

Only 64 people have ever been Prime Minister of Great Britain, since the first Prime Minister - SIR ROBERT WALPOLE - in 1721. So that's almost exactly 300 years. Over 300 years, only 64 people have been able to call themselves 'Prime Minister' - the leader of the British government. Of those 64 people, WINSTON CHURCHILL can claim to be one of the best - certainly in the top five of all time. (The other four would probably be WILLIAM PITT THE YOUNGER - who went to Pembroke College, and we have a big statue of him in the College - BENJAMIN DISRAELI, WILLIAM GLADSTONE and MARGARET THATCHER.) He was Prime Minister for most of WORLD WAR II, leading Britain victory against Germany, which was led by ADOLF HITLER. But then right at the end of World War II, there was a General Election - just like the one we had in November - and despite having won World War II, Churchill lost the election and was booted out as Prime Minister. When it became clear he had lost the election, his wife CLEMENTINE CHURCHILL said 'It may be a blessing in disguise'. To which Churchill replied, 'At the moment it seems quite effectively disguised.'



Churchill had to spend six years as LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION before there was another election, which this time he won. He became Prime Minister again, and served as Prime Minister until 1955, when he had retire due to old age and ill health. At that point, he was 81 years old. But he lived on for another ten years, dying in 1965. His funeral was a huge occasion - a big State funeral, paying tribute to the man who had helped protect Britain from being invaded by Germany in 1940, at the start of World War II, and who had put Britain in a position to help lead an invasion of Europe in 1944, to help free it from German rule, and overthrow Adolf Hitler and win World War II. Here is an amazing film, in colour, of the highlights of Churchill's funeral, which shows what a big deal his funeral was, and what a big deal Churchill was:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GC1WEgXKEI>

Churchill was born in 1874 into a really distinguished family. He was descended from the DUKE OF MARLBOROUGH, who was a British military leader and fought the last land battle ever to be fought on English soil - the BATTLE OF SEDGEMOOR, in 1685. Winston Churchill was to oversee a quite different battle that was fought in Britain in 1940 - THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN - but that battle was fought in the air between British and German planes. Churchill's father, RANDOLPH CHURCHILL, was a famous politician and could have easily become Prime Minister himself. Like Boris Johnson - who idolises Churchill - Churchill initially became famous as a journalist: he went to South Africa to report on a war being fought there between the British and South African farmers (the BOER (pronounced 'Bow - a') WAR), was captured by the South Africans, escaped and made his way to back to England. The story of his escape made him famous, and he used that fame to get himself elected to Parliament in 1901 as a MEMBER



OF PARLIAMENT for the CONSERVATIVE PARTY. But he soon found he disagreed with some of the policies being advanced by the Conservative government and he 'crossed the floor of the House' in 1904 and became a member of the LIBERAL PARTY. This was pretty good timing as the Liberals won the General Election in 1905, and Churchill became a member of the government.

Three years before WORLD WAR I broke out in 1914, Churchill became FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY - basically in charge of the Royal Navy - and that was the position he was occupying when WORLD WAR I broke out. Churchill really fancied himself as a war leader and came with a scheme to help win the war by attacking TURKEY, which was one of German's allies in World War I. His plan was to land a lot of British and Australian troops on the beaches at a place called GALLIPOLI (pronounced 'Gal - ip - o - lee'). They would then move from there to invade Turkey and take over the Turkish capital, Constantinople. The reality was a horrific disaster: the British and Australian troops came under constant gunfire and could not get off the beaches. 34,000 British soldiers were killed, and 8,000 Australian soldiers died - and to this day Australians remember Gallipoli Day as a day of mourning. Churchill was rightly blamed for the disaster and lost his job as First Lord of the Admiralty.

After World War I ended, Churchill lost his seat in Parliament, but made a comeback by rejoining the Conservative Party: he won a seat in Parliament in the 1924 General Election and was made Chancellor of the Exchequer (basically put in charge of Britain's economy) the same year. But he was not a very successful Chancellor and his time as Chancellor coincided with a lot of unemployment, which resulted in the LABOUR PARTY winning power for the first time in the 1929 General Election. Churchill was out of government, and would not come back into government until the start of World War II in 1939. The ten years in between - from 1929 to 1939 - are known as the 'wilderness years' for Churchill. He was still a Member of Parliament but in 1929 he was already 55 years old, and people wondered why he didn't just retire. But from 1933 onwards, Churchill started warning that Germany, under its new leader ADOLF HITLER, was a real threat to Britain, and that Britain had better start investing in new military equipment in case Britain was forced to go to war with Germany again. This made Churchill really unpopular. People in Britain were sick of war - so many people had died in World War I, the prospect of another war filled people with horror. But the Germans - having been beaten in World War I and treated really badly afterwards - were really keen to set things straight and re-establish themselves as the top European power. And Hitler was just the man to help them do that.

After the Conservative Party got back into power in 1935 under Prime Minister STANLEY BALDWIN, and then his successor NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, Britain did make some efforts at rearming and making itself more powerful militarily - but it also tried to avoid war with Germany through APPEASEMENT (pronounced 'A - pees - ment'), which basically meant giving into whatever Hitler demanded. But in 1939, Hitler's Germany invaded Poland, after Britain had promised Poland that it would protect her if she was invaded. So Britain had no choice but to declare war on Germany. WORLD WAR II was about to begin, and Churchill - the man who had warned Britain to get ready for another war with Germany - was brought back to his old position as First Lord of the Admiralty. Churchill was back in government.

The rest of the story will have to wait until Friday. Tomorrow, I will talk about something completely different - something very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very small.