

# ACTION THIS DAY WORKING WITH CHURCHILL



# ACTION THIS DAY

*The contributors have given all royalties on this  
book to Churchill College, Cambridge*

# ACTION THIS DAY

Working with Churchill

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Memoirs by

LORD NORMANBROOK

JOHN COLVILLE

SIR JOHN MARTIN

SIR IAN JACOB

LORD BRIDGES

SIR LESLIE ROWAN

Edited with an Introduction by

SIR JOHN WHEELER-BENNETT

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Sir John Martin, Sir Ian Jacob, Lord Bridges, Sir Leslie Rowan, 1968*  
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# Introduction

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THE question may well be asked: Is there either the need or the place for another book about Sir Winston Churchill? Has not every aspect of his Protean career been covered – and amply – either by himself or by others? It is certainly true that no one in our time has both made history and recorded it with the same immediacy, the same cogency and the same sublime beauty of language as has Sir Winston himself. And, in addition, there is the biography so excellently begun by Mr Randolph Churchill. These are the great pageantry works on a titanic figure portrayed against the background of history of which Sir Winston was so great a part; they represent him as a world figure as seen by himself and his son. Are they not sufficient?

The answer to this question must, in consideration of this present volume, most surely be 'no'. No man can see himself, no son can see his father, in the same perspective as those who have lived with him and served under his immediate command through the loneliness of high office, the agonies of defeat and glory of victory, who saw him day by day shouldering the burdens of a seemingly crushing responsibility, who shared with him, in selfless devotion, the long hours of grinding labour, the moments of black depression and the brilliant flashes of exaltation.

It is these particular facets of Sir Winston Churchill's career as a war-leader which are illumined by the con-

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tribution of this book, a contribution which will prove alike an imperative and enjoyable 'must' both for the professional historians of this period and for that perhaps mythical figure, the general reader. From its pages speaks the true voice of history, for these essays are the very bones of history itself, of history in that sense in which Sir Winston himself conceived and understood it: 'History with its flickering lamp stumbles along the trail of the past, trying to reconstruct its scenes, to revive its echoes, and kindle with pale gleams the passion of former days.'

It goes without saying that the recorded observations of those whose intimacy with Sir Winston was so regular and so close must of necessity rank higher in historical value and esteem than those of others who saw him only sporadically and then only at moments of emergency, transience or ill-health. The authors of these essays have drawn for their assessment of Sir Winston as a wartime leader upon their day-to-day experiences and their personal contacts with him at all hours of the twenty-four. They varied in age, at the time that they became associated with Sir Winston after the outbreak of war, from Lord Bridges, at forty-eight, to Jock Colville, at twenty-five, so that they ranged from mature experience to enthusiastic youth. This is an advantage for their collective authorship, for there is consequently an acceptable variety in their several senses of perspective and proportion. As the six essays were written quite independently of one another, the reader will find that in some instances the same point is made several times. No attempt has been made to avoid this reiteration, which in these particular circumstances goes far to establish historical accuracy.

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These essays are not a series of great canvases such as are hung in Burlington House; they are rather the snapshots found in the family album. Each one of them crystallises for history certain episodes and personal memories in association with a common subject depicting Sir Winston Churchill in moments of relaxation, annoyance or exhilaration, as well as of greatness. No one but those closely and intimately associated with their chief could have given such clearly defined vignettes with such impeccable and unassailable authority.

Herein lies the unique historical value of the book, for, as a collective result of their individual writings, the portrait which they jointly offer is one of a man conceived on grand and magnificent lines, displaying fortitude and magnanimity and vision, yet with the engaging frailties of personality which make him an essentially human character – the unwillingness to accept correction, the quick and minatory admonition, the equally immediate readiness to praise. These are endearing traits, known necessarily but to a few, those of 'The Secret Circle' who alone are equipped and qualified to describe with authority the circumstances of Winston Churchill, both as a 'Mighty Warrior before the Lord' and as a man.

Civil servants are famous for their loyalty to their chief; this is given generously and without stint, whether the Minister concerned be great or insignificant, a success or a failure. But in depths of affection and admiration they give less readily. They are men who see Ministers come and go; the weakness and the strength of many politicians pass under their survey in the course of their careers. They are not given to starry-eyed enthusiasms or feckless emotions. When,

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therefore, they offer high praise it may be accepted as being heart-felt and genuine, and their assessment of personality and character may be held as fair and dispassionate, for they judge with a detachment born of many years of experience and observation.

It is of this relationship, and of its significance in the origins of this book, that the late Lord Normanbrook, shortly before his death, wrote, on behalf of himself and his fellow-contributors, as follows:

The essence of the relationship between a Minister and his personal staff is a mutual feeling of trust and confidence. This was especially true of the relations between Churchill and his staff, because of the highly personal nature of his methods of administration and the exceptional frankness which he showed in discussion within his inner circle. The freedom which this relationship gives – freedom on the part of the official to say fearlessly what he thinks, and freedom on the part of the Minister to share his doubts and uncertainties – is undermined if either party to this unwritten contract feels at liberty to disclose what passes in their confidential exchanges. In ordinary circumstances, therefore, we should have been reluctant to write for publication now an appreciation of Churchill's qualities based on the knowledge we acquired through our privileged position as members of the inner circle. We have felt impelled to do so by the publication of Lord Moran's book, *Winston Churchill: The Struggle for Survival 1940–1965*, which consists of extracts from the diaries which he kept during the period when he was attending Churchill as his medical adviser. Lord Moran has set out to paint a picture of Churchill as a man: he has not been concerned merely to describe his physical condition. He has also given his assessment of Churchill's qualities as a statesman and leader of his country in war and peace. We cannot accept this

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assessment as it stands: we believe that in some respects it is incorrect and in others incomplete and on both counts misleading.

As editor of this volume of essays – which has been written and compiled with the full authority and approval of Lady Spencer-Churchill – I cannot resist the temptation to pay my own tribute to Sir Winston. In those terrible years of Appeasement I was much in Germany, where I had many friends and contacts, and on the various occasions of my return to England I, like many others, tried desperately to convince those in authority of the growing menace of National Socialism first to Germany and then, once Hitler had come to power, to Europe and the world at large. In the attainment of our initial objective of arousing interest and awareness of danger we failed miserably. The forces of apathy, of wilful myopia and of general delusion in high places were too strong for us. We were denounced as alarmists and unfounded prophets of doom, finding disbelief and frustration to be our portion.

In these days of his political exile Sir Winston was a tower of comfort and encouragement to us. He listened to what we had to say, he understood the warning which we sought to give, he perceived, in all its starkness, the danger of a fresh outbreak of the *Furor Teutonicus*. He became the Cassandra of the thirties, preaching in the splendour of his rhetoric the message of the necessity for awakening and preparing for the challenge which sooner or later would come from beyond the Rhine, though not until Hitler's final dastardly jettisoning of the Munich Agreement in March 1939 did Britain respond to his warning. To have followed him in those years when, as Brendan Bracken

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once said: 'There were no stars,' to have been cheered and sustained by his indomitable leadership, was a privilege which one will always feel honoured to have experienced.

During the war years, which this book covers, it was given to me to serve only remotely under Sir Winston Churchill's command. Yet, with millions of others in all parts of the world, I derived the same thrill and encouragement as I had during the pre-war years when his following was significantly smaller. In the type of war which was then loosed upon the world, the courage and the imagination, the steadfastness and the irrefragable determination of one man were necessary for the survival of Britain, one man in whose leadership the British people could unwaveringly place their trust, whose inspiration could fire their own dogged resistance and whose genius could interpret them to themselves. It was inevitable that he should fill this role. The Man and the Hour had met, and Winston Churchill was 'the Lord of his Event'.

Feeling as I do about Winston Churchill it was with no little sense of honour that I received and accepted the invitation of the authors of these essays to be their editor. I am confident that this contribution to Churchilliana (and therefore, by definition, to history) is unique, vital and invaluable. I would reiterate that this is not 'just another book about Winston Churchill' but a book which no student of Churchill can possibly be without, which the general reader will enjoy with relish and avidity, and which those historians working in the field of the Second World War will find indispensable.

JOHN WHEELER-BENNETT

# Biographical Note

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THE authors of the memoirs that comprise this book were all, at varying times, members of Sir Winston Churchill's personal staff when he was Prime Minister.

Lord Bridges was Secretary to the Cabinet from 1938 until December 1946, and in that capacity was Churchill's senior civilian adviser throughout the war.

Lord Normanbrook was attached to the Cabinet Secretariat in 1941 and served in it throughout the war, apart from a year with the Ministry of Reconstruction in 1944. He was Secretary to the Cabinet from 1947 to 1962, covering Churchill's second period in office as Prime Minister. He died on 15 June 1967.

General Sir Ian Jacob was a senior assistant to General Lord Ismay in the military wing of the War Cabinet Secretariat, which served Churchill in his capacity as Minister of Defence from 1940 to 1945. Later, in 1952, Sir Winston brought him back to serve for a period as Chief Staff Officer to the Minister of Defence.

Sir John Martin and Sir Leslie Rowan were Private Secretaries at 10 Downing Street – Martin from 1940 and Rowan from 1941. Both continued to serve Churchill until the summer of 1945, when Rowan succeeded Martin as Principal Private Secretary.

Mr John Colville had joined the Secretariat at 10 Downing Street shortly after war broke out and continued to serve there under Churchill until October

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1941, when he joined the Royal Air Force. He served again on Churchill's staff from December 1943 until the end of the war. When Sir Winston assumed office again in 1951 he brought Mr Colville back as his Joint Principal Private Secretary; and he continued in that post until Churchill resigned in 1955.

The editor of this volume, Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, historian and biographer, is an authority on Germany from 1914 to 1945. The official biographer of King George VI and author of *Nemesis of Power, the German Army in Politics*, he is Historical Adviser to the Royal Archives.

# Lord Normanbrook

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CABINET SECRETARIAT 1941-6  
SECRETARY TO THE CABINET 1947-62

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WALTER BAGEHOT, in contrasting the British constitution with that of the United States, said of the former that it has this advantage that in a sudden emergency the British people can choose a ruler for the occasion. 'It is quite possible', he wrote, 'and even likely that he would not be ruler before the occasion. The great qualities, the imperious will, the rapid energy, the eager nature fit for a great crisis are not required – are impediments – in common times. . . . But by the structure of the world we often want, at the sudden occurrence of a grave tempest, to change the helmsman – to replace the pilot of the calm by the pilot of the storm.' By way of example he quoted the appointment of Lord Palmerston as Prime Minister in the crisis of the Crimean War, and wrote: 'We abolished the Aberdeen Cabinet . . . which abounded in pacific discretion, and was wanting only in the demonic element; we chose a statesman who had the sort of merit then wanted, who, when he feels the steady power of England behind him, will advance without reluctance and will strike without restraint.' These words, written by Bagehot in 1867, are still apt to describe the emergence of Churchill as the national war-leader in the crisis of 1940.