Blenheim Palace Birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill

Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill was born at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, England on November 30, 1874.
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Upcoming Events:

Annual CSOT Dinner on October 2, 2021 at the Brentwood Country Club.

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On Monday, November 30, 1874, mid-way through the Victorian Era and in the wee hours of the morning, Lady Randolph ‘Jennie’ Churchill gave birth to a baby boy at Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire, England. The child’s name was Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill.

Blenheim Palace is situated on a 2,700-acre estate. It contains seven acres of rooms and its frontage measures 500 feet. Blenheim and its history leave a formative and lasting impression throughout Winston’s life.

It was during a visit to Blenheim in November 1874, when a pregnant Jennie was out walking on a game shoot with Randolph that she went into premature labor. She was rushed back to the house and, being unfit to climb the stairs, was put to bed in a downstairs cloakroom that still contained a bed from its time as the quarters of the chaplain to the first duke. There was no time to send to London for the distinguished planned for obstetrician. After a difficult eight-hour labor, the local doctor, Frederic Taylor, delivered the baby at 1:30am, 30th November. The premature Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill had amber-red hair and blue eyes. There had been no time to assemble his new clothes and so he was dressed in some given by the local solicitor’s wife, herself expecting a baby. He was dressed in a borrowed layette.¹

An account of the birth by Winston’s grandmother is as follows. “The fat and pink baby raised a terrific din”. His grandmother Her Grace, Frances Anne, Duchess of Marlborough, famed for her often-salty mots, shook her head and observed: “After all, I have myself given life to quite a number They were all pretty vocal

¹ Winston & Jack The Churchill Brothers by Celia and John Lee. London, Middlemarch
when they arrived. But such an earth-shaking noise as this new-born baby made, I have never heard.”²

Frances slipped away to send the news to Jennie’s mother in Paris, reassuring her of her daughter’s safety and that of the baby: “We had neither cradle or baby linen nor anything ready, but fortunately everything went well and all difficulties were overcome.”³

Years later in an interview conducted by historian Celia Lee, Peregrine Churchill told her “It was a rough, [premature] birth. Winston’s jaw was broke and he had to receive surgery.” It is no wonder the baby cried so loud!

Despite his early and difficult arrival, Winston’s father Randolph, a Member of Parliament for Woodstock and son of the 7th Duke of Marlborough, described him as “wonderfully pretty”. Winston was, in the end, a healthy baby boy.

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²Rene Kraus undated pub. Jarrolds, London, New York and Melbourne, titled Young Lady Randolph The Life and Times of Winston Churchill’s Mother; pp 58.59

³Duchess of Marlborough in a letter to Mrs Jerome in Paris, 30th November 1874; Blenheim archives.
Winston’s name is taken from his ancestor Sir Winston Churchill who fought for King Charles I in the English Civil War. This was also the name of Lord Randolph’s older brother who died at age 4.

The name Leonard was chosen to honor his maternal grandfather, the wealthy New York financier and Wall Street mogul, Leonard Jerome. Throughout his life, Winston Churchill was always proud of his Anglo-American roots.

The Spencer name recalls the family’s alliance with the Earls of Spencer dating back to 1817. The Spencer’s were a wealthy family from Althorp, Northamptonshire and held the earldom of Sunderland. Winston revered his connection with this powerful family.

Winston’s paternal grandfather was John Winston Spencer-Churchill, the 7th Duke of Marlborough and descendant of the 1st Duke John Churchill. Blenheim was built as a gift from a grateful nation for the 1st Duke to commemorate his stunning victory over the French army of Louis XIV at the Battle of Blenheim. This strategic battle ended the War of the Spanish Succession in 1704. Winston Churchill never lived in Blenheim Palace but it had a special place in his heart and he would strongly identify with it his entire life.

During his early years, Winston’s parents were kept busy with social engagements and political commitments leaving little time for him. He was a lonely little boy seeking
attention and recognition from his parents. Even though he was loved by his mother and father, he rarely received that attention he so desperately wanted. Many years later Winston said of his mother Jennie, “She shone for me like the evening star. I loved her dearly – but at a distance.” 4

Fortunately for Winston, he did have someone in his life who would fill the emotional void. It was his nanny Mrs Elizabeth Everest. She would be there for Winston throughout his early life. He called her woomany and he loved her dearly. Winston said of Mrs Everest: "My nurse was my confidante. Mrs. Everest it was who looked after me and tended all my wants. It was to her that I poured out all my many troubles...”5

Mrs Everest was let go by the Churchill’s in 1893 much to the dismay of Winston. When she died in July 1895, he attended her funeral, paid for the headstone, and arranged for flowers to be placed on her grave every year thereafter. So deep were his feelings for her.

Winston Churchill had a lifelong attachment to Blenheim. He often visited and spent a lot of family time there. On Tuesday August 11, 1908, after some coaxing from Sunny the 9th Duke of Marlborough, he proposed to Clementine Ogilvy Hozier in the gardens at Blenheim in the Temple of Diana while taking shelter from a rain shower. Winston obviously had a flare for the romantic.

During World War II, the House of Commons was bombed and heavily damaged by the Germans. Churchill would comment: “We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us.” Perhaps Blenheim Palace helped to shape a young Winston Churchill.

Join us for an online toast to celebrate Sir Winston Churchill’s 146th Birthday
Date and Time:
November 30, 2020 at 6:00pm central time
Click the picture to register for your free tickets.
Speakers will include Randolph Churchill, Nancy Pelosi, Allen Packwood, and Ambassador to the US Dame Karen Pierce.

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There would always have been a ‘special relationship’ between the United States and the United Kingdom even if Winston Churchill had not coined the phrase in a speech in February 1944, repeated several times during the war and again when he was no longer prime minister but the leader of the opposition in the House of Commons. The colonists who rose in revolt in 1775 were, after all, of overwhelmingly English descent and the War of Independence might equally well be described as a civil war, rather than as a rebellion. General Charles Cornwallis, whose surrender at Yorktown in October 1781 effectively led to the end of the war, had consistently supported the cause of the colonists in the British parliament. He had voted against the application of the Stamp Act to the American colonies, and against the Declaratory Act, which said that the British parliament could legislate for the colonies, and he continued consistently to oppose the policies that led to the revolt. As a serving officer, however, he had little choice but to obey when ordered to America.

Cornwallis was not the only general to have severe reservations about coercing Englishmen abroad. Gage (whose wife was American), Howe and Clinton, all successively commanders in chief in America all had doubts as to the justification of what they were doing, and much public opinion in Britain was sympathetic to the colonists. The only incident which did, at least for a while, mute public support was the execution of Captain John Andre, the go-between from General Clinton to the American traitor Benedict Arnold. But Andre had made the (literally) fatal mistake of changing into civilian clothes, which on his arrest made him legally a spy and liable to execution. Had he remained in uniform he would have been treated as a prisoner of war.

The only other time that America and Britain found themselves on opposite sides was in the war of 1812, and even here there was considerable embarrassment (on both sides this time). The causes were the British blockade during the Napoleonic war, a wish by some of the hawks in the American administration to capture British North America (Canada), and impressment of American sailors into the Royal Navy. At this time the responsibility for manning the Royal Navy was that of the Imprest Service, the ‘press gang’ who operated within a mile of British ports and impressed largely merchant sailors. Royal Navy captains could stop merchant ships at sea and impress British members of the crew, provided that their ship still had sufficient crew to sail to the nearest port of their home country. Operating on the principle that if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck it is a duck, Royal Navy captains would impress Americans who, at a time when almost fifty percent of sailors on American merchant vessels were in fact British, and when no one had passports or identity cards, looked and spoke like Englishmen. The men impressed were not necessarily unhappy – merchant ships were crewed with the minimum number to sail the ship; navy ships had to have enough men to sail the ship and to fight her, so provided one avoided being killed, life in the Royal Navy, with regular pay and the chance of prize money, was a lot better than on a merchant ship. While the men might not have minded overmuch the ship owners did, and increasingly pressurised President Madison to do something about it.
When Arthur Wellesley, not yet a duke but merely Viscount Wellington, was invited in August 1812 to hand over command of the Anglo Portuguese army in Spain to take command in America, he declined, asking what it was that the government hoped to achieve? Not, surely to reattach the United States to Britain? To the British government the war of 1812 was an unwelcome sideshow – fighting the French was far more important – and when the war ended in stalemate and the treaty of Ghent restored the situation as it was before hostilities, everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

Britain carefully avoided entanglement in the American Civil War, despite the blandishments of the Confederates, who hoped that the Union blockade that prevented cotton being exported to England might bring Britain in on the Confederate side. Although Britain did give the Confederates ‘belligerent status’, which merely meant that armed Confederate ships would not be treated as pirates and sunk by the Royal Navy, that was as far as it went and the British obtained their cotton from India and Egypt instead. The British prime minister, Palmerston, said that anybody who got involved in somebody else’s civil war was mad, and authorised the selling of Enfield rifles to the Union.

Despite a revolution and a war and increasing competition for trade, on the personal level relations remained good, with much intermarriage, exchanges between educational institutions and books published on both sides of the Atlantic.

By the First World War the majority of the population of the United States was still of British descent, but there was a sizeable German community in the mid-west, and an Irish element not necessarily sympathetic to Britain. President Woodrow Wilson objected to the British blockade, but had to admit that at least the British did not sink ships carrying cargos destined for Germany, but merely bought the cargos themselves or sent the ships back, while the Germans on occasions did sink American ships. Wilson had to navigate a difficult political minefield but Britain was able to lay contracts with American companies for huge amounts of military hardware ranging from aircraft engines to shells to machine gun ammunition, and when the Germans objected Wilson said that of course they would sell to Germany too, as long as they came and collected it, as the British did. Wilson knew full well that the Royal Navy ruled the seas and that it would be quite impossible for the Germans to transport anything from America to Europe. Wilson was, of course, eventually able to bring the United States into the war on the allied side.

Winston’s mother was American, and Winston always considered that he had a leg on both sides of the pond. When his father, Lord Randolph, died (not, as was claimed by his political opponents from tertiary syphilis, but almost certainly from a brain tumour) it was his mother’s contacts that enabled the young Winston to travel and during his brief time as a soldier to get attached to interesting campaigns while at the same time reporting for various newspapers and writing books. His *The Story of the Malakand Field Force* published in 1898 is an excellent account of a typical Imperial military operation on the northwest frontier of India, commanded by the wonderfully named General Sir Bindon Blood, even if Winston’s own participation is perhaps given more attention than it might strictly warrant, and *The River War* published the following year is even today still the best account of Kitchener’s reconquest of the Sudan.

On Winston’s first lecture tour of the USA, in 1900, he got to know Theodore Roosevelt,
and at some stage Theodore’s distant cousin Franklin, and certainly by the time FDR, as he was known, became governor of New York in 1929 Winston Churchill, eight years older, knew him well. As president from 1933 he kept in touch with Winston and when Winston became first lord of the admiralty (naval minister) on the outbreak of war in September 1939 he and FDR were in regular communication. It is of course normal for heads of government to communicate with each other, but for the head of a government to communicate with a more junior minister of a foreign government is highly unusual, and an extraordinary breach of protocol, but it was as well for Britain that it continued. With Winston as prime minister from May 1940 the exchange of letters and telegrams went on, and Winston was well aware that relations with the USA were crucial, particularly when the UK’s gold and dollar reserves were exhausted and overseas investments depleted in the financing of the war.

As with Wilson in the First War, FDR had to tread carefully: American public opinion, while sympathetic to Britain, was resolutely opposed to America being drawn into the war. FDR bent the laws of neutrality almost to breaking point. He amended the Neutrality Acts which prevented American trade in armaments with a participant in a war in which the USA was not engaged, to permit sales on a ‘cash and carry’ basis, knowing full well that only Britain had the naval capacity to carry. FDR introduced the concept of ‘lend lease’ and gently massaged public opinion, moving it towards acceptance of entering the war on Britain’s side, accelerated in the event by the Japanese attack on American possessions and Germany’s declaration of war on the USA. Such support before America’s entry might, perhaps, have happened anyway, although probably more slowly, but there can be little doubt that the amicable relations between Churchill and Roosevelt helped enormously.

At the Yalta conference in February 1945 it was unfortunate that Roosevelt was a dying man and Churchill aware that he was going to lose the coming election. Neither was sure what he wanted, they had not coordinated their agenda and both were bamboozled by Stalin. Withal, both Britain and the USA were founder members of the NATO alliance, which has ensured and still does ensure peace in Europe. Today the Special Relationship still exists, not perhaps based on the shared language, common descent, evangelical Protestantism, classical liberalism, and extensive private trade of the eighteenth century, but still due to a common language, the rule of law and a belief in democracy. The USA is Britain’s major ally, indeed the only ally with the assets, and conceivably the will, to come to the UK’s assistance in war, and the UK is still the major ally of the USA even if her military contribution is tiny compared to that of America. That said, of all the NATO members only the Royal Air Force is sufficiently advanced technically to be able to be seamlessly integrated into USAF tasking, and while the Royal Navy only has two fleet carriers compared to the USA’s nineteen, those two are now the most advanced in the world.

That there is a Churchill Society in Tennessee is in itself ample evidence that the Special Relationship lives on. Long may it continue!
Major Gordon Corrigan MBE

**Major Gordon Corrigan MBE**

**Popular military historian, author and TV personality**

Major Gordon Corrigan MBE was an officer of the Royal Gurkha Rifles before retiring from the Army in 1998. He is now a military historian and the author of numerous books. His television appearances include The Gurkhas, Napoleon’s Waterloo and Battlefield Detectives, and so far he has presented five series on various aspects of military history. He is an Honorary Research Fellow of the Universities of Birmingham and Kent, a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society, a Member of the British Commission for Military History and a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Farriers. For additional information on Major Corrigan please visit his website. [https://www.gordoncorrigan.com/](https://www.gordoncorrigan.com/)

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**Here is a wonderful video from the 2020 ICS Conference about Churchill’s painting in the south of France by Paul Rafferty**

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Sir Winston Churchill was arguably the greatest statesman of the twentieth century. His political life spanned more than sixty years and he held high office for much of this time. He is generally regarded as the man through whose military and political skill, diplomacy, inspiration and powers of persuasion the Second World War was won.

Much has already been written about Churchill’s health, though little that has been published is evidenced based, for example the suggestion that he suffered from a bipolar disorder. Churchill became ill at critical moments in British and world history, so it is legitimate both to understand the effects of his many illnesses on him and to consider his ability to continue in high office during them. Perhaps the most relevant illnesses in this respect relate to his gradually increasing cerebrovascular disease, manifested by a series of strokes, the first occurring in 1949, some fifteen years before his death at the age of 90. Churchill's long life also spanned an era in which major advances in medical science and clinical practice occurred, not least the introduction of antibiotics.

Allister Vale and John Scadding have written the definitive account of Churchill's illnesses

Winston Churchill's Illnesses 1886-1965
Allister Vale and John Scadding OBE
Available in time for Christmas, order today.
https://www.winstonchurchillsillnesses.org
and document all Churchill’s major illnesses, from an episode of childhood pneumonia in 1886 until his death in 1965. They have adopted a thorough approach in gaining access to numerous sources of medical information and have cited extensively from the clinical records of the numerous distinguished physicians and surgeons invited to consult on Churchill during his many episodes of illness. These include not only objective clinical data, but also personal reflections by Churchill’s family, friends and political colleagues.

From the Foreword by Randolph Churchill

My great-grandfather suffered bouts of poor health. After obtaining access to several closed medical archives, as well as unearthing some that were unknown previously, Allister Vale and John Scadding have written the definitive account of Churchill’s illnesses. Their expertise as physicians has been brought to bear on the interpretation of the evidence, much of it available for the first time. I would like to pay tribute to them for their dedication and determination to spend thousands of hours setting the history of Churchill’s medical challenges into modern day context.

They have already published some of their meticulous research on his illnesses in the medical press. That these papers have met with acclaim in the medical community does not surprise me; I have read them all with great interest too. As a result of their research the authors have corrected many repeatedly perpetuated errors. For example, we now know that Churchill did not suffer a heart attack in Washington over Christmas and New Year in 1941. The ECG taken shortly after the event confirms this and is published for the first time in the book with the detailed notes of Sir John Parkinson, Churchill’s cardiologist.

Similarly, there has always been much talk about Churchill’s ‘black dog’ (although Churchill only ever mentioned it in one letter, in 1911). In our family we always felt that he was referring to his personal low moments – unsurprising, perhaps, given the great stress and pressure he often worked under. He was fortunate to be supported by his wife, Clementine, to whom he was devoted. Their correspondence shows the extraordinary support that she gave him. At times Churchill would cry, and he could be emotional in both happiness and sorrow. But it was never felt in the family that he suffered from clinical depression and this volume confirms that view.

Vale and Scadding have produced a well-researched and highly readable book that
will be essential reading for Churchillians and other historians of the period, as it provides so much new material and many new insights. Clinicians and general readers alike who wish to understand the impact of illness on arguably the greatest leader of the twentieth century will also find the book of great interest.

Andrew Roberts, author of *Churchill: Walking with Destiny*

In this meticulously researched volume, Allister Vale and John Scadding provide a uniquely comprehensive and readable account of Churchill’s many medical problems, from childhood to his terminal illness, set in the context of his life as one of the greatest statesmen of the twentieth century. Pneumonia threatened Churchill’s life on several occasions and in his later decades he suffered multiple strokes; his ability to continue in high office during these illnesses was exceptional, aided by some of the most distinguished specialists of their time. Drawing on many medical and non-medical sources, the clinical, political and personal aspects of his many illnesses are woven seamlessly together. A superbly rounded account of the great man emerges in a most engaging narrative.

Allen Packwood OBE, author of *How Churchill Waged War*

Much has been written about Churchill’s health and much has been rumour and speculation. This is the definitive work on the subject, written by experts and grounded in the evidence.

Ronald Cohen MBE, Bibliographer of Sir Winston Churchill

Absolutely thorough, reliable, wonderfully researched.
Winston Churchill’s Illnesses is a tour de force of scholarship. Vale and Scadding have conducted exhaustive research and brought to light much previously unpublished material. Their meticulous and scientific analysis of Winston Churchill’s health makes this one of the most historically significant and important books ever published in the field of Churchill studies.

David Freeman, Editor of the *Finest Hour*, Journal of the International Churchill Society
That Other Hamilton Woman
Jean, Lady Hamilton 1861–1942: Diaries of a Soldier’s Wife
Celia Lee
Review by Andrew Roberts

Readers of Finest Hour who are familiar with Winston Churchill’s role in initiating the Gallipoli campaign in 1915 will instantly recognise the name of Sir Ian Hamilton, the commander of that tragically doomed expedition. Churchill had recommended Hamilton, a distinguished Edwardian soldier and long acquaintance, to Lord Kitchener, the secretary for war, for that high command, which turned out to be an utterly poisoned chalice.

The young cavalry officer had been thrilled to come to the attention of the famous soldier, Ian Hamilton, who was twenty-one years his senior. Churchill’s sixth book, Ian Hamilton’s March, was written to honour his achievements in the South African war. They remained firm friends and shared many of the liberal, and indeed Liberal, beliefs of the day. Both were opposed to harsh peace settlements with the Boers in 1902 and the Germans in 1918.

Celia Lee has an unrivalled knowledge of the invaluable and detailed diaries kept by Jean, Ian Hamilton’s wife, and has written a remarkable biography based on those intimate daily records of the life of a member of the Edwardian power elite. Jean, the daughter of a millionaire Scottish entrepreneur, had a profound effect on Hamilton’s career at crucial moments. And through her deliciously gossip-ridden diaries we get many wonderful anecdotes about life in that gilded age.
It will be the many diary entries that concern Churchill and his wider family that will be of particular interest to fellow Churchillians. On their first acquaintance, Jean was not greatly taken with the “young man in a hurry,” and it did not help that she caught him out in a mild social fib in 1902. Churchill had sent a formal decline of a dinner invitation, signed by his secretary, pleading his busy political schedule. Yet Jean’s friend, Pamela Plowden, who Churchill was wooing, had already told her she could not attend because he was taking her out to dinner à deux that very evening. Jean mischievously had the letter framed and hung on a wall in her house for many years after.

She quickly warmed to Churchill, however, as he was a constant guest of her husband, and Jean and Winston shared a love of painting. In 1921 Jean paid £50 for a gorgeous picture of Ightam Moat, now a National Trust property in Kent. (Hamilton bequeathed the painting to Ightam Moat in his will.)

The many dinner table stories recounted by Jean in this volume include one from February 1910 that shows, in a way no official record could, the humanitarian in Churchill. As Home Secretary he said it weighed on his mind that he had just signed his first death sentence, on a man who had abducted a girl and brutally cut her throat in an alley. “I was relieved,” Jean wrote, “and said cheerfully: ‘That would not weigh on my mind.’ ‘Think,’ he said rather savagely, ‘of a society that forces a man to do that.’” The discussion continued about the criminal liability of lunatics; Jean found Winston “sensitive and excitable.”

During the First World War, Jean recorded her admiration for the war work conducted by Clementine Churchill, who organised canteens for women working in munitions factories. At a dinner towards the end of the conflict, the pregnant Clementine, worried about her family finances, even offered to give her unborn child to the childless Jean Hamilton. There could hardly be a more graphic example of the closeness of their families and friendship. That child was Marigold who, of course, was not given up but tragically died at the tail end of the Spanish Flu pandemic.

The friendship between the Churchills and the Hamiltons was sealed after the collapse of the Gallipoli catastrophe, when the two men worked hand-in-glove during the inevitable public Inquiry into all the things that had gone so badly wrong in that campaign. As the progenitor of the expedition and its commander, Churchill and Hamilton were in the forefront of the potential criticism, yet through their patient, factual and eloquent explanations of every stage of the operations, closely coordinated between them throughout the Inquiry, they encouraged the Dardanelles Report to place the blame where it deserved to fall, rather than primarily on them.

In 1919, the Hamiltons first rented and then purchased from the Churchills the beautiful country estate of Lullenden in East Grinstead in Sussex. These large-scale expenditures were, of course, entirely due to Jean’s inheritance. It is worth noting that Ian Hamilton owned the shooting rights on the Chartwell estate and almost certainly introduced Winston to the property that became the most important to him, and to Churchillians everywhere.

Andrew Roberts’ most recent book is Leadership in War (2019)
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