



Churchill's Secret



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Churchill's Secret



“Who knew adversity as well as triumph, but always came back fighting.”

Michael Gambon and Lindsay Duncan star as Sir Winston Churchill and Clementine Churchill in this feature length film, Churchill's Secret.

Romola Garai (*The Hour, Legacy*) takes the part of nurse Millie Appleyard and Churchill's adult children are played by Matthew Macfadyen (*Ripper Street, The Enfield Haunting*) as Randolph Churchill, Daisy Lewis (*Downton Abbey*) as Mary Churchill, Rachael Stirling (*The Bletchley Circle, Detectorists*) as Sarah Churchill and Tara Fitzgerald (*Game of Thrones, In the Club*) as Diana Churchill.

Set during the summer months of 1953 Churchill—now Prime Minister for the second time and in his late 70's—suffers a life-threatening stroke, which is kept secret from the world.

Told from the viewpoint of his young Nurse, Millie Appleyard, the drama follows his battle to recover as his long suffering wife Clemmie, desperately hopes the stroke will force Winston to retire while his political friends and foe scheme to plot who will succeed him.

Meanwhile his adult children descend on Chartwell, unsure if he will pull through, as tensions within his family begin to surface.

Further cast includes Bill Paterson (*Outlander, Law & Order: UK*) as Lord Moran, James Wilby as Lord Bracken (*The Great Train Robbery, Endeavour*), Alex Jennings as Anthony Eden (*Foyle's War*,

Silk), Patrick Kennedy (*Downton Abbey*, *Boardwalk Empire*) as Jock Colville, Christian McKay (*Rush*, *Borgia*) as Christopher Soames, Chris Larkin (*Doctors*, *Yes, Prime Minister*) as Rab Butler and John Standing (*Borgia*, *The Other Wife*) as Lord Camrose.

Daybreak Pictures, part of the Tinopolis Group, produce the drama with Executive Producers Hal Vogel and David Aukin overseeing production. Churchill's Secret is co-produced with MASTERPIECE, where Rebecca Eaton is Executive Producer. It will air in the US on PBS in 2016.

Based on Jonathan Smith's recently published book, *The Churchill Secret: KBO*, the drama is adapted by Stewart Harcourt (*Love & Marriage*, *Treasure Island*, *Poirot*).

The 120' film is directed by Charles Sturridge (*Da Vinci's Demons*, *The Scapegoat*, *The Road to Coronation Street*) with Timothy Bricknell (*From There to Here*, *The Fear*, *Eric & Ernie*) producing.

Churchill's Secret is a Daybreak Pictures/MASTERPIECE Co-production for ITV.

Introduction

Hal Vogel, Executive Producer

David Aukin, my business partner, and I were first introduced to the writer Jonathan Smith in October 2013. He had just completed and delivered to his publishers the manuscript of his latest novel KBO – Winston’s old motto for KEEP BUGGERING ON. That was two years ago. Two years from our first meeting to now. In my world that is about as fast a production as any of us could ever hope for.

One could say it’s a testament to Winston. Winston always sells. But that’s the problem. What, if anything, is there left to say about Winston that’s new? The subject of countless biographies - so many movies, dramas, novels. He is a mythical titan of the 20th Century with every beat of his life story raked over. Surely it’s all been said. It is a testament to Jonathan’s novel and in no small measure to Stewart Harcourt’s very brilliant adaptation that there is, it turns out, something new to say about the great man after all.

And it is heart breaking and completely unexpected.

The story takes place in 1953. Winston, now in his late 70s, is Prime Minister for the second time. Stalin is recently dead, the queen has ascended to the throne, England has won the ashes and the Russians have now successfully tested their first hydrogen bomb. England may be a better place, but the world is certainly not a safer one. It’s this new world order of nuclear proliferation that forms the backdrop to our story.

Winston, the great warrior, believes he has one final political mission to achieve – to find a way out of the cold war and the threat of mutually assured destruction and deliver world peace. He believes only he can broker a détente with the Russians.

But having suffered a near-fatal stroke, now fighting for his life, his survival is far from certain. Winston’s political allies are faced with a dilemma, tell the public and risk ending any hope of Winston returning to office and achieving his last great political ambition; or say nothing and risk huge political embarrassment should Winston die.

So what did they do? What politician’s do best. They cover it up. Enlisting the help of the press barons, Winston’s old friends Lord Beaverbrook, Camrose and Bracken, a pact is secretly hatched at Chartwell to keep the story out of the papers, from both the public and Parliament, though Cabinet was at least informed.

In this era of blanket news coverage it’s a little shocking to think the PM could suffer a serious stroke without the public or parliament knowing. More shocking still to think the country might be run by a couple of close, politically unaccountable aids. And that so little has ever been written about it. Surely that could never happen now? But as we know from Chilcot, Snowden and WikiLeaks it does. Of course it does. It is happening ALL the time.

But this is not a political drama about political cover-ups. It’s only a small part of our story. The secret at its heart is something much more ordinary but no less shocking or surprising.

Introduction

Hal Vogel continued:

Historical or political dramas only ever really work when one can get under the skin of ones subject, when one is able to find revealing, personal insights that resonate beyond the specifics – beyond the politics or the facts.

The Winston myth is the story of great political struggles, of unlikely triumphs against all the odds. But ambition and success are seldom without cost. And it's the personal cost of that political ambition, the price paid by those closest to Winston – particularly by his wife Clemmie but also his children - that interested us.

We set out to make a family drama about a very different kind of cover up. One that resonates with all of us. About the failure of parents, the disappointments of children, the sacrifices within marriage. About the secrets and lies, pain and disappointments that course through all families. And like so many families, these painful memories and resentments lay buried and hidden within the Churchill's just like any other.

And all of this witnessed by a complete outsider, by Jonathan's only fictional creation in the novel, the plucky, down-to-earth nurse, Millie Appleyard.

As a modern young woman in postwar Britain, Millie sees clearly all the possibilities for a young woman in this new world. And with dilemmas and choices of her own, the aristocratic and rarefied reality of the Churchill household might seem a strange place to find inspiration but in the warm, witty and tender friendship that develops between these two unlikely people, both Millie and Winston discover they too have much to learn from one another.

Cast interviews

Michael Gambon is Winston Churchill



Q: How did you approach the role of Winston Churchill?

"I'm terrible. I never do any research, although I did read through a book on Churchill. You look at him and see what shape he was, how he walked and all the sort of things that actors do. Then you try and copy that as much as you can. You listen to how he spoke. I don't know what I've done with that. I can only do what I do best, what I think I'm doing. And that's how it all ends up. You just hope and pray you're doing it properly."

"Then you find yourself in a rehearsal room with the other actors who all happen to be friends of mine, which is wonderful. We're all mates. I couldn't believe it. I thought they'd all been arranged especially for my benefit."

"I really like the director Charles Sturridge. He's been so kind to me on this. I've worked with him before. A lovely man and a good director."

"So every day I turn up and play Churchill as best I can. I am obsessed by the way he walked and the way he sat down. You didn't see him walking much. The voice is a bit strange. It goes up and down. A strange way of speaking."

"But you've got to do your own thing, really. Do what you think. People have said, 'You look like Churchill.' And I thought, 'Bloody cheek.' But I've looked in the mirror and there is a sort of likeness there. I've also tried to find a bit of his bloody-mindedness by making my voice bigger and not moving my top lip much. I try my best."

"So here I am. Terrified. It's very frightening acting. The older you get, the better you get but the more frightened you become. I do, anyway. It's frightening playing someone as famous as Churchill. You think, 'Christ almighty.' You can play King Lear. No-one knows anything about him."

Cast interviews

Michael Gambon interview continued:

I've played all those parts. Shakespeare, Stratford, all that. Playing those roles doesn't seem to matter as much as Winston Churchill who we all know immediately, don't we?"

Q: Where is Churchill in his life when this story begins?

"We begin this story in 1953 when he's still prime minister - and he has a mild stroke. Then he has another more serious one, which puts him out of action. He spends the next six months or so fighting it through, getting better, being in bed, playing with the children out in the garden.

"His illness was kept secret and it left the country without a leader. We couldn't do that now. It was in the days when that sort of thing was kept quiet. When someone important had a serious illness. Luckily he recovered and the public never knew about it until after his death. Many people watching this film won't know about this section of his life.

"I was around 24 when Churchill died in 1965 and I remember watching the State Funeral. I always like watching big funerals."

Q: What was his relationship like with his wife Clemmie (played by Lindsay Duncan)?

"It was a bit on and off and a bit rough sometimes, as with all marriages. But fundamentally he loved her. We bring that out in this film. Some of the scenes are quite moving. It's been great working with Lindsay again. She's a genius and our scenes together work very well."

Q: What was it like filming in the gardens of Churchill's former home, Chartwell in Kent?

"I enjoyed filming there. I've been to Chartwell before and it's now owned and run by the National Trust. The public were there while we were filming. That was quite nice, actually, to have them around the edges, looking. I signed a few autographs. But I wasn't mobbed. They're not like that. They're quite posh, the people who go to Chartwell. So they wouldn't do that."

Q: The story begins with a dinner at 10 Downing Street. Have you ever visited No 10 in real life?

"No, not Number 10. I was asked to but I never turned up. To tell you the truth I think I forgot. I was supposed to go with a group of actors. Buckingham Palace I've been to quite a few times. That's about all."

Q: Churchill liked to paint?

"I am painting in one scene. I have painted in the past but I don't do that now. It's a bit quiet. I like a bit of noise."

Q: What made Churchill such a great orator?

"Very highly educated people can talk on and on. I think it's amazing. I watch politicians speaking in the House of Commons and I don't know how that's done. I can't do that. I can say lines or speeches if they're written. But I can't do it without a script."

Cast interviews

Michael Gambon interview continued:

Q: Do you watch yourself on screen?

"No, never ever. I can't bear it. It's horrible. I'm a theatre actor, fundamentally. I've spent my life on the London stage and I can't see myself then. As a theatre actor you never see yourself. So I don't want to see myself now. You go into the room and see a screen with you on it and you think, 'Oh Christ!' And out you go."

Q: You have given up performing on stage?

"I have to. I can't remember the lines. It's a fact of life. I spent nearly 50 years on the stage at the National, RSC, all around America and in London. It's a shame. I feel heartbroken. I went on the stage recently with a mate of mine to try and see if it would work if I put a plug in my ear and got someone in the wings to prompt the lines. But it won't. The theatre is about speed of delivery and quickness of reaction and it wouldn't fit in with that."

Q: Winston says in the film, 'Growing old is not for cowards. It's such a strange thing to happen to a little boy.' How do you feel about growing old?

"Well, there's nothing you can do about it. You just take it, don't you? What can you do? I behave a bit young off camera in the street. Mucking about with mates I behave like a child. But that's all right. That's what you're supposed to be doing, isn't it? If you're an actor you're supposed to be a bit nutty, aren't you?"

Q: Do you get recognised in the street?

"From Harry Potter I get noticed. Kids. That's all right. I don't mind that, it's good fun. But it's getting thinner. The mail from Harry Potter when I was in it and when it was running would be piled high every week. Now it's down there a little bit. A bit upsetting, really."

Q: Winston Churchill was 89 when he stepped down as an MP. Do actors ever retire?

"No. You'd be mad to retire. I've been acting for over 50 years. I wouldn't want to stop now. There'd be no reason. Unless someone stops me. I keep rolling on. I like it."

Cast interviews

Lindsay Duncan is Clementine Churchill



Q: What story does this drama tell about Winston Churchill?

“It’s a film about a very intense and dramatic occurrence in Churchill’s life and something that affects those around him very deeply. Something that is shocking. Apart from the political aspect to Churchill, he had a family and this is a huge family drama. The personal and the public overlapped all the time.

“I read a couple of books as part of my research for the role. It’s not really a hardship. If you are playing someone who lived, you do need to know some background. There are choices you make that are informed by knowledge of all sorts of things: the length of the relationship, how much of that was influenced by the pressures of public life and by Winston’s personality. So there’s a lot that is relevant to you as an actor that an audience doesn’t need to know.

“Churchill’s Secret shows him as almost insanely determined. Beyond the point of being realistic, he was determined. Of course, that’s how he had the career, the life he did. By always going further and lasting longer than was reasonable.”

Q: Can you describe Clemmie and Winston’s relationship at this time?

“It’s clear that at this point Clemmie would cheerfully duck out of public life and, equally, would like that for Winston. I think she felt politically and in terms of his reputation he had done very well and maybe it was time to bow out. She would have liked more privacy, less pressure for both of them and more time with him.

“But at the same time, having been married to him for over 50 years, she knew perfectly well he lived for work. She said retirement would be a kind of death for him. She certainly wasn’t as keen on carrying on as Winston was. It was interesting reading about a marriage that lasted for so long and a man who was involved in two world wars. The detail of all of that is riveting.

Cast interviews

Lindsay Duncan interview continued:

"She was very effective during the Second World War, took on a lot of work, was passionate about it and determined to see projects through that she felt were important. Bomb shelters, for instance. Making them safer, more comfortable, cleaner, all those things."

"But I don't think she was looking for the limelight. She was very engaged with his public life in terms of giving him her frank and, I have to say, informed opinion about things. Sometimes he listened. Sometimes he didn't. But she did choose to escape a lot and she went away for long periods of time. I think that's how she managed to keep going for such a long time."

"She was slightly more liberal than he was and very protective of his reputation. So sometimes she offered advice, like, 'You won't come out of this well if you do this.' She cared passionately about him. It seems to me that he was extremely lucky in his marriage."

Q: You have worked with Michael Gambon before. Can you describe the experience of working alongside him?

"It's wonderful working with Michael Gambon. He's a great actor. He really is. Michael has rather brilliantly, through his own personality, created a situation where he can get away with saying, 'I just turn up and say the lines.' It's a bit more skilled than that."

Q: What was filming at Chartwell like, the former home of Winston and Clemmie?

"It was fantastic to film at Chartwell. It's a National Trust property now and there were loads of people milling around. It was useful that we filmed those scenes very early on. I've played a couple of real people before but I'd never been so affected by a location. More by the house than the gardens."

"I was really struck by the fact they actually lived there. It's such an obvious thing to say but I thought, 'Well, they walked through that door.' It was the domestic aspect. Although lots of public figures went through that door and Churchill was never 'off'. There would be lots of weekends with colleagues. But I thought, 'The whole family were present in this building.' I felt that. So it was useful."

"We got into the front door at the point where he's just had a second stroke, as we understand it. I think we shot that either on the anniversary of the day when it actually happened or the day either side. But most of the filming was done in the gardens."

"I was lucky enough to finish my bit of filming and have the rest of the day free. The National Trust were great because they gave someone really experienced to me and I was then given a rapid and very relevant tour by someone who, honestly, could have rebuilt the house. They knew so much about it. That was wonderful for me. To be in Clemmie's original bedroom and so on. If I hadn't been making this film I probably would have had no reason to ever go there. But now I will always remember Chartwell."

Cast interviews

Lindsay Duncan interview continued:

Q: One of Clemmie and Winston's children - Marigold - died aged two. Is she mentioned in the film?

“It’s a very powerful part of the drama. It wasn’t a secret, it was public. But that’s something lots of people won’t know about. It has an impact in our film.”

Q: How did their four other children cope with Winston’s fame, political ambitions and iconic status?

“It wasn’t easy for those children. The family certainly suffered. You can apply the psychology of absent fathers and busy mothers and all of that and I’m sure to some extent that’s true. But to do that is very modern. They were aristocratic. In that class at that time, you didn’t do the school run. It’s very different. We’re incredibly hands on now.

“It’s a very interesting thing to think about. What happened to these children? They were in the public eye. One thing that is very clear, because it’s stated by their daughter Mary, is that Winston came first, second and third in terms of Clemmie. She loved her children but he would always come first.

“Mary had a constant nanny and seems to have come out of things rather more happily and successfully in her life. But not all of them came through their lives happily. Randolph was a very spoilt boy. Spoilt by his dad. And there was often anger towards both of his parents.

“But he wrote to his mother about this period in their lives when she was dealing with the stroke and praised her dignity and her care for Winston. It’s very touching to see this angry man who could also be like a little boy lost as well. He noticed that his mother did behave with a great deal of dignity and a steadfastness which she always applied to her relationship with their father.”

Q: Why is Winston remembered as such a great speech-maker?

“The one thing that comes to mind is context. People who do have any sense of Churchill will remember the wartime speeches. I suppose one of the reasons he is really imprinted on the national consciousness, certainly for people of a certain generation, is because of how he behaved during the Second World War.

“It is incredibly effective because he manages to present someone who is with you to the end and makes no bones about how difficult it’s going to be. Which is a very smart move. To reinforce the difficulty which makes you feel you’re not being lied to. People were suffering so much, so it was important not to be lied to. Although, of course, it was very clever and aware. But people want to hear something that at least they think is the truth.

“He was saying it’s going to be really difficult, we won’t give up and implying a belief in the people he was talking to. It’s incredibly bolstering and moving, without being sentimental. So he chose his words extremely well. War, politically, is very useful to politicians because it gives you a platform. If you are good at all, you can play to your strengths. And he certainly did that.”

Cast interviews

Romola Garai is Nurse Millie Appleyard



Q: Who is Millie Appleyard?

“Millie is a nurse employed to care for Winston Churchill after his stroke. She is the only totally fictional character in the drama. He actually had a team of four nurses. But we’re able to record the experiences of those women through Millie. She would have been employed to give him very basic nursing care because they didn’t really understand strokes at that time, what caused them and what rehabilitation they could offer.

“She’s from Yorkshire and a different kind of background to the Churchill family. Working people, lower middle class. Millie is a nurse with a career and she’s suddenly brought into this very unfamiliar situation with a family of aristocrats and the prime minister. She is ambitious and driven in her career, believes she can help him and does a lot of work with Churchill to make him get better.

“Millie is quite withheld and doesn’t express her opinions freely or easily. Particularly at that time with the hierarchy between doctors and nurses much more regimented. She wouldn’t have been in a position to express what she thought about the family, the pretty explosive family dynamics or him as an individual.

“But what you do see is somebody who really loves their job and is very good at it. And the fact that she admires that about Churchill. Aside from all of the other demands on him as a father, as a husband, and his many failures as an individual man, he was a passionate and committed politician and a very good politician. She is someone who can see, understand and appreciate that.

“You end up with a nice parallel in the story between a young woman who is very keen on her career and loves her vocation very much and a man who is also extremely dedicated to his job. It’s really in some ways about vocation versus family and the tension of those two things. With Millie as the eyes of the audience.”

Cast interviews

Romola Garai interview continued:

Q: How much did you know about Churchill before this?

"I guess slightly more than the average because I've done a lot of 20th century history in my work. But I'm no expert. I certainly didn't know what had happened with his stroke and a lot of people don't know about it. Which is why this will be an interesting drama for viewers. He was a man of incredible personality with an unbelievably active mind. A genius really. But the fact he was prime minister and what he achieved during his life aren't really essential to the main idea of the film. This is about somebody becoming very ill and recovering against all expectations."

Q: Did you do your own research?

"I did a bit. If you're playing somebody with a very specific job, you have to. Because otherwise you just won't know what to do on screen. It's sort of terrifying because there are going to be a percentage of people who are nurses who are going to know when you do things wrong. But sometimes you have to make decisions about what tells the story best."

"People don't always understand all of the factors that go into making a decision. Of course you don't want to be doing something for no good reason that is just wrong. That is very exposing as an actor. Particularly when you're telling stories that involved real people and their real lives, you don't want to be changing history for no good reason. So you have to be respectful of the period."

"I spoke to a fascinating woman who is a nurse but also a professor, a doctor, with a specialism in stroke care and also discussed the history of stroke care. She had read the diaries written by Churchill's doctor Lord Moran and knew a lot about Churchill's stroke."

"It's very much a medical anomaly, a very curious episode in medical history that this man recovered from this incredibly debilitating series of strokes and recovered so completely and went on to live for another 10 years. That was so unexpected."

"Even by today's standards it's remarkable and there's been a lot of interest from medical academics into how he managed to get better. The only thing I think people can really put it down to is his will, his force of character."

Q: What else does the film say about Churchill, including his family life?

"I always think the best testaments to people are the honest testaments. I really liked this piece and the writing because I'm not very interested in just watching people eulogised on screen."

"It does him a disservice to not acknowledge their family dynamics were very complicated. It was very difficult being his child. He wasn't always an amazing father. He had a very loving marriage but it was a marriage that he possibly took more out of than put in."

"He was a committed and brilliant politician but he made political mistakes as well. Very significant mistakes, especially early on in his career. That's much more interesting to watch than a piece that doesn't acknowledge the humanity of the person involved."

Cast interviews

Romola Garai interview continued:

"Churchill was bloody-minded. But the Second World War was the last war with an enemy that was very clear and had to be defeated for a very clear reason. So that bloody-mindedness, his strength of character, his refusal to do a deal with Hitler is something really admirable and should be admired. Modern conflicts are much more complicated and confusing.

"The thing I really liked in the script is this idea that his true loyalty was really completely with politics. There is an enormous price to pay for that in a family. Even though Clemmie and Winston had a very loving marriage, she had to share him. Had she refused to share him, that would have been the end. It was a very clear dynamic and I think that's very interesting to explore."

Q: Winston says in the film, 'Growing old is not for cowards. Such a strange thing to happen to a little boy.' What do you make of that?

"He was quite child-like in some ways. A lot of the people at the time mentioned that about him. He had this very unhappy childhood. He was this malcontent and wasn't a high achiever. I think when you're like that as a child, when you're isolated or not popular or whatever, that stays with you through life. He had that with him all through his life and I think that's what that line is trying to represent. Old age for people that are unbelievably mentally active and brilliant is a terrible thing."

Q: You've worked with Michael Gambon twice before. What is he like to work with?

"Michael is very instinctive. There are so many different kinds of actors and all actors basically work in very different ways. I think Michael does really and truly just read it and go with his instincts completely. A lot of actors do that but they feel the need to pretend they don't because they're worried people will think it's not difficult or it's a silly occupation. They're worried about being trivialised. Michael doesn't worry about it being trivialised. He's honest and says, 'Look, I just read it and I go with my instincts.' I think that's probably true of a lot of actors."

Q: How was filming at Chartwell, the former home of Winston and Clemmie?

"It was very spooky. I made myself laugh thinking if the ghosts of the family were wandering among us they'd go, 'Oh look, there's papa and there's mama. And who is that woman?' It is a weird feeling playing real people and acting out scenes from their life in the house they lived in, not that long after it all happened. It's not that far in distant history.

"I feel a sense of responsibility to try and do justice to them as individuals and neither elevate them or do them a disservice. You're more aware of that when you film in people's actual houses. I had been to Chartwell before and had a look around again. It's quite a revealing house because it's very stately in some ways, in the grounds and in the view. It has all the trappings. But then in other ways it's quite a practical house. It's not a gothic, romantic house. It seemed to encapsulate him quite well."

Cast interviews

Romola Garai interview continued:

Q: Millie travels to her new post with two Special Branch officers on a steam train. How was that to film?

“We filmed that on the Bluebell Railway in Sussex, which is lovely. Those are the days when you think, ‘I can’t believe I’m getting paid to go for a nice trip on a beautiful steam train through the English countryside on a sunny Tuesday afternoon while everyone else in the world goes to work.’”

Q: Millie tells Churchill he is the greatest speaker in the world. What qualities did he have?

“Churchill was very idiosyncratic in the way he spoke. Today public speaking has become so monotone and peculiarity is something that rolling news is very afraid of. It’s easy to pinpoint anybody’s idiosyncrasies now, which I think is a terrible shame. Because some of the great orators were very individual in the way they spoke.

“Churchill would not get elected today. His speech was very peculiar, quite mumbled in some ways. But the deep resonance of his voice and this extraordinary articulation that he had, emphasising the words, was so individual to him.

“It’s amazing to hear his speeches. When you listen to them you understand how people thought, ‘OK, we’re going to put our faith in somebody at this time of real fear.’ And he was the man they could put their faith in. It was like a parent’s voice. It was so recognisable, so apparent when he was speaking that it was him. So familiar. That would have been really important.

“Today it’s hard for people in politics to be themselves completely in the same way because of the way the media is now. I think that’s a shame. I like personalities. I don’t think people are belittled by being flawed. It was an easier time then to speak and behave as you were.”

Cast interviews

Matthew Macfayden is Randolph Churchill



Q: Who was Randolph Churchill?

“Randolph Churchill was Winston Churchill’s only son and a sad figure in a way. It’s a very difficult thing trying to live up to a father like that. Randolph went into politics and wasn’t terribly successful. He also had a terrible relationship with alcohol and died aged 57 in 1968.

“But the lovely thing about the Churchill’s Secret script is you see moments of vulnerability. He wants his father to think of him as a success. But it was an impossible act to follow. Randolph was mocked in public. He had a tumour removed. It turned out to be benign and Evelyn Waugh wrote, ‘A typical triumph of modern science to find the only part of Randolph that was not malignant and remove it.’”

Q: Did you research his life?

“It was all in the script but I did do some research online and looked at a lot of photographs. It’s the relationships that are important in this, so you don’t feel as if you’re doing a historical piece at all. It’s about a family so it works without knowing very much about Churchill. With added extra interest for those who do know the history.”

Q: Can you describe Randolph’s relationship with his family?

“It’s a mixture of frustration and disappointment. Wanting to please and feeling like your mother is hogging their father from the children. Something that one of his sisters Diana feels as well. When Winston is very ill, lots of things come out within the family. That’s what’s interesting about it.

“You have this impossible act to follow. Someone you both resent and adore. Very difficult. Like the children of megastar musicians or movie stars. It must be very peculiar. Churchill was an iconic, mythologised figure in an age before celebrity.

Cast interviews

Matthew Macfayden interview continued:

“Hopefully the audience will have a little sympathy for Randolph. He was obviously not in a good place. Certainly not in this film. He turns up and is terribly upset about his father’s illness. He doesn’t know how to deal with it and is full of anger and bitterness. But you see the vulnerability.”

Q: Winston is described as ‘bloody-minded’. Do you agree?

“That’s wonderfully comforting. I have to remind myself of that as an actor, because it’s hard. It’s not like the reviews come and go away. They are there forever. And any interview you’ve done where you’ve been misrepresented, it’s there forever as a reference in the ether, on the internet. So it’s nice to think about people like this because it reminds you that all of that is nonsense and fluff.”

Q: What was Winston like as a man?

“There are people with that almost maniacal energy and self-belief. But often their nearest and dearest suffer because of it. Like his wife Clemmie. People like that are totally selfish when they are doing their own thing. I read that Winston had written in dictation and letters and notes and books and so on more than Shakespeare and Dickens combined over his life. He had two secretaries and was constantly dictating day and night. That’s what made him tick.”

Q: Why was Winston such a great orator?

“Maybe it’s a combination of charisma and presence. And wit. I think you know it when you see it. You know on a gut level. It’s like a child knows. You know when someone is telling the truth.”

Q: You have worked with Michael Gambon before?

“I’ve worked with Michael Gambon twice before. That was a big factor in taking this role. Apart from anything else he has this wonderful instrument - his voice and his body and his big face and eyes - and he has a great wit and intelligence. He’s lovely. I did a Poliakoff TV drama called Perfect Strangers with him and we played father and son. Then we did Henry IV Parts 1 and 2 at the National Theatre playing Hal and Falstaff.

“So it was nice to do this. I’ve got a scene today with Michael and he’s in bed. He’ll be messing around and making me laugh. I’ve loved working on Churchill’s Secret with lots of friends in the cast. You turn up and it’s like a party.”

Q: What was filming at Chartwell like?

“That was great. I’d never been to Chartwell before so it was fascinating. It’s very special to film there with a beautiful view over the Kent countryside. Winston loved it.”

Cast interviews

Bill Paterson is Lord Moran



Q: What did you know about this chapter in Winston Churchill's life?

"A little bit. I'd done another film about Churchill called *Into The Storm*, which was set in the war. I played Clement Attlee and that led up to the Attlee election win in 1945. So obviously I had followed the denouement of Churchill's life after that because I connected with Attlee's life. This story is the tail end of that when Churchill came back. Also I'm just about old enough to have lived through that period. You pick up news, even when you're a boy. The sense that he was hanging on longer than was necessary. I could hear my folks talking about it. Saying that Mr Churchill should have a rest."

Q: You were 19 when Churchill died in January 1965. Do you have any memory of his State Funeral?

"I wasn't present at the actual event but I remember Churchill's funeral. These were significant things. Today we live in such a rolling world of news that you have to be au fait with absolutely everything. We weren't in those days. But the major events really did punch through because they covered everything from the cinema newsreels and whatever."

"Churchill was the prime minister when I was born at the end of the Second World War. Then Attlee and then Churchill again. So he was my first prime minister. In Glasgow he was not gloriously adored because of, particularly, the memories of the First World War when he ran the Ministry of Supply. And then the miners in the 1920s. He was not universally loved, Churchill. But being born in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, you did live in a Churchillian shade. There's no question."

Cast interviews

Bill Paterson interview continued:

Q: Who is Charles Wilson, Lord Moran?

"Moran was Churchill's personal physician. Without him Churchill would not have been in full harness for all of these years. There's no doubt about it. They were friends and the friendship went back. They had shared the Great War, the First World War. That was their common lingua franca. Charles Wilson had been a medical officer in the front line throughout the war and he won a Military Cross for his services at The Somme. It was baptism by fire for these guys. So Churchill and he were close. He took over as Churchill's doctor just as Churchill came to power in May 1940. He basically was a friend and a doctor. It's something we'd all like, isn't it? To have a doctor who's a friend. That's a handy thing to have."

Q: This was a very different era of medicine?

"There's no secret that Moran gave Churchill some medication after the stroke - amphetamines and sleeping things that could almost sound sinister until you realise that nowadays we all get statins or aspirin to thin the blood or whatever. Moran gave Churchill aspirin on a daily basis, long before it was thought of as essential. So he probably kept him going. That's why Churchill lived until he was 90.

"Moran wrote a book called The Struggle For Survival, which was published the year after Churchill died and was controversial because people said he was breaching the medical ethics of the Hippocratic Oath, talking about his patient.

"He argued - and I think maybe it was valid - this was of national importance. The fact the leader was being propped up had been hidden from view for some time in a way that you just can't contemplate nowadays. If our prime minister cut his finger it would be a Twitterstorm within the hour.

"But Churchill was hidden away for three months at one point after a considerably serious stroke. He also had his episode in America when he was in Washington during the war. That would be unheard of these days.

"So Lord Moran was partly responsible for that cover up. He kept it secret but he wasn't political in that sense. He did what he thought a doctor looking after a patient would do, which is to follow the best instinct for his recovery."

Q: You have worked with Michael Gambon several times before?

"I love working with Michael. I've been his doctor three times, I think, from The Singing Detective in 1986 onwards when I played his psychotherapist. I adore Michael. Everybody does. I'd just filmed Dad's Army with him before going on to Churchill's Secret and was his constant companion in that. In some ways not unlike Moran and Churchill in the last years.

"Lindsay Duncan (Clementine Churchill) and I have passed on two or three jobs but never really had scenes together until this film. But I've known Lindsay forever. We're friends in the same circle and I love her work. So it's a joy to work with her."

Cast interviews

Bill Paterson interview continued:

Q: What was filming at Chartwell like?

"That's quite something, isn't it? I'd always wanted to go to Chartwell. I'd passed it many times in going to friends that live down that way. The house is interesting. It's not the most comfortable and everybody knows Clemmie wasn't crazy about it. But it's the views. I'm obsessed by views myself and can see what Churchill was on about.

"He would sit on a chair in the bay window of a bedroom on the top floor and look over that Weald of Kent. There's a scale of landscape you don't see very much in the south of England. It's literally a timeless shape. The distance is fantastic. That's what he fell in love with and that's what kept him going.

"Filming at Chartwell helps as an actor. I'm interested in history in places. I always have been. It is quite a privilege to stand there on that spot. We were going through a rather lovely spell of weather so you also had the beauty of those gardens. His first stroke happened on the 23rd of June in 1953 and, as it happened, we were filming on the lawn at Chartwell on the exact anniversary of that date.

"The interiors of Chartwell were created in the studio. It's not a house you'd walk in and say, 'Wow, this is so cosy.' But with those views you could see Churchill's attraction to the place."

Q: Do you need to know much about Churchill to appreciate this drama?

"No. You've got to be a certain age now even just to recall the living Churchill. But the predicament of controlling the media, the ability to hide something, is fantastically interesting these days when we're so aware of what has been hidden and what should come out. So that alone is interesting.

"Also to see this great figure in our history being manipulated a little bit. Plus dealing with his troublesome personality, which was not to give up, has a timeless appeal. The survival instinct is incredibly strong. That's why Moran called his book, *The Struggle For Survival*.

"Moran realised Churchill's need to hang on to power and influence was almost a medical need. It was essential for him. Otherwise he'd just roll over on his side and give up because he couldn't conceive of a life just painting as he did, or fishing or whatever, sitting around. He would have given up."

Q: Winston says in the drama, 'Growing old is not for cowards. It's such a strange thing to happen to a little boy.' What are your thoughts on growing old?

"I think to be a little bit older is a good time to be alive. We're in a lucky time for that. My generation has had an awful lot of advantages and we still continue to get them. We get the whole technical ability of the internet and the accessibility of information. But we didn't get lumbered with that overload in our earlier years. So we got, to some extent, the best of both worlds.

Cast interviews

Bill Paterson interview continued:

“I would have hated to miss out on the chance to zoom in on a map on my little laptop and see the world there and see what planes are flying overhead or to find information about anything at the drop of a hat. So provided your health is ticking over - and that’s helped by things that are done these days - I think we’re very lucky. I actually find life optimistic at the moment.

“Despite Churchill’s ‘Black Dog’ depressions, he was clearly somebody who had a total drive for life. I remember reading something years ago when I was young-ish that Churchill said he could not imagine any day in his life when he hadn’t done something interesting or worthwhile. It still haunts me that phrase. You get to the end of a day and think, ‘Did I actually just go to the shops today? Is that all I did?’ You have to think, ‘Did I really do something...I’ve learned something or seen something or spoken about something.’

“He had that thirst for life. Even, as we know, at considerable cost to those around him. He was selfish, without a doubt. He was self-centred. And he didn’t retire as an MP until he was 89. Whether that’s good or bad is a value judgement. I tend to think it was probably not a bad thing. But it’s not sustainable these days. We have a generation of young people who need to get openings in their lives. They can’t be held down or positions kept by older people just to keep them busy. There have to be openings and opportunities for the young.”

Q: How would Churchill have fared in today's TV news age?

“I’ve got some footage of him making a parliamentary broadcast. He was incredibly witty and a great one with one-liners. Sound bites would not have been difficult to a man who said, ‘Never in the field of human conflict etc,’ and, ‘Their finest hour...’ He was a soundbite guy. So I think he would have done fine. He had a twinkle in his eye.”

Q: Winston's personal dislikes were the sound of typewriters, ticking of clocks and, above all, whistling. Do you have a similar list?

“We wouldn’t have got on because I spend a lot of time whistling. I love whistling. I don’t do Twitter and I’m deeply troubled by how much information is now assumed to be passed on by Twitter.

“The idea of tweeting from the Front Bench as a government minister to give you some major information or some view on some major issue...it just seems to me so trivial. But it’s apparently not. So you could say tweeting is one. And I’ll leave it at that because there will be endless tweets about this. I’ll create a Twitterstorm by saying I don’t tweet!”

Q: What do you think the appeal of Churchill's Secret is?

“There’s nothing overly romantic about this story but it is quite touching. Even that sense of a parent, a father seeing the unhappiness of their children, which comes out in this. The daughters and Randolph, apart from Mary Soames, they were what we would call a dysfunctional family nowadays. Troubled and dysfunctional. And there was great sympathy for that. There was also a tabloid interest in it. So there’s an awful lot of contemporary connections beyond the historical in this film.

Cast interviews

Bill Paterson interview continued:

“I got to know Lady Soames - Mary as she was - because she was the chairman of the National Theatre in the early 1980s. We were doing Guys and Dolls at the National. She loved Guys and Dolls and would bring people to see it. And she always wanted to see her gangsters. She said, ‘I’m going to see my gangsters.’ So Jim Carter, Bob Hoskins and I were dragged up to these rather nice receptions with the various guests. I got to know her rather well. She was a delightful woman and a fantastic support to the National Theatre. She was really hands on. I think she carried all of the great things of the Churchill family.

“When I played Attlee, she came on to the set to see the recreated wartime bunkers and was completely taken aback that she knew me. She said, ‘Oh Bill, you’re Clem?’ Then she got into this hole and told us all of these things - that her father hated sleeping down there. He would always sleep up in the back rooms of the Foreign Office until they built other bunkers down in Downing Street.

“So incredible insights you only really get when you’re talking to the daughter of the man.”

Production interviews

David Aukin: Executive Producer

Q: How did Churchill's Secret reach the screen?

"The wonderful novel - The Churchill Secret: KBO - by Jonathan Smith was brought to us at Daybreak Pictures by a mutual friend who thought it might be of interest. And he was right. We did think, 'Does the world need another film about Churchill?' But then we read the novel and it was a really original take on it. What was also very interesting was he invented this character of Nurse Millie Appleyard who tells the story for us in a way and allows the audience into the story."

"Churchill would have had three nurses looking after him in this period because, initially, he needed around the clock care. That was one of Jonathan Smith's brilliant ways of telling the story. It also made sense for the drama to be able to identify that as one nurse."

"It's not just a story about politicians and toffs. It allows us to see the private and personal side. So then we sent the book to Stewart Harcourt and he wrote a brilliant script, bringing in Churchill's children and the impact this stroke and crisis had on the family. That brought another element into the story. ITV and Masterpiece in America were thrilled with it. So we had a film to make."

Q: It shows a different aspect to Winston Churchill?

"This is not a political film. It is a political crisis but one that is kept secret from the world. The outside world didn't discover anything about it until his doctor Lord Moran published his diaries after Churchill's death many years later."

"It really is a family drama. The struggle that is going on is between the politicians who want him to be well enough to resign. He's an old man and they want Anthony Eden to take over. And the family who want him to get better in order that they can have him back. His wife Clemmie wants to spend some years with him in retirement."

"It is, of course, Churchill's determination and indomitable spirit that gets him through the stroke and enables him to continue as prime minister against everyone's anticipation. But as a story of how people cope with an illness, of being a stroke victim and how so often it is their determination that gets them through, it could be about any family in that sense."

Q: How did you approach the casting?

"Obviously the first role we had to cast was Churchill and we only had one person in mind. That was Sir Michael Gambon. For a number of reasons. First of all, as a human being he's at that point in his life that Churchill was very close to. Michael is a bit younger but they're not that different in age. And physically he has that wonderful look."

"He is also one of the finest actors in the English speaking world today. And he had never played Churchill before. He had been asked and refused. We have a lot to thank his agent for. Absolutely being determined that Michael should do this. So we're very grateful to him as well."

Production interviews

David Aukin interview continued:

“Once Michael committed it becomes a rollercoaster because everybody enjoys working with someone like Michael, and the director Charles Sturridge knows everybody. So it became a very attractive job for actors. We were very lucky to get Lindsay Duncan, Matthew Macfadyen, Romola Garai, Bill Paterson, Rachael Stirling, Daisy Lewis and so on. The cast quality goes all the way through like a rock.”

Q: Was it difficult to get permission to film at Chartwell?

“They were very collaborative and co-operative and the public were amazing. Chartwell closes at 5pm, so we would work mainly from late morning right through until nine o’clock in the evening when it got dark. So from five until nine we had the grounds to ourselves and the rest of the time the public walked around the grounds and were fantastically amenable and understanding. That worked very well.

“Winston Churchill himself had a lot to do with the design of the gardens. He built the pond and the walls so the spirit of Churchill is very much in those gardens and you can’t replicate that elsewhere. The exterior of the house is also pretty unique so we have all that in the film.

“We didn’t film inside Chartwell because it’s not really practical for a film crew and all of the paraphernalia that we bring with us. It was better to do it in the studio. So our wonderful production designer Michael Howells re-created the interior of Chartwell at the West London Studios.”

Q: What were the other main challenges?

“The real challenge of the piece is to make this a story accessible to a really wide audience. It’s not just a political drama. It is about a family. A family dealing with their grief. So that’s part of it. The fact that we also see the story through Nurse Appleyard and her perceptions...there’s a wonderful moment when she’s first hired for the job and she says, ‘Do you think he’ll mind that I didn’t vote for him at the last election?’”

Q: Do you need to know about Churchill to enjoy this film?

“Absolutely not. You really don’t. That’s the great skill of the screenwriter Stewart and of Jonathan Smith’s novel, that you really don’t have to know much about him. Churchill is one of those iconic figures that has never really died. He’s still very much in the public consciousness. Even if you’re young, you can’t but help hear older people mentioning him. American politicians seem to mention him in every speech they make.

“He stands for something very important. Because he was a great man. There’s no question about that. This film shows that great man, and how his bulldog spirit got him through this stroke.”

Production interviews

David Aukin interview continued:

Q: This drama is an American co-production, where the admiration for Churchill is at least equal to that in the UK?

“I would think it’s probably higher in America. Churchill has always had his detractors in this country, especially on the left. And people remember with anger some of the things he did as a younger politician. But his great achievement is summed up by what somebody says in the film, ‘We in Britain today aren’t speaking German.’”

Q: Britain was left without a leader during the period of this story?

“It is extraordinary. It was a different world then and not one that we should be particularly proud of. But it’s absolutely true. It would not be possible today. It was fortunate it happened during the parliamentary summer recess, so they had every excuse for him not to be making public appearances. But today if the prime minister wasn’t seen on his holiday in Cornwall or wherever, people would be asking questions.”

Q: Would Churchill have survived in today’s TV age?

“The few examples we have of him doing a television interview were appalling. He really didn’t know how to use the medium. His public oratory was meant for a public space and he would never have adapted in the way that someone like Harold Macmillan did. On the other hand he was smart. Churchill was a very shrewd politician. He knew about branding himself. The idea of the man with the cigar and the sign. He knew these things were important. So would he have just adapted to what was needed for modern times? I don’t know. But he was very smart.”

Q: His wife Clemmie wanted Winston to concentrate on his own family, as opposed to his ‘family’ in Downing Street, Whitehall and Westminster?

“There’s no question that at the end of the Second World War when he lost the election, she thought that was the moment for him to step aside. It made a lot of sense in terms of his age and what he’d been through and the strain that all had taken. And she wanted some years alone with him. Just a family life. But he had one final mission he wanted to accomplish. World peace. That was the man she loved, the man who also had this mission, this determination. So she was torn. She wanted him but she knew also this is what kept him going and was why probably she had this deep love of him.”

Q: What is new about this story?

“It’s a wonderful drama. Viewers will never have seen a portrait of Churchill and his family like this. It’s not about great politics, war and peace and dealing with Hitler. This is about a family and a man struggling to overcome a serious illness and how he does it. It has reverberations that go way behind just the iconic Churchill. You can watch this without knowing anything about Churchill and still think it’s a great drama. Then maybe it will prompt some people to find out more.”

Synopsis

Set during the summer of 1953, Churchill's Secret tells a little-known part of Winston Churchill's great life story. Having suffered a life-threatening stroke, which his inner circle conspired to hide from the public, the film charts the course of Winston's remarkable recovery and investigates the strain that his great public service wrought upon his private life.

By now in his late 70s, Prime Minister for the second time and with his sights set on achieving peace with the Russians, the great war god Churchill falters at a public dinner. Confused and emotional, he appears to be entering his dotage – if not his demise.

Unsure if he will survive the weekend, his passionately loyal wife Clementine spirits him away to Chartwell, their private country residence. In the darkest hours, Clemmie calls their children to his bedside. However, the crisis reveals deep divisions within the family. Just as it does within the Conservative party, as those waiting in the wings begin to whisper. The press barons and politicians, unsure who could replace him as leader, agree to keep the situation a secret- an unprecedented event in modern British history.

But Winston won't give up. With the help of Millie, a young and surprisingly spirited nurse, and to the bittersweet relief of Clementine, he lives to fight another day on the front line of international politics. His last great battle in his sights: European re- unification and nuclear disarmament.

Told from the point of view of his family, his doctor, the men he championed and, most touchingly, his young nurse, Churchill's Secret follows Winston's extraordinary battle to recover, casting an honest light on the tensions within his brilliant and dysfunctional family.



Cast and Production Credits

Cast Credits

Winston Churchill	MICHAEL GAMBON
Clementine Churchill	LINDSAY DUNCAN
Millie Appleyard	ROMOLA GARAI
Randolph Churchill	MATTHEW MACFAYDEN
Dr Moran	BILL PATERSON
Sarah	RACHAEL STIRLING
Mary	DAISY LEWIS
Diana	TARA FITZGERALD
Lord Bracken	JAMES WILBY
Anthony Eden	ALEX JENNINGS
Jock Colville	PATRICK KENNEDY
Lord Camrose	JOHN STANDING
Christopher Soames	CHRISTIAN MCKAY
Rab Butler	CHRIS LARKIN
Lord Beaverbrook	MATTHEW MARSH

Cast and Production Credits

Production Credits

Executive Producers	HAL VOGEL DAVID AUKIN REBECCA EATON SALLY MYLES
Producer	TIM BRICKNELL
Director	CHARLES STURRIDGE
Line Producer	EMMA PIKE
Assistant Directors	MARK GODDARD LYNSEY MUIR VAN LUKE WATSON
Location Manager	HELENE LENSZNER
Production Designer	MICHAEL HOWELLS
Art Director	FABRICE SPELTA
Director of Photography	FABIAN WAGNER
Casting Director	CELESTIA FOX
Costume Designer	CHARLOTTE WALTER
Editor	ADAM GREEN
Make up and Hair Designer	WAKANA YOSHIHARA