

FINEST HOUR

THE JOURNAL OF WINSTON CHURCHILL AND HIS TIMES • WINTER 2017 • NO. 175

The Churchill Women

Jennie Jerome • Mrs. Everest • Pamela Plowden
Clementine Churchill • Sarah Churchill
Edwina Sandys: A Day at Chartwell





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The Churchill Bulletin

is a free, online newsletter published monthly by the International Churchill Society. To receive email notification, please visit www.winstonchurchill.org. All back issues are archived online.

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was removed from the Admiralty in May 1915. When Sir William Orpen, a famous portrait painter, attempted to paint Churchill at that time, he described his subject as “sitting quietly in a chair...holding his bowed head in his hands.”

In task-positive mode, Churchill became alive and was able to work his way out of his depression by focusing on what he was doing in the moment. We again see this pattern of turning to painting when Churchill was voted out of office in 1945. Werner Vogt’s review on this page of Philip Gut’s biography of Willy Sax, manufacturer of the oil paints used by Churchill, illustrates this perfectly.

Attenborough’s own book is filled with information that is probably not well known to the average Churchillian. I was surprised to learn that Clementine Churchill had become “seriously mentally ill in the autumn of 1963.” I was reminded after reading the book that Churchill’s daughter Diana suffered from depression and in 1963 took her life by overdosing on sleeping pills. Not much attention, however, is given to Randolph Churchill, who died at fifty-seven of a sudden heart attack brought on by years of drinking and smoking. I was also disappointed that Attenborough did not speculate on what Churchill’s diagnosis would be today from the perspective of DSM-V, the diagnostic and statistical manual used by all medical and mental health professionals to arrive at a diagnosis for a patient.

Nevertheless, this good and worthwhile book is informative and easy to read if you are looking to understand Churchill from a psychological perspective. ☞

Martin Garfinkle is a professor in the Health and Human Services Department

at New York City College of Technology (CUNY) and author of *The Lion’s Roar* (2011).

C’est beau, mais c’est faux

Philipp Gut, *Champagner mit Churchill: Der Zürcher Farbenfabrikant Willy Sax und der malende Premierminister*, Stämpfli Verlag, 2015, 176 pages, €39.00. ISBN 978-3727214554

Review by Werner Vogt

When Winston Churchill visited Switzerland in the summer of 1946, various remarkable things happened. With his “Let Europe Arise” speech, addressed to the academic youth of the world and delivered at the University of Zurich [see *FH* 173], the wartime Prime Minister and then Leader of the Opposition confirmed his position as a leader of thought. On the same day, Churchill invited Willy Sax to his hotel for a drink before dinner. Here was conversation more to Churchill’s liking, for Sax was the Swiss owner of the small paint factory that supplied Churchill’s needs. Churchill recognised that Sax had not only an excellent knowledge about the composition of his paints but also about mixing and painting techniques.

Out of this informal conversation developed a friendship that lasted nearly twenty years; Sax died less than a year before Churchill. Philipp Gut, who is a deputy editor of the staunchly Conservative magazine *Die Weltwoche* and a historian by training, gives a detailed account of Sax’s numerous journeys to Chartwell as well as to the South of France, whither Sax was repeatedly invited when Churchill went there for painting holidays.

It would not be fair to call the amity that evolved between Churchill and Sax a mere “functional” friendship. Too deep was Churchill’s appreciation for Sax, his wife and daughters, and above all for some of the fine Swiss painters, which Sax brought along on some of his visits with Churchill. One such was Cuno Amiet, one of the greatest Swiss painters of the twentieth century. When embarking on the journey to Chartwell, Amiet—an octogenarian who was not prone to strong drink—had his first whisky on the ferry to Dover just to make sure that he would be ready for the challenge if need should arise.



Gut proves to be a good raconteur of lovely anecdotes. Amiet, we learn, did not mince his words when confronted with Churchill’s paintings. When asked on one occasion in Southern France to comment on a particular canvas by Churchill, Amiet—conversing in French because Sax’s conversational English was insufficient—said: “C’est beau, mais c’est faux” (It’s beautiful, but wrong). Churchill took some time—and lunch—to digest the blow and eventually answered in his inimitable way: “You

are right, Mr. Amiet, my truth is wrong, and your error is right.”

Gut’s narrative is based on Sax’s diary and correspondence with Churchill still in the family archives. He was helped as well by a booklet Sax’s daughter Maya compiled twenty years ago, which contained the main facts about the Churchill-Sax relationship, albeit in an amateur narrative. The result is a beautiful tale about a friendship founded in the sunset of two men’s lives. The simple tale of the Swiss entrepreneur enjoying excellent food and drink in abundance, discussing everything from strokes (Churchill), heart attacks (Sax), politics, and—above all—art, is a beautiful story.

There is, however, a huge discrepancy in the author’s treatment of Churchill and Sax. The reader learns nothing new about Churchill’s career, but the main facts are covered in sufficient detail. Yet on Willy Sax we learn surprisingly little. There is, of course, his date of birth and the mentioning of his hobbies: Sax was a talented musician (violin, piano, accordion) who even played in the Tonhalle orchestra in Zurich—the equivalent of London’s Royal Albert Hall or St. Martin-in-the-Fields. We learn also that Sax was a keen fisherman, who caught his fair share of pike and trout in the rivers near his home.

What we do not learn about Sax from Gut’s book are answers to questions like: How did his family business develop under his leadership? Where was he educated? When, where, and how did he take on Churchill as a client?

Most importantly, why did Gut not reveal that Sax was not so apolitical as claimed in Maya Sax’s booklet? Sax was in fact a National Front candidate in his hometown of Dietikon in 1934. He finished far

behind the winners, but, at thirty-six, he was hardly an innocent. The National Front in Switzerland was a far-right movement, which was not so extreme or—as we now know—so dangerous as the Nazis in Germany. Nevertheless, the “Frontists,” as they were called, were by no means harmless. They were anti-Socialist, anti-liberal, and—above all—anti-Semitic. Some of their activists did condone and perpetrate political violence.

The behaviour of Sax could be explained as the foolish actions of someone with no gift for politics, but, unfortunately, this is not covered in the book. Painting the full picture of Sax’s pre-Churchill life rather than just a sketch would have made Gut’s book stronger and more honest. ☺

Werner Vogt is the author of Winston Churchill und die Schweiz reviewed in FH 173.

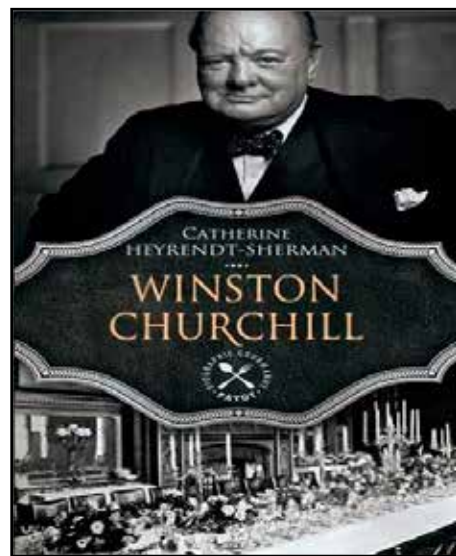
Mauvais appétit

Catherine Heyrendt-Sherman, **Winston Churchill: Biographie gourmande series.** Paris: Payot-Rivages, 2016, 160 pages, €15. ISBN: 978-2228916547

Review by Antoine Capet

The “Churchill industry” does not only operate in the Anglophone publishing world. France has seen a number of recent publications, which add little if anything to our knowledge of the great man, his entourage, and his times. See for instance my reviews of Frédéric Ferney’s *Tu seras un raté, mon fils!* in FH 169 and *Churchill: La femme du Lion* by Philippe Alexandre and Béatrix de l’Aulnoit in FH 172.

The latest *petit livre* appeared in December 2016, just in time for the festive season and the presents associated with it. The title *Winston Churchill* has nothing special to attract the buyer. The sales pitch only comes with a small logo below it giving the name of this new series (the next book is to be on Marie-Antoinette—another sure crowd-puller): “*Biographie gourmande*” (a food-lover’s biography). No doubt there is a market for such a book in France. The pity is that the author has only an embarrassingly superficial knowledge of her subject, and she piles up cliché upon cliché, along with all the old “canards,” on Churchill’s drinking in particular.



If she has such a scanty knowledge, one may ask, where did she find the material to fill 130 pages of text? Very honestly, she lists in the endnotes all the sources for the many figures and anecdotes which she gives. But then the reader can see that most of the notes refer to two books in English: *Churchill: A Life* by Sir Martin Gilbert and *Dinner with Churchill* by Cita Stelzer. The book is in fact a re-hash in French of some of the indications given in these two English-language