

Reviews

'Spycatcher': A study on alcohol consumption; MI5, MI6, MI drinking too much.

A forbidden book review

The following book review was written in 1987. It was submitted to the *British Medical Journal* who were unable to publish it because of the injunctions obtained by the Government, which prevented any direct quotations from *Spycatcher*. It was published in March 1988 in the *Irish Medical Times* in Dublin.

Following the loss of the Government's final Appeal in the House of Lords it is possible to read it in England. It is reprinted for two reasons. The reviewer draws attention to the heavy use of alcohol by some members of various secret services, which may have impaired their effectiveness. It is also of interest as an example of the remarkable lengths to which the Government had gone to prevent any publication of, or quotation from, this book. It suggests that the utmost vigilance and resolve will be needed in future to prevent further draconian limitations of freedom of speech. What is presented as reform of Section 2 of the official Secrets Act may end up as a strengthening of its powers. It bodes ill for the future of open Government if the following book review is the type of publication liable to be strangled at birth.

Spycatcher (The candid autobiography of a Senior Intelligence Officer).

By Peter Wright. New York: Viking Penguin. 1987. Pp 392.

There have been many reviews and accounts of Peter Wright's book *Spycatcher*, but I know of no medical scrutiny so far. The levels of consumption of alcohol by the protagonists have not yet been carefully considered. Peter Wright's early youth was ruined by his father's alcoholism and drink flows pretty freely wherever Wright himself is conducting serious conversation. It starts early when he describes his invitation to join the Secret Service. This came from Colonel Malcolm Cumming, a member of MI5 and later head of D. Branch. The proposal came over lunch at Cumming's club.

"Finally he ordered two brandies and turned to the purpose of his hospitality" . . . "I paused while brandy was served" . . . "Cumming cupped his glass and gently rolled its contents" . . . "Cumming drained his glass with a flick

of the wrist" . . . "Cumming tapped the side of his brandy glass gently and assumed an expression of surprise" . . . "After lunch we emerged from the rich leather and brandy of the In and Out Club to the watery brightness of Piccadilly".

Meetings between MI5 officers appear often to have been accompanied by alcohol. "It was the sort of meeting which began quietly. F. J. (Furnivall Jones) had a bottle of scotch on the table" . . . "That night F. J., Patrick Stewart and I went to my club, the Oxford and Cambridge, to discuss the interrogation: F. J. settled down into a corner with a large scotch" . . . "Arthur Martin was a former Army signals officer who joined MI5 soon after the war. Hollis had instructed Arthur to begin an investigation of the Deputy Director General. He had been doing this for a short time until he and I exchanged ideas . . . Arthur opened his desk drawer and pulled out a small bottle of scotch. He poured us both a small measure in his coffee cups" . . . "Furnivall Jones promised that he would make an appointment to see Dick White if I undertook to restrain Arthur from any rash course of action. I telephoned Arthur from my club; it was late but I knew he would be up, brooding over a scotch bottle. I said I had to see him that night and took a taxi round to his flat. 'I suppose you have come to tell me you have decided to throw your hand in too' he said acidly. For the second time that evening I settled down to a long drinking session, trying to talk Arthur round. He looked desperately strained. He had been seriously over-working since before the Lonsdale case, and was putting on weight drastically. His flesh was grey, and he was losing his youthfulness".

Alcohol is mentioned frequently in other contexts, for example when Wright visited Victor Rothschild, a former member of MI5.

"Hanley agreed to go with me one evening to Victor's flat in St. James'. I had one drink and made a tactical withdrawal to my club . . . The next day Victor rang me up. 'We must meet tonight and make our plan'. That night, over a particularly fine claret, we drew up our campaign".

On another occasion he visited the head of MI6.

"In the Summer of 1975 I dined with Maurice Oldfield at Lockets. 'I was called in by the Prime Minister yesterday', he said. 'He was talking about a plot. It's serious, I need to know everything'. I ordered another brandy and decided to tell him everything I knew. When I finished, he asked me if Hanley knew. 'No', I replied, 'I thought it best to forget the whole thing'. 'I want you to go back to the office tomorrow and tell him everything'. Maurice tottered up to bed".

Alcohol appears to have played a role too when Guy Burgess may have been attempting to recruit Stewart Hampshire to work for the KGB.

"Stewart Hampshire spoke of his memories of Guy Burgess. He told me that he now thought in retrospect that perhaps he himself had been the target of a recruitment approach by Burgess though he had not realised it at the time . . . He was invited to dine alone with Guy Burgess at his flat in Chester Square. Both men drank heavily and in the small hours Guy made a pitch at him asking him to work for peace. 'It was dangerous work', he said 'but worth it' . . ."

Burgess and MacLean were known to have had serious problems with excessive drinking, but they were not the only spies affected this way. The "third man" and the "fourth man" also drank. Tessa Rothschild (nee Mayer) was aware of MI5's doubts about Blunt after the Burgess/MacLean defections but she defended him to the hilt. To her he was a vulnerable and wonderfully gifted man, cruelly exposed to the everlasting burden of suspicion by providence and the betrayals of Guy Burgess.

"Anthony used to come back tight to Bentinck Street, sometimes so tight that I had to help him to bed", she used to say. "I would have known if he was a spy".

Wright mentions Blunt's drinking when he was involved in interrogating him after his confession.

"Every month or so for the next six years, Blunt and I met in his study at the Courtauld Institute. Sometimes we took tea, more often we drank, he gin, I scotch. Always we talked about the 1930's, about the KGB, about espionage and friendship, love and betrayal. They remained for me among the most vivid encounters of my life".

On another occasion Wright arranged to interview Alistair Watson in Blunt's presence.

"I picked Blunt up from the Courtauld and went to Brown's Hotel. Blunt was desperately anxious. 'I hope you've got something to drink', he said when we arrived at the hotel . . . Watson was frail like a man just let out of hospital but eventually we coaxed him into telling the story of his dealings with the Russians again . . . They both talked about Cambridge most of the time . . . It struck me as an odd way for the idealism and activism of the 1930's to end . . . in a small hotel suite with a bottle of scotch and a bottle of gin . . . Blunt left the table upset and embarrassed. He walked over to the drinks cabinet on the other side of the room. He had drunk almost a complete bottle of gin but still needed more . . . There was no gin left so Blunt poured himself a tumbler full of sherry and added soda water and gulped it down".

Other interrogations appear to have been equally thirsty work. Dennis Proctor had been the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Fuel and Power. He had retired to France with his second wife and in February 1966 was visited by Wright.

"That evening we had a splendid dinner and afterwards retired into his study with the port. Proctor was drunk and I could see he was finding my visit a strain. For a while he seemed to doze off over his port and woke up perspiring heavily. 'Why do you think it was Guy never bothered to approach you?', I asked, as I filled his glass again. Proctor gulped his down and poured himself another".

A further occasion for alcohol was a visit to an ex-member of the Service, Klop Ustinov (Peter Ustinov's father) who had been recruited by MI5 before the war and obtained high grade intelligence from Zu Pulitz.

"Ustinov was thrilled by my visit . . . (two small glasses and a bottle of vodka appeared) . . . "As the vodka took hold we began to talk of old times . . . Ustinov drank and composed himself 'but it was fun' he said finally. He poured more vodka with an unsteady hand . . . As late afternoon darkness closed in on the room I left. We shook hands and he returned alone to the vodka and his piles of books. I was too drunk that night to do anything other than go home".

Alcohol flowed in the American Secret Service also. James Angleton and Bill Harvey are described during working lunches.

"When I arrived at Harvey's Angleton was already sitting at his table, a gaunt and consumptive figure, dressed in a grey suit clutching a large Jack Daniels in one hand and a cigarette in the other . . . It was a long lunch. Angleton gave little away, but pumped me with questions with every drink".

At a later lunch even more alcohol flowed.

"I heard the sound of Bill Harvey's voice inside the house asking where we were. He threw back the flimsy, metal mosquito door and emerged onto the verandah clutching a bottle of Jack Daniels. He had obviously been drinking. 'Now you limey bastard' he roared smashing the bottle down on the table, 'let's have the truth about this case'. I knew immediately it was a set up. Normally, Harry Stone would accompany me to any serious discussion of MI5 business but he was in the hospital recovering from a heart attack. 'This is most unfair Jim, I thought this was a dinner party', I said turning to Angleton. 'It is Peter', he said, pouring me a massive scotch in a cut glass tumbler. 'I am not going to be browbeaten' I replied flatly . . . 'I don't see the problem'. 'You don't see shit'. Harvey spun open the second bottle of Jack Daniels".

Harvey was already a living legend in the CIA for his hard drinking and his cowboy manners. He began his career handling Soviet counter espionage for the FBI until Hoover sacked him for drunkenness. He promptly took his invaluable FBI knowledge and put it to work for the fledgling CIA becoming, along with Angleton, one of the most influential American operators in the secret war against the KGB. Alcohol finally caught up with both of them.

"Bill Harvey was driven into retirement by alcoholism. Angleton too was drinking far more than was good for him and had begun to look not merely pallid but genuinely ravaged. His mood changed too. He became increasingly introspective and the dry humour became less and less visible. He seemed pent up and aggressive, trusting fewer and fewer people who were turning more and more against him. Drinking, smoking and fishing were Angleton's main releases. Barry Russell-Jones told me in amazement of accompanying him on a fishing trip to a stretch of river he owned in Idaho and finding that Angleton had buried bottles of Jack Daniels under the water at 100 yard intervals so that he could never be caught short".

The French Intelligence Service appears to have had similar habits but claret replaced Jack Daniels.

"Marcel Chalet was the Deputy Head of the French D.S.T. The night before I left Paris he took me out to dinner. The restaurant was discreet but the food was excellent. Marcel was an attentive host, providing bottles of the best claret, and regaling me with a string of wispish anecdotes about the perils of Gallic intelligence work. 'And you my dear Peter, have you had any luck with radiation?' I choked momentarily on my claret. 'Not much', I replied. Marcel filled my glass patently disbelieving my every word. Like true professionals we turned to other things and never discussed the matter again".

Less is known about the drinking habits of those in the Russian Secret Service, but in view of the known heavy consumption of alcohol in Russia it would be no surprise to discover that they too had a problem. Wright obviously is not in a position to give much information about this but there are a couple of tantalising glimpses. Frantisek Tisler was a double agent who was being run by the FBI and they had handed on to MI5 items of his intelligence which related to British security.

"Tisler claimed he had gone back to Czechoslovakia in the Summer of 1957 and met by chance an old friend, Colonel Pribyl, who at the time was also on leave from his posting to London as a military attache. They had got drunk and Pribyl told Tisler that he was running an important spy in Britain, who was designing simulators for use in a guided missile project".

The only other Russian information was about another defector, Oleg Lyalin.

"Lyalin soon began to exhibit the strain of leading a double life. . . Lyalin began to drink too heavily, and when he was posted back to Moscow we decided to bring his ordeal to an end. . . Almost immediately our plans fell apart. . . 'Lyalin's blown. He was arrested for drunken driving a few hours ago and is in the clink at Marlborough Street'. The Legal Department had to apply for formal immunity from his drunkenness charge because of the risk of an assassination if he were brought before an open court.

At the end of the book Wright's criticism of one of his colleagues comes as no surprise.

"Traditionally K. Branch was MI5's prestige department and F. Branch its poor relation, shunned by the brightest officers and run shambolically by an amiable tippler".

Alcohol consumption subtly pervades this book. It may partly account for Wright's almost paranoid obsession that there was a further mole within the Security Services, although he can provide little support for this belief. His judgement must be questioned; the case for a mole being generally based on uncorroborated evidence of defectors from Russia or Eastern European intelligence, one of whom was considered insane by the CIA. His belief remains unshaken because of the peculiar difficulties of refuting causal hypotheses in intelligence work. The area of uncertainty which still has not yet been resolved is whether there may have been a plot by elements of MI5 to destabilise the Wilson government of 1974. This raises a question of major public interest which will not go away and will doubtless lead to further litigation in Strasbourg in a couple of years time.

This book can be recommended to anyone interested in studying the consumption of alcohol in obscure places. If positive vetting had prevented the recruitment of excessive drinkers to the security forces there would not have been the betrayals. As David Lloyd George said in 1915, ". . . if we are to settle with German militarism we must first of all settle with the drink. We are fighting Germany, Austria and the drink, and as far as I can see the greatest of these deadly foes is drink".

There is a ray of hope however. Vodka must be doing even greater damage to the Russian Secret Services.

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Treated Well? A Code of Practice for Psychiatric Hospitals.

By Good Practices in Mental Health and Camden Consortium. 1988. Pp 23.

Anxiety and concern about the care and treatment of psychiatric patients has been with us for a long time. Anti-psychiatry has also been with us for a long time. Campaigns against — and attacks upon — psychiatry often use the ammunition provided by those who are concerned about quality of care in the psychiatric establishments. This is a great pity.

There is no doubt that many psychiatric hospitals in the past were dreadful places. There is equally no doubt that at the present time many psychiatric