



**The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and
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Lodge Presentation Program Paper

Sir Winston Churchill: The Man and the Freemason

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Freemasonry has attracted many distinguished men, but surely in the top ranks of that company would be found Sir Winston Churchill, who is generally regarded as the greatest British statesman of recent history.

Brother Winston – his full name was Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill – was born in Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire on November 30, 1874. He was the son of Lord Randolph Churchill, a politician, who was the third son of the 7th Duke of Marlborough and had served as Chancellor of the Exchequer. His mother, Lady Randolph Churchill was the former Jennie Jerome, daughter of an American millionaire Leonard Jerome.

Winston was an independent and sometimes rebellious youth, who did not do well at school, but he ultimately completed Harrow School, where he began his military career with the Harrow Rifle Corps, earning high marks in English and History and becoming the school's fencing champion.

After he left Harrow in 1893, Winston applied to attend the Royal Military College at Sandhurst. It took him three tries to make it, and he had to apply for cavalry rather than infantry since the grade requirements were lower. He graduated 8th out of a class of one hundred fifty and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the 4th Queen's Own Hussars on February 20, 1895.

Winston's father died in 1885 at the age of 45, and although Winston lived to 90, he was convinced at the time that he too would die young and that he would have to make his mark early in life.

In 1895, Winston travelled to Cuba to observe the Spanish fighting the guerillas and also covered it as a correspondent for the *Daily Graphic*. From Cuba, he went to Bombay, India and became a champion polo player.

In 1897, he fought in Malakand, now Pakistan and, published *The Story of the Malakand Field Force* in *The Pioneer* and the *Daily Telegraph*. After Malakand, Churchill was transferred to Egypt in 1898, where he served under the command of Lord Kitchner. While in the Sudan, he participated in what has been described as the last meaningful British cavalry charge at the Battle of Omdurman in September 1898.

By October 1898, Churchill had returned to Britain and begun his two-volume work *The River Wars*, an account of the re-conquest of the Sudan. He resigned from the British Army on May 5, 1899, failed to win a Parliamentary election at Oldham, and again looked to journalism.

The Second Boer War broke out on October 12, 1899, and Churchill obtained a commission as a war correspondent for the *Morning Post*. He was captured by the Boers and sent to a prison camp near Pretoria from which he escaped. He continued as a correspondent but gained a commission in the South African Light Horse. He and his cousin, the Duke of Marlborough received the surrender of the fifty-two guards from the camp in which they were so recently imprisoned. By 1900, he was elected a Member of Parliament.

Winston became a Freemason in 1901, at the age of 27. Freemasonry in England had undergone a renaissance during his lifetime. The election of the Prince of Wales, later Edward the VII, as Grand Master in 1875, the year after Brother Winston was born, gave a huge impetus to the Craft, and the Prince was an exceedingly popular Royal and Grand Master.

Brother Winston was initiated in Studholme Lodge in London on May 24, 1901, passed to the degree of Fellowcraft on July 19, and became a Master Mason on March 5, 1902. Studholme Lodge was a prominent Lodge. The guest list of the Lodge's 21st Installation Banquet in 1897 included seventeen Members of Parliament, including the Lord Chancellor, as well as numerous Lords, Earls, Knights, and high-ranking members of the armed forces.

By 1912, Brother Winston was well on his way to political success and that year was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty. His stated objective in that post was to get the British fleet ready for a possible war with Germany.

Lodge membership in England was not a casual affair, and the members were expected to be active and attend all meetings. Given the demands on his time and the knowledge that he would no longer be able to play the role expected of him in Lodge, he resigned from the Studholme Lodge but continued his membership with the Craft and on a number of occasions his involvement in Masonic affairs was sought and willingly provided.

At the start of World War I, Churchill was the First Lord of the Admiralty, but had to vacate the position after the disaster at the Battle of Gallipoli. He was commissioned a Major with the 2nd Battalion, of Grenadier Guards, later Lieutenant-Colonel, commanding the 6th Battalion, Royal Scots Fusiliers. When he was with the Grenadier Guards, he learned that they were a “dry” outfit, which drank only such beverages as tea and milk. He felt a great thirst, and when he learned that the Guards permitted alcohol in the trenches on the front line, yes, you guessed it, he volunteered for the front.

In the period between WW I and WWII, Churchill was in and out of government, won support on some issues and lost ground on others. Notably, he was a fierce critic of Neville Chamberlain's appeasement of Adolf Hitler and, in a speech to the House of Commons, he bluntly and prophetically stated, "You were given the choice between war and dishonour. You chose dishonour, and you will have war."

Britain declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939 and Churchill was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty and a member of the War Cabinet, as he had been during World War I. When this information

was passed to the Board of the Admiralty, a signal was sent to the Fleet, "***Winston is back.***"

On May 10, 1940, prior to Germany's invasion of France, Chamberlain resigned as Prime Minister and George VI asked Churchill, who had been among the first to recognize the growing threat of Hitler, to take the job and form an all-party government.

Churchill, who had fought in many wars and was no stranger to combat, was a truly great wartime leader, who had the credibility to urge the people of Britain to stand and fight. His rhetorical skills played no small part in motivating the citizenry. You may have heard some of his famous wartime phrases, for example: "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat," and "We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills, we shall never surrender." He remarked after the second battle of El Alamein: "This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning." You may also recall that he said to the fighter pilots who won the Battle of Britain, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

Churchill's effectiveness as a wartime Prime Minister was, in part, due to the relationship he developed with President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This facilitated Britain receiving needed war materials from America under the "Lend Lease" program, which provided not only munitions but destroyers and tanks "on credit" and "on loan."

Germany was ultimately defeated on May 7, 1945 and later Japan on August 15, 1945. But, despite having led Britain to the greatest military

victory in its history, his Party was nevertheless defeated in the 1945 election. He served for six years in Parliament as the Leader of the Opposition, and became Prime Minister again in 1951. During this term, he further enhanced the relations with the United States and dealt with the Mau Mau revolt in Kenya, and a war in Malaya.

Queen Elizabeth II, upon his retirement from office in 1955, offered to raise Churchill as Duke of London, but he declined. However, there were no shortages of honors for this Brother. He received numerous degrees from prestigious universities, and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1953 for his numerous published works, especially his six-volume set on the Second World War. President Kennedy, following an Act of Congress, proclaimed him an honorary citizen of the United States.

Brother Winston died at home January 24, 1965 at age 90, exactly 70 years after his father's death. By Royal Decree, his body lay in state for three days and a state funeral was held at St. Paul's Cathedral. As his body passed down the Thames, the Royal Artillery fired a nineteen gun salute and the RAF staged a sixteen fighter fly-by.

I think it is fair to say that Brother Winston, who was selected in a BBC poll as the "Greatest Britain of them all," lived his life guided by the values and principles he learned in Studholme Lodge, and I think he would have subscribed to the statement made by our own George Washington, when he spoke about Freemasonry:

"Being persuaded that a just application of the principles, on which the Masonic Fraternity is founded, must be to promote private virtue and public prosperity, I shall always be happy to

advance the interests of the Society, and to be considered by them as a deserving Brother.”

While we may not achieve the heights of Brothers George Washington or Winston Churchill, we too should be guided by the same moral and social virtues as they were and, each in our own way, serve as an effective ambassador of Freemasonry in our community.