

Churchill's Wizards - The British Genius for Deception 1914-1945 by Nicholas Rankin.
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There is still nothing that British people of an historical bent and a certain age enjoy more than tales of plucky Brits putting one over on the beastly Boche and the horrible Hun, and anyone to whom that description applies will love Churchill's Wizards, an account of the extraordinary steps taken by the British army, air force and navy, and the offices of the State, to bamboozle the Germans during the First and Second World Wars.

The individuals concerned in these endeavours were a curious mixture of military and non-military types, and some of their ideas and the projects to which they lead were weird in the extreme: at the same time others were highly affected and saved lives. Across the pages of Churchill's Wizards stride the great portrait artist Solomon J. Solomon, who fought the cause of camouflage on land and Norman Wilkinson, a marine artist, who fought the cause as it applied to shipping; the black propagandists Sefton Delmer and Dudley Clarke; Ewen Montagu of Naval Intelligence, the courageous double agent Juan Pujol Garcia, aka Garbo, and, bestriding them all, Churchill himself.

While reading Nicholas Rankin's terrific story of British pluck, inventiveness and eccentricity, it is easy to forget that work on camouflage, creating dummy materiel to fool the enemy, building forward observation posts in the trenches in the form of blasted trees and the like had a deadly serious purpose - saving British lives and achieving victory.

Rankin accords much credit for these endeavours to Winston Churchill who championed many of the inventors and was often far more open-minded to the value and potential of extra-military activity than his own military were. The best known stories of deception during the wars are here, not least that of the Man who never Was, a terrific story powerfully retold.

Churchill's Wizards has much to offer armchair historians of the world wars, as well as providing a fascinating insight into some of the reasons that the British, together with their allies, emerged victorious in both conflicts.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh