

# THE CAMBRIDGE FIVE

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## SPIES WITH NO REGRETS

A notorious womanizer.

A flamboyant homosexual.

A renown art historian.

Plus two more characters.

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WHEN SOVIET INTELLIGENCE OFFICER ARNOLD DEUTSCH MET WITH CAMBRIDGE University graduate Harold “Kim” Philby in 1934, he came right to the point: “We need people who could penetrate into the bourgeois institutions. Penetrate them for us!” Philby eagerly agreed, beginning a lifelong affiliation with Moscow.

The freshly-minted spy also identified other potential recruits, and in short order, Deutsch managed to sign up four more Cambridge men: Donald Maclean, Guy Burgess, Anthony Blunt and John Cairncross. All were dedicated communists and demanded no financial compensation for their espionage services. In time, the Soviet strategy of recruiting young, disaffected members of the British elite would yield rich rewards.

The Cambridge Five quickly obtained key positions in the British government and intelligence apparatus, including SIS (foreign intelligence), MI5 (domestic security) and the Foreign Office. Indeed, Philby’s name was floated as possible director of SIS. Over the next couple of decades, the Five did immense damage to British and Western security. Through Cairncross, Moscow learned of Anglo-American efforts to build an atomic bomb in 1941. Maclean and Burgess, both working for the Foreign Office, gave the Soviets documents of inestimable value on Allied strategy in the Korean War. And as liaison between SIS and U.S. intelligence in Washington, Philby knew of, and betrayed to Moscow, project VENONA, the American effort to break encoded Soviet diplomatic messages.

Indeed, it was VENONA that brought down the Five. As Philby learned the Americans had decoded a Soviet message that referenced Maclean, he warned the latter through Burgess. But when Burgess and Maclean precipitously defected to

Moscow in 1951, suspicion was cast on the remaining three. Philby and Cairncross were forced to retire. Cairncross moved to southern France while Philby joined his fellow spies in Moscow in 1963. Blunt eventually confessed against a grant of immunity and stayed in England. The authorities’ reluctance to prosecute any of the Five has been attributed to a lack of hard evidence as well as distaste by the British upper class to confront “their own.”

The Cambridge Five have captured the public imagination through their espionage exploits as well as their extravagant personal lives—Philby, a notorious womanizer, married four times and had numerous affairs; Burgess, a flamboyant homosexual, earned notoriety on the diplomatic social circuit for his heavy drinking; and Blunt, a renown art historian, was knighted and became art adviser to Queen Elizabeth II. Yet for all their glamour the fact remains that the Five had blood on their hands. In 1949, for example, Philby informed the Soviets of an Anglo-American scheme to infiltrate Albanian exiles as saboteurs and insurgents into communist Albania. Consequently, their mission was doomed. Dozens of them were ambushed, killed or arrested by the Albanian secret police shortly after their arrival. Philby showed no remorse, though, telling a British journalist shortly before his death in 1988: “I was serving the interests of the Soviet Union and those interests required that these men were defeated. To the extent that I helped defeat them, even if it caused their deaths, I have no regrets.”