

## CHURCHILL'S BIRTHPLACE

Winston Churchill was born and raised not far from where I live, at the suitably auspicious Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire (that's Churchill's abode, not mine).

It has long been a seat of the Duke of Marlborough and was built between 1705 and 1722 and designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987. To this day, parts of the palace remain home to the Dukes of Marlborough (the current Duke, John George Vanderbilt, is the eleventh). The park, gardens and a large section of the palace are open to the public, and there are varied commercial concerns today that help pay for the expensive maintenance of such an estate. A gift shop, miniature railway, cafeteria, fishing, game, farming and property rentals all add to the collective pot.

The palace itself is a splendid pile in the style of English Baroque, and while of course you can't smoke as you wander through the ornate interior, there are miles of beautiful grounds, gardens and walkways to explore this beautiful area of the English countryside. I can think of no better place to enjoy a contemplative Montecristo Edmundo.

## CHARTWELL IN KENT

Churchill's home in adult life was at his beloved Chartwell in Kent. Here, he could be found writing, sketching, plotting, reading and enjoying the views across the Weald of Kent beyond the gardens.

Shortly after the Second World War, it became obvious to the Churchills that they could no longer afford the upkeep of Chart-



On your way to The Wellesley's humidor, you'll pass under the watchful eye of the classic Churchill portrait.

BOTTOM: COURTESY JAMES J. FOX/TOP: COURTESY THE WELLESLEY

well, but a grateful nation came to the rescue and it was agreed that the Churchills could live in peace at the property for a nominal rent for the rest of their lives, after which it would revert to the National Trust, a public body which maintains and looks after many historical estates and properties of note in the United Kingdom.

As it happened, Clementine Churchill, Winston's wife, voluntarily handed the property over a year after her husband's death in 1966. Today, it remains much as it was during Winston's time there, with his books, paintings, personal belongings and more to be found inside. The gardens are a particularly poignant place to reflect on the life of this remarkable man—and you may find this a pertinent moment to clip and light a Julieta-sized cigar, or a Churchill as we now know it—and go for a stroll in the Garden of England. It's a patch of earth Churchill loved perhaps beyond all others and it's not hard to imagine that during those darkest hours in the bunkers of Government, it was Chartwell he was really fighting for.

## ESPECIALLY FOR CIGAR FANS

While he was busy beating back Germans and generally holding the entire planet in thrall, Winston Churchill was of course feted with gifts of cigars from around the world. His cigar consumption, and the devotion that fed it, are well documented in the excellent book, *Churchill's Cigar*, by Stephen McGinty (Pan Macmillan, 2007).

So well furnished with cigars was he that he had little cause to buy them in later life. But in his formative years Churchill found solace in some of London's finest cigar emporia. Famously, he bought cigars from Fox of St James's. As of this writing the shop's

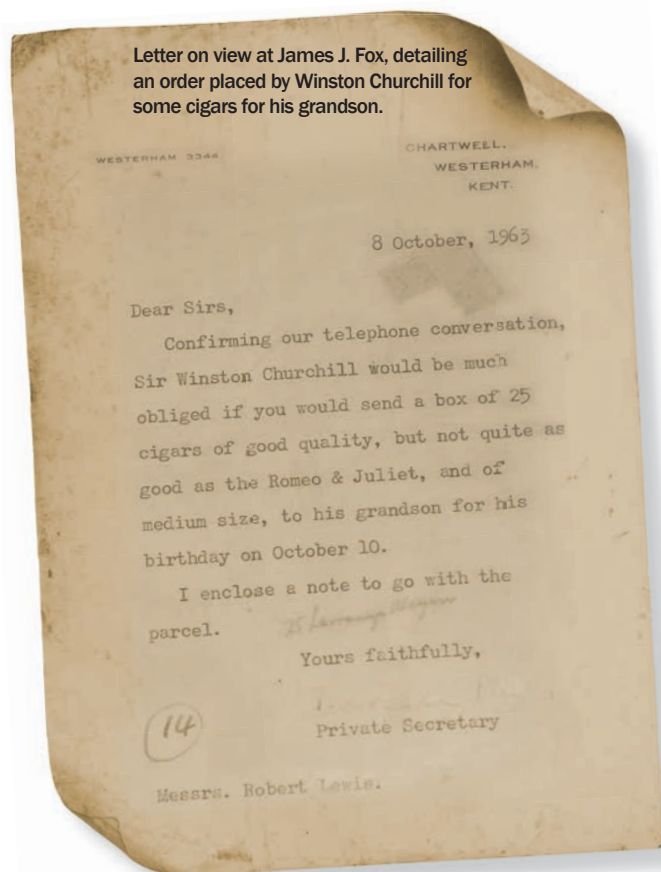
museum is undergoing refurbishment and due to reopen in early 2015, but in the shop you can view Churchill artifacts, including the ledger that faithfully records his cigar orders. You can even take the weight off in the very chair in which Winston used to repose. Best of all, you can select a fine Cuban cigar (I respectfully suggest a Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 2) and slink upstairs to the sampling room to enjoy it in peace while overlooking the hustle and bustle of one of Mayfair's most celebrated streets.

If you want to enjoy a cigar under Churchill's watchful eye, and we're talking the very best of the best here, then take a 15-minute stroll past Green Park and Hyde Park Corner and cross into Knightsbridge. Here is one of London's finest boutique hotels, and because the owner, Khalid Affara, is a cigar enthusiast extraordinaire, you'll find yourself very well catered to, indeed.

The Wellesley boasts just 36 luxury suites and bedrooms in stylish art décor. Everything about this hotel is exquisite, and most things seem to weave their way ethereally around the theme of fine cigars. Churchill would have loved it.

Even the chairs on the two covered and heated cigar terraces have been designed so that one's arm is at the right height for both the table and custom-designed copper ashtrays. You can dine from the a la carte menu right here at your table if you desire.

There is a walk-in humidor that will take your breath away. It's fully climate controlled by remote (data is fed through to Cigar Sommelier Giuseppe Ruo's mobile phone, wherever he may be in the world) and features some jaw-dropping cigars, many of which are available by the stick. But don't come here without a fully laden wallet.



Letter on view at James J. Fox, detailing an order placed by Winston Churchill for some cigars for his grandson.