

Churchill, Henry V and Napoleon? Overrated, says BBC History magazine

Also among the most overrated people in history, according to the magazine, are Charles Darwin, Spartacus and Malcolm X

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Churchill was chosen by the historian and former BBC journalist Christopher Lee because of failings in his early career. Photograph: PA

They may be among the most famous figures from [history](#), but the likes of [Winston Churchill](#), Henry V and Napoleon Bonaparte don't hack it so far as some British historians are concerned. Poor old [Charles Darwin](#) doesn't figure any better either.

All are included in a list of the most overrated people in history chosen by the populist [BBC History magazine](#) to stir debate and publicity in its latest issue. Others chosen include Spartacus, Mary Queen of Scots, John Locke, William Wilberforce, Lord Baden-Powell and [Malcolm X](#) – quite enough for an eclectic fantasy dinner party guest list, or at least a row at one.

Churchill was chosen by the historian and former BBC journalist Christopher Lee, not on the basis of a wartime record which has already seen him chosen as Britain's most celebrated hero, but because of his ministerial and political failings much earlier in his career.

Quite a few of his Tory colleagues might have concurred with Lee's view of Churchill's hopeless judgment and over-zealous use of the military, at least right up until the summer of 1940. "If it had not been for the fact that he led Britain to victory in the second world war we would have scant memory of [him]," Lee reckons.

Tracy Borman, one of Queen Elizabeth I's many biographers, perhaps unsurprisingly opted for Mary Queen of Scots as "a pampered princess ... with no idea of what was needed to rule effectively", while Charles Darwin gets it in the neck from science historian Patricia Fara for being a sloppy collector who side-stepped suggesting how life

might have been created in the first place.

Amid the sound of academic axes being scraped, British military historian Saul David chooses Napoleon Bonaparte, the medievalist Nigel Saul downplays Edward IV, and the imperial historian Denis Judd gives Baden-Powell a kicking. Oscar Wilde is the choice of the high Tory historian and journalist Andrew Roberts and Malcolm X gets the thumbs-down from the Anglo-American historian Amanda Foreman.

Robert Attar, the magazine's deputy editor, said: "No figure from history should be immune from criticism, so it's refreshing that our panel has been prepared to take aim at some of the most cherished people of the past. We ... hope they will stir up a lively debate."

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