

The traitors of St John's Wood

Historian **Bridget Clarke** asks: *Is there any other square mile of England that has so many connections with traitors who spied for Russia and their helpers?*

The Cambridge spies

In 1934 Edith Tudor-Hart (1908–1973), an Austrian Communist and photographer, was living at 12 Grove End Gardens. Anthony Blunt (probably recruited by Guy Burgess in 1936 after meeting while undergraduates at Cambridge earlier) described her as 'the grandmother of us all'. Her Communist contact in Vienna had been Litzi Friedman, who married Kim Philby there in February 1934 and was able to move to London with him to live at his family home at 18 Acol Road in April that year.

Another Soviet agent friend was Arnold Deutsch, nephew of Oscar Deutsch (millionaire founder of the Odeon chain of cinemas, including Swiss Cottage). Arnold and his wife, a trained radio operator, lived in Hampstead, and in May 1934 he made contact with Litzi and Edith discussing the recruitment of capable idealistic students who could penetrate British intelligence.

One of the first was 22-year-old Philby, who had become a Communist while at Cambridge. KGB files later showed how in June 1934 Edith and Philby went to Regent's Park where Deutsch waited to ask Philby if he was willing to spy for the Soviet Union.

In August 1934 Philby invited 21-year-old Donald Maclean, a Communist fellow graduate, to supper at Acol Road to discuss securing sensitive government posts from which they could pass valuable intelligence to the Soviet Union. They were later joined by Guy Burgess, who lived for a while in Wellington Place before working in Washington.

In 1949 Burgess was posted to Washington as MI6 liaison officer with the CIA. He got advance warning in 1951 of the net closing round Maclean, who decided to defect and Burgess decided to go with him.

Blunt was unveiled as another traitor in 1964, by which time he was Keeper of the Queen's Pictures.

George Blake (1922–2020)

Born in Holland, he fought in the Resistance until 1943, when his family escaped to England. Here he joined



A modern day look at some of the clandestine spots where spies may have met in the past. Top left and above photos by Vittoria Di Meo /Top right photo by Eva Marriott-Fabre

the Royal Navy and then MI6, learning Russian. Trapped in Seoul and a prisoner of the North Koreans for three years, he changed allegiance and later betrayed 600 agents when working in Berlin; he became the first MI6 agent to be convicted of betraying his country.

He received a 42-year sentence in 1961, but after five years he was helped to escape by three former fellow prisoners in contact with various Communist sympathisers, some of whom lived in St John's Wood. They included the Rev. John Papworth, an anti-nuclear Left-wing priest of St Mark's, Hamilton Terrace (d. 2020), who offered to hide Blake in his house while an escape from England was organised.

Papworth contacted the actor Tony

Richardson, who lodged in Abbey Gardens with Reggie Smith, a British Council lecturer, and his wife Olivia Manning, author of *The Fortunes of War*, and persuaded Richardson to finance Blake's escape via camper van to East Berlin.

Philby, Maclean and Burgess and Blake died in Russia. Philby and Blake remain there in a Moscow cemetery; Maclean's ashes were returned to be buried unmarked in Buckinghamshire. In the churchyard of St John the Evangelist in West Meon in Hampshire is a final link between the spies and St John's Wood: Burgess' ashes lie hidden by brambles, but south of the church stands the imposing tomb of Thomas Lord, founder of Lord's Cricket Ground.