

CHURCHILL

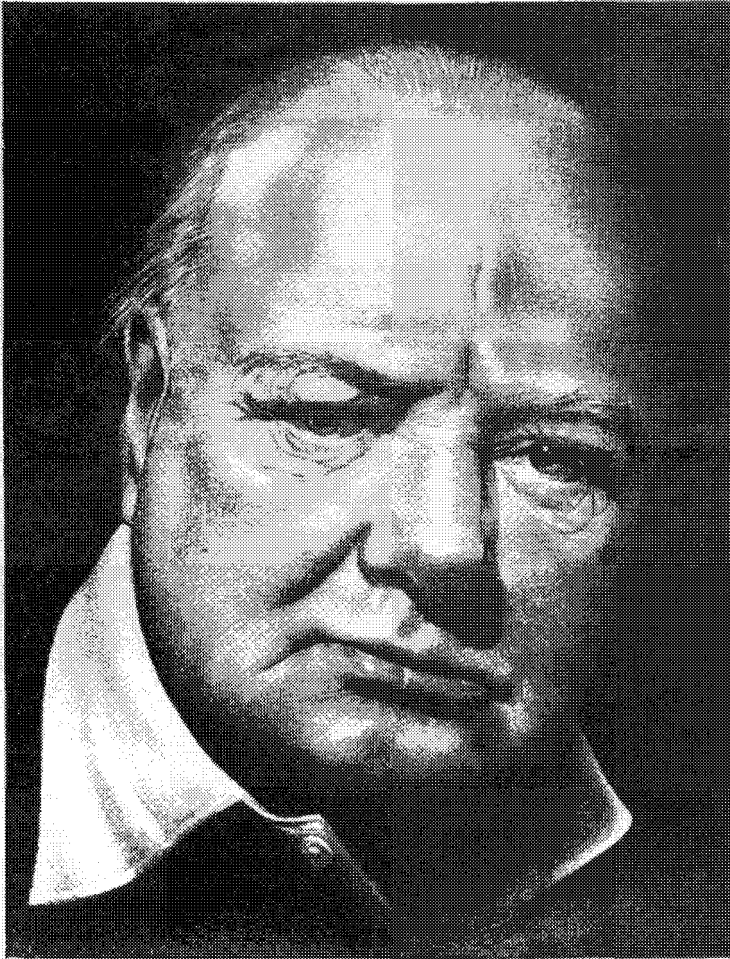
The Member for Woodford



DAVID A. THOMAS

CHURCHILL
The Member for Woodford

GENERAL ELECTION 1959
WOODFORD PARLIAMENTARY DIVISION
(Comprising the Borough of Wanstead & Woodford)



The Rt. Hon.
SIR WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, K.G., O.M., C.H.
ELECTION ADDRESS
Polling Day - Thursday, 8th. OCT. 1959

Frontispiece Sir Winston's last election address, 1959

CHURCHILL

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DAVID A. THOMAS

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Preface and Acknowledgements

THIS VOLUME attempts to tell the story of Sir Winston Churchill's association with his Essex constituencies covering a period of very nearly forty years from 1924 until 1964. His first constituency – the Epping Division – stretched from Aldersbrook to Harlow, embracing Loughton and Woodford and lasting from 1924 to 1945. Thereafter boundary changes effectively reduced the constituency to Wanstead and Woodford; thus from 1945 until his retirement in 1964 he was the Member for Woodford.

These forty-odd years see Churchill intimately concerned with the Conservative Associations and constituents of South West Essex while in and out of office, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, as an outcast in the political wilderness for ten years – including the period of Munich – when he was roughly treated and almost ejected while he fought for his political life among his own Woodford colleagues. These years also saw him as Prime Minister during a period of global war and imminent invasion, as a relatively ineffective leader of the opposition, as a back-bencher and as Father of the House.

The story is told principally through his own words in speeches which, though not recorded in bound volumes, were nevertheless carefully reported by the range of local newspapers covering the constituencies.

I am indebted to the Guardian Gazette and Independent Group of newspapers which have provided a faithful record of Sir Winston's constituency life. Specific attributions are made throughout the book but where no such reference is made, the attribution is to the *Express & Independent* newspaper of that time. A substantial amount

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of material is available in the bound volumes of these newspapers lodged in the archives of the Epping Forest District Museum at Waltham Abbey and in the Local History section of the Redbridge Central Library.

John Yates, lately Editorial Director of the newspaper group, permitted the generous use of these reports and I am grateful for the group's kind support.

I am most grateful to the archivists, custodians of archives and librarians who have given generously of their time and knowledge: Ian Dowling at the Redbridge Central Library was especially patient and helpful, as were his staff, Linda Whitehead, Katherine Easton and Catherine Harper. At Waltham Abbey I was helped by Susan Dalloe and Anne Hunt.

Thanks are due to the staff of the House of Commons Library, the staff of the Cambridge University Library (Stanley Baldwin Papers), to Dr B. S. Benediktz of the University of Birmingham Library (Neville Chamberlain Papers). The Donald Forbes Papers were of considerable interest, and I am grateful for having had free access to them. I am happy to acknowledge the generosity of Donald Forbes, CBE JP FCA, and of Valda Forbes for their unfailing kindness and willingness to help, without which this account would have been much more difficult to compile.

Sir James Hawkey's Papers, according to his son, Sir Roger, were passed to Randolph Churchill ('I have forwarded to Randolph Churchill quite a considerable quantity of letters that passed between Sir Winston and my father': letter to Donald Forbes, 23 November 1966: and by implication were never returned). Forbes confirms, too, that masses of Association archives were scrapped in 1946 when the Broomhill Road headquarters was requisitioned for housing. However, not all were destroyed; some were salvaged and found their way to the Essex Record Office. Members of staff at the Essex Record Office at Chelmsford earn my gratitude for their customary help in producing in particular the Woodford Conservative Association scrapbooks and other archival material, post-Second World War, including the Colvin Collection.

In 1974 the Association staged a Centenary Celebration Exhibition at the Sir James Hawkey Hall for which I was given full responsibility. This enabled me to locate and catalogue a vast collection of

Preface and Acknowledgements

Churchilliana in the Woodford/Epping district, and to interview and correspond with numerous constituents with Churchill recollections and memories. I have drawn upon these for this book. My appreciation for their help is acknowledged.

I wish to express my gratitude to John Harvey, CBE, who kindly read the book in typescript, correcting many errors and making helpful suggestions: he generously put at my disposal his collection of Churchilliana, including letters which had escaped Martin Gilbert's trawl. I am most grateful, too, to Harry Packford who kindly loaned the prized 1924 general election address; and to the following: the late Major J. C. Robinson for his recollections of Major Ralph Bury and other pre-Second World War personalities; Robert (Bob) Mitchell, OBE MA; Hazel Kemp for recollections of her mother, Kathleen. Others who recorded their recollections but have since died deserve to have their names listed because they, too, contributed: Doris Moss, OBE MA, Kathleen Kemp, Ralph Prout, MBE, A. H. (Jack) Frost, F. C. Mountier, MBE, T. C. (Tommy) Welsh, A. E. (Tim) Healey, Colonel Sir Stuart Mallinson, CBE DSO MC DL JP, and Colonel William Hubert (Hugh) Barlow-Wheeler, DSO OBE.

I am also indebted to Valerie Thomas, LRPS, for the professionalism of her photographic work.

In addition to the generous use I have made of the local newspapers of the Guardian Gazette and Independent Group, for which I am greatly indebted, I have quoted specifically from the following, many of which no longer exist: *The Bancroftian*, *Buckhurst Hill Express & Independent*, *Chigwell Times*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily News*, *Daily News (New York)*, *Encounter Magazine*, *Globe and Mail (Canada)*, *Stratford Express*, *The Times*, *Times & West Essex Star*, *Waltham Abbey Weekly Telegraph*, *Wanstead Express & Independent*, *West Essex Gazette*, *Woodford & Chigwell Express & Independent*, *Woodford Guardian*, *Woodford Times*.

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'This constituency is not like all others. We are not necessarily occupied with convincing electors that they should vote for our candidate. We in Woodford are trustees on behalf of the nation with the responsibility of ensuring that so long as Sir Winston is able and willing we must send him back to the House of Commons.'

Alderman Donald L. Forbes,
Chairman of the Woodford Division
Conservative Association, 1 October
1959, as quoted in the *News Chronicle*.

'If anyone should chronicle the history of Woodford it must be among its proudest boasts that it was closely linked with so great a man.'

John E. Harvey, Chairman of the
Woodford Division, Conservative
Association, 23 November 1954.

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PART ONE
EPPING

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1 • *Constitutionalist Candidate for Epping*

The Epping contest will be the thirteenth election battle in which Mr Churchill has engaged in his varied political career. He has suffered a defeat five times. His first attempt at Oldham in 1899 was a failure, but he entered parliament in the following year as a Conservative member for the same constituency. Six years later, having 'crossed the floor' of the Commons he was returned as a Liberal at North-West Manchester.

West Essex Gazette, September 1924

IN THE early 1920s Sir Harry Goschen was a leading businessman, the chairman of the West Essex Unionist Association, a Deputy Lieutenant of the County of Essex, chairman of the National Provincial Bank; a much respected man of substance. In 1924 he wrote to the Unionist Executive Council exhorting its members to adopt Winston Churchill as the prospective parliamentary candidate for the Epping Division: 'I think that the Council will be rendering a great service to the country and to the Party if they see fit to select him . . .'

Just how great a service the Council would render – and, more to the point, how great a service Churchill would render the constituency, the country and the free world – neither Sir Harry Goschen nor anyone else could ever have guessed at.

The events culminating in the adoption of Winston Churchill as the parliamentary candidate for the Epping Division began two years earlier in 1922, the year, incidentally, when the Churchills' youngest daughter Mary was born. But less celebratory events dominated that year for Churchill.

Churchill, the Member for Woodford

When Lloyd George's Coalition government fell from power and a general election was called in the autumn of 1922, Winston Churchill was already a politician of commanding stature. He had been a Liberal member of Parliament for more than 20 years: he had held no fewer than five Cabinet posts as well as two non-Cabinet. The thrust and parry of the hustings and the taunts and heat of parliamentary debate and opposition had fashioned a finely tempered parliamentarian. He had also been assailed by a different sort of fire in a number of military campaigns and had borne the agony and ignominy of the Dardenelles. At the time of the 1922 general election he was about to celebrate his forty-eighth birthday.

When the Conservative leader Bonar Law had appealed for 'tranquillity and freedom from adventures and commitments both at home and abroad' there was to be no such luxury for Churchill. His return to Westminster as the member for Dundee was not the foregone conclusion it seemed at first glance. He was no longer the popular hero who had escaped captivity from the Boers. Dennis Bardens observed:¹

Now he was the political turncoat, a man who liked 'a whiff of grape-shot', someone who was against the 'workers'' revolution in Russia and ill-disposed to trade unions at home, a military adventurer ready yet again to gamble with men's lives [in the Balkans].

It was to be a hard-fought campaign and Churchill would need all his health and strength to battle through successfully. But bad luck was to handicap him. Three days before the campaign started Churchill was taken gravely ill, struck down with appendicitis: he was rushed to hospital to be operated on just in time. In those days it was a serious operation. The wound, he records with journalistic precision, was seven inches long. He was prevented, almost entirely, from taking part in the contest for the seat of Dundee.²

Churchill tells us that 'the tide flowed fierce and strong' against him. Much of the ferocity was directed at Clementine Churchill who deputised for her husband at the hustings although she was still feeding the baby Mary. She addressed about six meetings and displayed great courage in the face of the barrage of shouting and general uproar which accompanied her meetings. She seemed

undaunted by the experience and fought bravely. It was a sombre report she sent to the convalescent Winston.

Churchill travelled the long distance north to the constituency in time to address two meetings immediately before the polls closed. In contrast to the riotous meetings addressed by Clementine, the 4,000 electors of Dundee who turned out to hear him at the Caird Hall listened with courtesy to his reasoned arguments and forthright views. He delivered his speech propped up, half-lying on a sort of sedan chair. Less tranquil was the meeting on the eve of poll in the Drill Hall the following evening. Five to six thousand people attended, in stark contrast with the few score who turn out nowadays to listen to a Cabinet minister's speech during a general election. In Dundee this vast crowd concealed a hard core of a few hundred Socialist and Communist trouble-makers.

Pandemonium soon erupted. The uproar was whipped into a frenzy with mindlessly repeated taunts of 'What about the Dardenelles?', 'The hero of Sydney Street!', 'Black and Tans!' For once in his life Churchill conceded. 'I give way,' he uttered resignedly and was escorted from the hall through a back door by the police. When the results of the election were declared Churchill's massive majority had been swept away by the Labour onslaught. He had been roundly defeated. The Independent/Prohibitionist Edwin (Neddy) Scrymgeour, with a rare tenacity, had won the day. This reporter in the D. C. Thomson organisation in Dundee had opposed Churchill on no fewer than five occasions; the first time he had recorded a mere 655 votes from over 16,000 cast; this time he had increased his poll to over 32,000 votes. It was an impressive achievement.

The result was a personal rebuff for Churchill. The national result, with five and a half million votes going to the Conservatives, gave that party a significant parliamentary majority. The Liberal vote was a decisive rejection of Lloyd George and his party. And as a portent of the future, the Labour Party registered more than four million votes. Bonar Law thus formed the first Conservative government for twenty years.

Churchill was quick to react to his new-found freedom. No longer shackled by political and ministerial duties, he took the family to a villa near Cannes where he was able to complete his

TABLE 1
PRIME MINISTERS DURING CHURCHILL'S
PARLIAMENTARY LIFE

1 July 1895	Marquis of Salisbury	Conservative
12 July 1902	Arthur J. Balfour	Conservative
5 July 1905	Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman	Liberal
8 April 1908	Herbert H. Asquith	Liberal
26 May 1915	Herbert H. Asquith	Coalition
7 December 1916	David Lloyd George	Coalition
23 October 1922	Andrew Bonar Law	Conservative
22 May 1923	Stanley Baldwin	Conservative
22 January 1924	James Ramsay MacDonald	Labour
4 November 1924	Stanley Baldwin	Conservative
8 June 1929	James Ramsay MacDonald	Labour
25 August 1931	James Ramsay MacDonald	Coalition
7 June 1935	Stanley Baldwin	Coalition
23 May 1937	Neville Chamberlain	Coalition
11 May 1940	Winston Spencer Churchill	Coalition
23 May 1945	Winston Spencer Churchill	Conservative
26 July 1945	Clement R. Attlee	Labour
26 October 1951	Sir Winston Churchill	Conservative
6 April 1955	Sir Anthony Eden	Conservative
13 January 1957	Harold Macmillan	Conservative
19 October 1963	Sir Alec Douglas-Home	Conservative
16 October 1964	J. H. (Harold) Wilson	Labour

convalescence. He set up his easel and painted in the winter sunshine. Had he wished, a safe seat might have been found for him but he was worn out with years of hard work and he welcomed the enforced rest. Apart from painting he pressed on with preparing volumes of *The World Crisis* – his study of the Great War – for publication.

The enforced rest gave him time to consider his future. Mary Soames writes that he found himself 'a wanderer in a sort of No-Man's land between die-hard Conservatism and an enfeebled and disunited Liberal Party whose faith and purpose seemed to have vanished'.³

The powerful draw of Westminster was never far from Churchill's heart: someone used the expression 'He glowered on the scene with undisguised envy.' He responded to the call of friends to return to the cauldron of Parliament. The House of Commons was his home. He would return.

With the retirement and subsequent death of Bonar Law, his successor Stanley Baldwin called a general election in May 1923. To his delight, Churchill was selected as a candidate for the constituency of West Leicester. He had no qualms in forsaking Dundee, and he never forgave the constituency for rejecting him. Many years later, in 1945, when offered the honour of the freedom of the town, one of his secretaries answered on his behalf courteously declining the honour . . . Vengeance must have been sweet.

At West Leicester he stood for the last time as a Liberal Free Trader. But if he thought this constituency would be more accommodating than Dundee, he miscalculated sadly. It was another vigorous campaign; rowdyism prevailed at the larger meetings, orchestrated by Socialists and Communists. Churchill was defeated again. His Labour Party opponent Pethick-Lawrence won the day, much to Churchill's chagrin. Nationally the Conservatives secured 258 seats, the Liberals 159 and – surprisingly – Labour won 191 seats. The Liberals compromised and sided with the Labour Party. So disenchanted did Churchill become at this move that he broke finally with the Liberals. He declared himself a Constitutionalist – a further step along the road to re-embracing Conservatism.

When a by-election occurred in the Abbey Division of Westminster Churchill was quick to throw his hat in the ring offering himself as

TABLE 2
CHURCHILL'S PARLIAMENTARY POSTS

1906	(aged 32)	Under Secretary of State for the Colonies
1908	(34)	President of the Board of Trade
1910	(36)	Home Secretary
1911–15	(37–41)	First Lord of the Admiralty
1915	(41)	Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
1917–18	(43–44)	Minister of Munitions
1918–21	(44–47)	Secretary of State for War
1919–21	(45–47)	and for Air
1921–22	(47–48)	Secretary of State for the Colonies
1924–29	(50–55)	Chancellor of the Exchequer
1939–40	(65–66)	First Lord of the Admiralty
1940–45	(66–71)	Prime Minister and Minister of Defence
1951–55	(77–81)	Prime Minister

Ages are approximate. All his appointments after 1910 were of Cabinet rank.

'a Liberal who wished to join with Conservatives in arresting the march of Socialism'.

The *Daily News* was less kind and tolerant. It grumbled: 'Mr Churchill appears to be trying hard to make the best of every possible world. He is a Liberal, a Constitutionalist, an anti-Socialist and a pro-Conservative.'

There was some justification for this description. Churchill himself claimed at the time: 'I stand for a united Conservative Party with a Liberal Wing, both standing on a broad and progressive platform.'

Whatever his stance, it aroused interest and antagonism. He drew in the crowds. The scenes were boisterous and at one meeting he was howled down and unable to speak. Later he declared he found this election 'incomparably the most exciting, stirring, sensational' that he ever fought. He had no organisation, nor any idea how to set one up. The three major political parties fielded official candidates, backed by enormous resources. But Churchill was undaunted; he sensed the 'exhilarating feeling of being supported by a real and spontaneous movement of public opinion'. Men of standing and importance joined him. The London press became united in its almost unanimous support for him. Thirty Conservative MPs appeared on his platform.

Dukes, jockeys, prize-fighters, courtiers, actors and businessmen all developed a keen partisanship . . . it was most cheering and refreshing to see so many young and beautiful women of every rank in life ardently working in a purely disinterested cause not unconnected with myself.⁴

At the count the tension was tangible. It was the most exciting Churchill had ever watched. And at the end of the day he had failed by 43 votes: 43 out of a total of nearly 30,000 polled. Churchill was distraught. For the third time he had been rejected by the electorate in three disparate constituencies. There was small comfort to be drawn from such rejection: but some comfort, however slim, was just detectable: the political balance was slowly tilting his way. The Westminster result had been a near miss and it enabled him to press his claims with the Conservative Party – of which he was still not a member.

He enlisted the support of Sir Samuel Hoare and of the chairman

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of the Conservative Party, Colonel Stanley Jackson. Finally, approval came from the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, for Churchill to stand at the next general election as an Independent Constitutionalist with full Conservative support. Baldwin further agreed that a safe Conservative seat should be found in or near London, leaving Churchill free to play a leading part in a Conservative campaign outside his own constituency. Ideally, it was thought that the chosen constituency should have no Liberal candidate, allowing a straight fight between Churchill and a Socialist candidate.

Although Churchill was not prepared to rejoin the Conservative Party he announced his readiness to give general support to its declared policies; he would also oppose MacDonal's Anglo-Soviet Treaty, and continue the denunciation of Socialism. Baldwin was able to write to a Cabinet colleague in July 1924: 'Winston, in private, accepts our policy . . . it is now up to him to address a meeting and say so.'

In August, before Churchill could declare himself in public, Colonel Jackson came up with two constituencies which seemed to meet most of the conditions: Richmond and Epping.

On 5 August Sir Harry Goschen, chairman of the West Essex Unionist Association, wrote to the controversial Churchill, with Colonel Jackson's approval, advising that the member for the Epping Division, Sir C. E. Leonard Lyle (of the Tate and Lyle organisation), did not intend to stand again for Parliament, and stated his willingness to recommend Churchill's name to his Executive Council as a worthy candidate. Goschen concluded:

Should this idea appeal to you I presume I might tell them that you would stand as a supporter of the Conservative Party, their Leaders & Policy, & especially as regards Ireland the policy they have outlined in a publication called 'Looking Ahead'.

Churchill was jubilant to receive this invitation which he considered 'such a fine offer' and to which he replied on 11 August. He emphasised his intention to do all in his power to 'secure a victory for the Conservative and anti-Socialist forces at the General Election'. And he gave his full concurrence to the programme of the Conservative leaders. He pledged his support for the Conservatives' Ulster programme, though he made it clear he thought it a subject needing

care and prudence and he would rather prevent it becoming an election issue. The principal issue was not in doubt: 'a decisive victory should be won over the Socialists at the next appeal'.

Churchill seems to have been genuinely touched by Goschen's 'most kind and complimentary proposal'. He sent the chairman's letter to Colonel Jackson on 14 August seeking guidance and an early decision. And – as if to stress the urgency of the matter, for it was generally believed that a general election might be called for October or November – on the following day, the 25th, the deputy chairman of the Epping Conservatives, A. J. (James) Hawkey, phoned the Conservative Central Office urging a prompt decision.

Alfred James Hawkey was a man of local influence. He was the chairman of the Woodford Urban District Council from 1916 until 1934, and for another three years chairman of the combined Wanstead and Woodford District Council. Politically he was Sir Harry Goschen's deputy. The latter was heavily committed to the city and he was content to leave the day-to-day running of the West Essex Unionist Association to his younger and more energetic deputy. Nevertheless, it was a curiously self-deprecating situation.

Hawkey was to play a big part in Churchill's constituency work. He was a successful businessman in the baking trade, chairman of the Clark's Bread Company and vice-chairman of the famous Aerated Bread Company, known as the ABC. Aged 47 in 1924, he received a knighthood two years later. He was created a baronet in 1945. Churchill came to think highly of James Hawkey, whom he described in his war memoirs as 'my ever faithful and tireless champion'.

Another influential Woodford resident was Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, one of Churchill's great wartime colleagues and friend. Churchill wrote at this time that Sir Roger had told him 'there is a very favourable disposition among the Conservative notables. It looks one of the safest seats in the country.' Keyes was probably right about Epping being one of the safest seats, although this is arguable;⁵ and anyway Churchill would not need to be told so. Nor was Keyes so well informed on the matter of Woodford's notables being ready to welcome Churchill, as we shall see.

On 19 August Colonel Jackson intervened from Conservative Central Office. He wrote a letter to Churchill in which he revealed

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he thought that Churchill might not accept Goschen's offer, that he looked upon the seat as a good one – but possibly a little too far from London. However, his other choice – Richmond – was now less attractive because of the recalcitrance of the sitting member. Jackson made two other points: he reminded Churchill: 'You do not say in your letter if the Epping seat appeals to you.' It was implicit, but not actually stated. Further, Jackson wrote, he had been in touch with the Conservative principal agent, Herbert E. Blain, who was trying to fix matters for Churchill.

Nine days later Churchill wrote reassuringly to Sir Harry Goschen from Chartwell:

My dear Goschen,

You may be quite sure that I would not have kept you so long without an answer if I was not considering most seriously the exceedingly important and complimentary proposal which you have made to me . . .

He went on to blame the absence of people on holiday and undertook to give a definite answer not later than 10 or 12 September. By 10 September a decision had still not been made. Colonel Jackson was not too unhappy, and viewed Epping as better than Richmond: Epping, he thought:

. . . not exactly the kind of seat that I would have wished to have seen you offered . . . [nevertheless] I should be very pleased if you accepted this invitation and can assure you of every possible assistance from this office [the Conservative Central Office].

On the strength of this powerful support Churchill wrote to Sir Harry on 11 September 1924 accepting the invitation to put his name forward as a candidate for the Epping seat. There was a sense of relief all round. Churchill was delighted, even though he now faced another appeal to the electorate, his fourth in two years. Sir Harry Goschen was pleased at the outcome and set in motion all the procedural requirements. He wrote to the new candidate on 18 September:⁶

Dear Mr Churchill,

A meeting of this Association was held today for the purpose of considering the question of providing a candidate for this constituency



1 Sir Harry Goschen, Chairman of the West Essex Unionist Association, invited Churchill to stand for the Epping constituency in 1924