

Admiralty in 1911 on the eve of the First World War and a chief promoter of the “New Navalism” (maintaining the vaunted might of the Royal Navy), he favored the Conservative-owned press, which pushed for sharply higher naval spending. He was no longer the radical social reformer and friend of the Liberal media, but instead promoted naval reviews and the launching of new ships to meet the increasing German naval threat.

Much to the delight of the newspapers, Toye notes, Churchill took up flying lessons, which served his two-pronged goal: getting front-page press attention and gaining public support for military aviation. His wife Clementine Churchill was not pleased with the flying lessons, but understood her husband well and was a strong media asset to him throughout their lives. She shared with Churchill an unabated interest in current events and was a charming hostess at Chartwell, entertaining the “great and the good” of the media.

Newspaper-backed intrigue was not foreign to Churchill, and Toye avers that on occasion, he had no objections to conspiring with the press lords for his political benefit. The press lords knew they could count on Churchill to provide “good copy” for their readers; his flair for publicity and excellent command of the written word were most welcome. Even his strong interest in painting became part of his public image, which he burnished with his essay “Painting as a Pastime,” written for *The Strand Magazine*.

With the coming of film and radio, Churchill became a participant; however, he always favored newspapers over other media. His attitude toward the BBC could be harsh, and he believed it was on occasion too negative, according to Toye. The advent of television had little appeal for him, and he watched it only rarely during his lifetime. He was never really comfortable before TV cameras and had little interest in appearing on television interviews, with their cameras and the glare and heat from the lights.

During the Second World War, Churchill demanded a “responsible press,” and though he did not become an active censor, he was critical of newspaper stories that could damage the war effort or could endanger Allied relations. Toye acknowledges Churchill’s “authoritarian and repressive streak.” Interestingly, Churchill’s attitude toward the American press always seemed more comfortable and relaxed, evident by his demeanor in the press conferences with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and later with President Harry S. Truman.

Another continued focus of the press was Churchill’s health in his last years, during which rumors of his death were frequent. Speculation abounded despite considerable efforts by Churchill and his political allies to suppress information about his declining health and cognitive abilities from a series of what were thought to be debilitating strokes and mini-strokes as well as severe hearing loss. Journalists were increasingly not inclined to be discreet, Toye reports; as one journalist said, “Mr. Churchill is News!”

With *Winston Churchill: A Life in the News*, Toye has made another significant contribution to Churchill studies. Many other books on Churchill go into his relationship with the media, some more than others, but Toye’s is the first to focus solely on Churchill and the press. The book may not contain newly revealed facts, but it does confirm Churchill’s adeptness at manipulating the press.

W. Mark Hamilton is author of *The Nation and the Navy: Methods and Organization of British Navalist Propaganda, 1889–1914* (1986). ☞

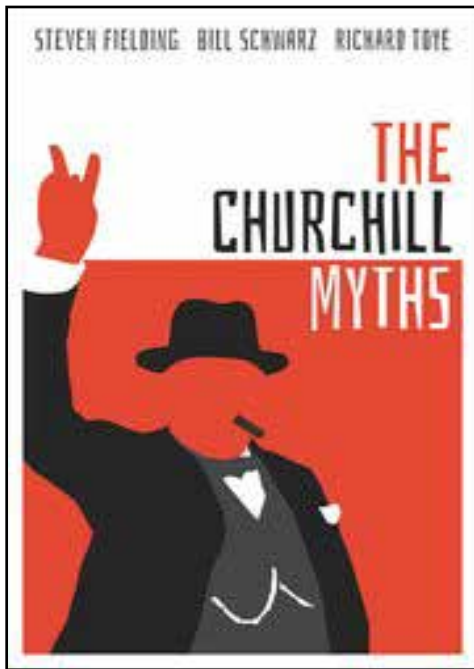
Print the Legend

Steven Fielding, Bill Schwarz, and Richard Toye, ***The Churchill Myths***, Oxford University Press, 2020, 224 pages, £20. ISBN 978-0198851967

Review by Alastair Stewart

You would be more successful in counting the stars in the night sky than every Churchill myth. Two twin irritants blight Churchill scholarship: mawkish *bon mots*, which Churchill never said, or his pantomime bogeyman notoriety. He is only missing the Fu Manchu moustache or perhaps a white cat and a secret lair.

So *The Churchill Myths* by Steven Fielding, Bill Schwarz and Richard Toye should be a welcome reprieve. The book does not try to answer every charge against Churchill. Nor does it try to dismantle the fetishism of his mem-



ory. The authors aim to chart the propagandization of Churchill's legacy in twentieth-century politics but with mixed results.

No other public figure has so interwoven himself into the cultural and political fabric of countries across the world as Winston Churchill. No other figure is so loved or derided based on half-truths alone. The book charts significant Churchill conjurations in policy and pop culture. But it never quite scratches that itch of a question: why can't we let Churchill rest in peace?

What is fascinating here is seeing the range of instances of Churchill deployments. The book is a spotter's guide from the Commons to *The Crown*. It highlights where Churchill's reputation evolved beyond itself to become a set of values and finally, an industry. The stereotype has gone one further and influenced campaigns for Brexit and even the rise of Trumpism.

But the authors have pulled at the Gordian Knot. It is a glob-

al task to explain every possible reason why Churchill endures as both a cultural symbol and a political prophet. It is disappointing that the book comes in at a mere 162 pages of principal text, for the appetite is very much whet for more. It is really an introduction to how some Churchill factoids came to be, and some more prominent instances where his memory, visage, and spirit were invoked.

Anyone expecting an exhaustive rebuttal against such popular hijackings will be disappointed, and there is a grand spectrum of public maulings to pick from these days. The plurality of Churchills versus the flesh-and-blood man is an ongoing battle. Churchill, as the authors discuss, is more a vessel for modern value debates. The book is full of consistently tight analyses but is slightly too academic to tackle the juiciest of modern Churchill scandals. When everything from white supremacy to genocide and all that is in between are on the table, one needs to be loaded for bear.

The lack of breadth leaves confusing oversights. Brexit is a worthy topic, but the rise in English populism can scarcely be understood without exploring devolution. Churchill is a daily ideological weapon in Scotland, where he is regularly hailed as either a unionist saviour or a blue-blooded fascist of the British state. Both views are paradoxically enabling the cliff-edge push for Scottish independence.

A popular myth abounds that Churchill personally ordered tanks into Glasgow to crush strik-

ers in the 1919 Battle for George Square. The fallacy was recently rebuked when found to have been made the "correct" answer on an official Scottish history test. Churchill is a popular and modern tool to make a point about alleged English oppression. That in itself is indicative of the book's problem: the title suggests tackling myths. It is more an introduction to understanding the perniciousness of personality cults in England and America.

The book's premise of understanding Churchill as a prism is culturally illuminating but self-defeating in its political scope. This, of course, presumes one can exist without the other. But Churchill is like Mandela or Gandhi—there came the point when the man split into what we think he is and how his memory is rallied to make a political point.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson—himself an author on Churchill—has dallied in Churchillisms throughout Brexit and in his government's response to COVID-19. When applied to real life, *The Churchill Myths* is not the tool to dismantle the political permissibility of Churchillian maxims, clichés, and innuendo. One needs an encyclopaedia to ruin the hagiography and cultism endemic to current policy.

In a quest to find the theory for Churchill's legacy, the book leaves us wanting more on how to tackle the cancer of ignorance ubiquitous across the Western world. If there is a common thread, it is that many historical figures have become better than they were and worse than we remember. This is a tragedy.

The Churchill Myths is a fascinating, insightful, and often challenging read. It whets the appetite but is too short a work to explain why Churchill, like another British hero, regenerates again and again.

Alastair Stewart is a Scottish public affairs consultant and freelance writer. He is working on a book about Churchill and Scotland. 📖

The Unknown Chancellor

Hugh Gault, *Kingsley Wood: Scenes from a Political Life, 1925–1943*, Gretton Books, 2017, 564 pages, £25. ISBN 978-0956204196

Review by Mark Klobas

Readers of *Finest Hour* well know that Winston Churchill has not wanted for biographers. The same is true for the overwhelming majority of his wartime cabinet. Most of them wrote their memoirs after the war, and several have also been the subject of substantial biographies. The most notable exception is Sir Kingsley Wood, Churchill's first Chancellor of the Exchequer. Wood's sudden death in September 1943 precluded an autobiography, while the non-existence of any personal papers left by Wood has long discouraged historians from undertaking studies of his life.

Recently, however, Hugh Gault filled the vacuum by writing a two-volume biography of Wood. The first volume, pub-

lished in 2014, covered Wood's initial career as a solicitor, his emergence as an expert on industrial insurance, and his first years as a Member of Parliament. The second volume begins with Wood's appointment as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Neville Chamberlain, at the start of 1925, and covers the remaining eighteen years of his life. Since Wood spent all but two of these years in government, Gault has a wide range of Wood's various roles and responsibilities to cover. The result reads like a political history of interwar Britain.

Though Gault's focus often shifts from Wood, his description of events helps to illustrate how central Wood's ministerial activities were to national developments. As Postmaster General in the early 1930s, Wood was active in reforming the Post Office, promoting telephone usage, and supervising the recently established British Broadcasting Corporation. After being named Minister of Health in 1935, Wood pursued an active campaign of slum clearance and took up campaigns to promote public fitness. Gault details throughout this period the growing esteem in which Wood was held by his colleagues and in the press and notes the occasional mention of a possible premiership in Wood's political future.

It was as a rising star in the Conservative party that Wood was appointed Secretary of State for Air in 1938. The importance of this office had grown with the push to rearm Britain in the face of the increasing threat posed by Nazi Germany. Wood's predecessor, Lord Swinton, had resigned

after mounting public criticism over delays in aircraft production. Gault credits Wood with a number of important decisions, including the shift in emphasis from producing bombers to fighters and the inauguration of the Empire Air Training Scheme. This last proved to be a valuable source of pilots for Britain throughout the Second World War. Though Gault regards Wood as a success in the job, the wartime demands exhausted Wood to the point that in April 1940 he exchanged offices with Sir Samuel Hoare and moved to the less-demanding position of Lord Privy Seal.

Wood's time as Lord Privy Seal proved short. Within a month, political turmoil led to Winston Churchill replacing Neville Chamberlain as prime minister. Gault credits Wood as one of the key figures in Churchill's elevation, most notably by forewarning him on 10 May of Chamberlain's intention to corner him into supporting Lord Halifax. Wood's own standing in the Conservative party made his appointment to some prominent office in the War Cabinet likely, and Churchill sent him to the Exchequer. Gault believes that Churchill and Wood made a good team: Wood's administrative ability complemented Churchill's political charisma and strategic vision. As Chancellor, Wood played an important role in balancing the allocation of resources between the civilian and military sectors. By adopting Keynesian policies in the 1941 Budget and the Pay-As-You-Earn (PAYE) approach to collecting taxes, Wood established enduring changes to Treasury policy. These achievements under-