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Before Goronwy Rees died last month he disclosed

new facts about diplomat-spies to ANDREW BOYLE

ON THE day Mrs Thatcher sensationally revealed that Anthony Blunt had not only spied for the Russians, but had later received a secret pardon, the man best-placed to tell the story of Blunt's treachery was dying of cancer in hospital.

Goronwy Rees, former Estates Bursar of All Souls College, Oxford, had been a close friend and confidant of Guy Burgess when the Cambridge trio of spies—Burgess, Blunt and Maclean—were active.

Last November Rees was lying in Charing Cross Hospital and in the hectic days following the exposure of Blunt, the removal of his knighthood by Royal decree and the all-too-public humiliation of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, the sick man— together with other patients—was blockaded by striking hospital workers with banners proclaiming: 'Goronwy Rees, the spy's friend, is here,' and 'Get well Goronwy—others can't even get treatment.' But Rees himself, although close to Burgess, was never a spy, or a homosexual, or even a member of the Communist Party—and he later suffered, grievously from Blunt's evil influence.

A day or two after Mrs Thatcher's revelations, a reporter from a national daily newspaper posing as a Cambridge don, T. E. B. Howarth of Magdalene College, bluffed his way to Rees's bedside, in the hopes of getting a story, but the dying man was too ill to talk.

Rees lost consciousness shortly afterwards and his doctors took the precaution of calling in the police to guard him. Tests proved that the patient was suffering from a serious deficiency of sugar in his blood; this was consistent with his malignant condition, but it would also have been consistent with a massive injection of insulin given by an intruder. In a decade that had brought about the bizarre murder of Georgi Markov, it made sense to protect Rees not only from over-zealous journalists, but also from the risk of more dangerous intruders.

When Rees recovered consciousness, the only visitor outside his family whom he asked to see was Andrew Boyle whose book, 'The Climate of Treason,' serialised in THE OBSERVER, led to the unmasking of Blunt. Talking to Boyle about Anthony Blunt's televised press conference, at which the former Keeper of the Queen's Pictures gave disingenuous replies to a string of undemanding questions, Goronwy Rees was roused to anger:—

'ANTHONY BLUNT cast a long shadow over my life, just as I may well have cast a long shadow over his. It sickened me listening to his well-bred voice. I felt a little pity for his predicament at first—but not for more than a few moments. His sheer nerve continues to amaze and haunt me.

'You, Andrew, were largely instrumental in exposing him publicly as a Soviet spy. No doubt there are sentimentalists who have abused you, and who will go on abusing you, for putting an old man of great erudition in the pillory to account for his shameless treachery against his own country.

'Disregard the sentimentalists, whether they happen to be his friends, his former pupils, his distant admirers or simply that body of confused or immature onlookers who still don't know or don't care what went spiritually wrong here when Stalinist Marxism was all the rage in the 1930s. Like many others, I was accidentally caught up in it through my close personal friendship with Guy Burgess.

'I first met Burgess at the start of the summer term of 1932, when he arrived in Oxford from Cambridge to stay the weekend with Maurice Bowra, who was Dean of Wadham College. There was a lot of coming and going then between the two universities. I had been elected a Fellow of All Souls the previous year on graduating from New College. It isn't given to every clever, ambitious schoolboy from a fairly narrow Welsh lower middle-class home and background to find his dreams of academic prowess fulfilled so early: by the time I'd come of age, I was already listed in *Who's Who*. I mistakenly thought the world was at my feet.

Lying back in his hospital bed and pondering the past, Rees admitted that the uneven triangular relationship he enjoyed from then onwards with Burgess and the haughty, enigmatic Blunt cost him dearly in the end.

'I was, in more senses than one, the odd man out. For I was heterosexual; and I was not interested enough in politics to start plotting for any revolutionary Marxist solution to all our ills as a nation. They were already committed to the Marxist cause; their commitment was cemented by homosexuality.

'At the time of our original meeting Guy was already an open Communist. Among his many activities, social and political, he spoke most freely of his success in helping to organise a recent strike of busmen in the town of Cambridge. Blunt—no matter what he says now—was by then also a covert member of the Party and, as a young don, a kind of Grey Eminence behind Burgess and other disciples, most of whom belonged to The Apostles. I never joined the Communist movement, though my views were Marxist-tinged and anti-Fascist and I was certainly influenced to some extent by the thrust of Guy's original and brilliant mind.

'Marxism for Guy was a way of looking at the world which seemed as natural and unforced as breathing. You can imagine my incredulity on learning some two years later that, quite apart from failing to achieve all that was expected of him academically, Burgess had inexplicably turned a political somersault, declared himself a Fascist and gone down from Cambridge.

'I had left Oxford by then to work on the *Manchester Guardian* as a leader-writer, briefly meeting

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Malcolm Muggeridge about a week before he and his wife departed for Moscow, where he rapidly shed his illusions about Stalinist Marxism as a short-cut to the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Burgess and Blunt, of course, also paid visits to Moscow; these were brief visits in the spirit of pilgrims, but exceedingly important visits for all that. I couldn't imagine why Burgess had openly renounced his Communist faith and reneged on his former friends and associates. It didn't make sense. Only when, in 1935-6, we became neighbours in London did I hear his explanation.

I asked Goronwy Rees what he made of Anthony Blunt's categorical statement that he had never been homosexually attached to Burgess.

'That is a convenient falsehood, only one of many uttered by someone who lives up completely to your definition of the classic agent as a "controlled schizophrenic" who has so thoroughly mastered the art of lying that nothing will shake or break him down. Guy Burgess always boasted openly of his "conquests," and Blunt was definitely taken to bed by him, becoming more deeply "Marxist" in the process. Later Guy even pimped for him . . .'

'How can you be so certain?' I insisted. Burgess possessed such a powerful Walter Mitty streak that you had difficulty in knowing when or if to believe him.

'Guy always talked candidly to me about the squalid homosexual side of his make-up, perhaps because, to him, it wasn't at all squalid or revolting but rather an expression of his immense *joie de vivre*. I did not grasp the sinister aims of it until years later, partly because this perversion was currently widespread and fashionable, notably among undergraduates from the public schools. Like Malcolm Muggeridge, I was a grammar school product. We were, for the most part, uncontaminated.

'After making one initial pass at me which I firmly resisted, Burgess cheerfully accepted the fact that I was not attracted to men as lovers. This didn't stop him talking end-

lessly and often tediously about his conquests, of whom Blunt was one.

'I saw little enough of Blunt, despite having heard so much about him, until I was appointed assistant editor of the *Spectator* in 1935. By then I had grown accustomed to Guy's absurd posturing as an upside-down Marxist converted to his own highly individualistic brand of Fascism, which seemed to have sprung from a synthetic sort of despair at Britain's vacillating policy in India and to be bound up with the resulting mortal threat to the survival of the British Empire.

'He and I lived close to each other and we remained friendly so long as we avoided political arguments. His restless intellectual curiosity still fascinated me. He had become secretary to Captain Jack Macnamara, the right-wing Tory MP for Chelmsford, who shared Guy's sexual tastes and who introduced him to the pro-Hitler Anglo-German Fellowship.

'Philby, another of Burgess's brief sexual conquests by the way, was worming his way into the same organisation almost simultaneously by another route. Philby and I were only casual acquaintances who met on occasion at Guy's Chester Square flat. Blunt kept aloof from the Anglo-German Fellowship on leaving Trinity College, Cambridge, to join the staff of the Warburg Institute. I got to know him better when he began to contribute regular articles to the *Spectator* on art. It was curious how so obviously learned a man depended on the guidance of Guy Burgess in formulating his views for the printed page.

'It was during this busy and enjoyable period of early manhood that I met, and took an immediate dislike to, Donald Maclean aboard a friend's yacht in Southampton. Blunt I could stomach, but not Maclean: his air of empty superiority affronted me. His name was quite familiar to me, since Burgess had often spoken admiringly of him—and boasted incidentally of having bedded him, too, at Cambridge.

'Was that the only occasion,' I asked, 'on which Maclean came into your life? Did anything occur at that time which might have alerted you to the double life he was already leading as a Soviet agent?'

'Goronwy Rees paused for a while, then said, 'One small incident does come back, insignificant though it appeared then. Maclean and I had a mutual friend: her Christian name was Barbara. Now Barbara was a professional photographer with a studio in Mayfair, and she told me one day how skilful Donald was with a camera—so skilful that she'd no hesitation in letting him use the studio for his own work. It's easy to see the importance of such unconnected trifles in retrospect: Krivitsky, the first major Soviet defector, saw specimens of Maclean's handiwork in Moscow. Such clues meant nothing to me in the 1930s.'

Rees spent the next few minutes discussing the 'generation-gap' which makes it so difficult for men and women born after the Second World War to understand the peculiar, unrepeatable climate of unrest—social and political as well as spiritual—which turned a minority of their predecessors into traitors and a sizeable majority into their witting or unwitting accessories. What the French critic and essayist, Julien Benda, called *la trahison des clercs* (the treason of the educated classes) ran deeper in the Thirties than was commonly realised.

'I'm not seeking now to excuse myself by saying I was one of the *bien pensants* who allowed himself to be taken in. There were many of us who believed our mood of rebelliousness against the complacency and irresolution of government was justified, especially during the Spanish Civil War. But, equally, I was hopelessly duped by Burgess on the unforgettable evening he tried to lure me into that spy ring.

'I had recently reviewed in the *Spectator* an emotional book on Britain's distressed areas, and Guy had embarrassed me by heaping inordinate praise on what I'd written. That evening, drinking Irish whiskey in my flat, he returned to the subject and I begged him to drop it. Why should he, said Burgess, when it was plain I had the root of the matter in me? Then he confided that he'd been a Comintern agent ever since coming down from Cambridge. I accused him of inventing a tall story. He convinced me momentarily that he was telling the truth, adding that he wanted me to work with him and others for the cause. Who were the "others," I demanded? I pressed him to give me one name. Somewhat reluctantly he did so.

'The name he gave me was that of Anthony Blunt. It impressed me deeply because Blunt was highly regarded by everyone I knew for his intellect and his apparent integrity. As I put it once elsewhere: "He quite conspicuously possessed all those virtues which Guy did not; all they had in common, except friendship, was that both were homo-

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sexuals. But it now appeared that they were both also Comintern agents."

"I faithfully promised Burgess that I would never mention the matter to Blunt. I kept that promise. Nor did I inform anyone else until after the flight of Burgess and Maclean to Moscow nearly 15 years later in 1951. The point is that though I found Guy uncannily persuasive whenever I was in his company, I still only had his word for the story of a Comintern ring. And in all matters except his homosexual conquests I never could wholly bring myself to accept for long anything he chose to tell me."

Blunt apart, what was it, I wondered, about the Comintern of the mid-Thirties which misled Rees into supposing that the ring of conspirators to which Burgess belonged did not go in for espionage?

"Well, the Comintern and its works struck me at the time as a worthy organisation to belong to since it was dedicated ostensibly to helping the international working class. I did nothing about the offer to join, all the same, nor did Burgess renew it. You see—and I can't stress this too strongly—I just wasn't sure if he'd been pulling my leg."

"In those days I pretended to be more working-class than was actually the case. My family enjoyed more of this world's goods than most of our neighbours. My father, as a Methodist Minister trained at Mansfield College, must have had an income of some £400 per annum, a good salary by going standards. I suppose I adopted my working-class pose because I felt an outsider among Guy's numerous and often strangely assorted homosexual friends. I also felt I was resented by some of them. I believe you're right, Andrew, in stating that Anthony Blunt later came to hate me. I had no idea then how diabolically hard and callous he would become in the course of leading his double-life."

Rees recalled that Burgess mocked him in 1939 for joining the 90th Field Regiment, a Territorial unit stationed conveniently close to the offices of the *Spectator*. Volunteering for military service was looked down on as an empty, absurd gesture. At the BBC, where Burgess had been working as a talks producer much sought after by MPs, he found time to freelance for the Secret Service as well as serve his Soviet control—his informants including Edouard Pfeiffer, a notorious homosexual in the inner councils of Daladier's unstable French Government.

One unforeseen event rocked Burgess's imperturbability: this was the Nazi-Soviet Pact on the

eve of the Second World War. It, in common with Blunt and the rest, Burgess gradually adjusted himself to the cynical Moscow line and quietly went on working for the Soviet Union against the 'imperialists,' Britain and France.

"I remember how strained Burgess was on the eve of war," Rees said. "He'd rushed home from a holiday in France and actually had the nerve to raise once more the question of serving the Comintern in my hearing. I choked him off. He agreed never to mention the subject again. I was eventually commissioned in the Royal Welch Fusiliers about the time Blunt was recruited into MI5; it was during the chaotic summer of 1940 after Blunt, as an Intelligence officer with a unit of the retreating British Expeditionary Force, and Philby, as a war correspondent with *The Times*, had been evacuated from France."

"When on leave in London later in the war, I visited Guy from time to time in the large flat he'd rented from Victor Rothschild above the offices of *The Practitioner*, the medical newspaper, at 5 Bentinck Street, a few minutes' walk from Broadcasting House."

"Anthony Blunt was also in permanent residence, as were two highly placed girl secretaries engaged in important official work. Richard Llewellyn Davies, the architect and another ex-Apostle from Trinity College, Cambridge, fell in love with one of them and then emulated the man-who-came-to-dinner by "hanging up his hat" and never leaving. The sardonic phrase was not mine but Guy's."

"Among the most frequent of the casual visitors I noticed in 1943-44 were J. D. Bernal, the scientist, John Strachey, the politician, and Guy Liddell, a long-serving senior officer of MI5 whose marriage had recently broken up and who was a colleague of Blunt's. He was also on close terms with Burgess."

"You told me, Andrew, that Sir Arthur Harris, Commander-in-Chief, Bomber Command, recommended to the Air Ministry in very forceful language about this time the removal of Strachey, a former Communist, from his Command. Well, if the Air Ministry or Harris could have eavesdropped on some of the political intrigues that Strachey indulged in with Guy and his associates, they would have had him drummed out or court-martialled. It was in that Bentinck Street flat that I heard them rehearsing their arguments in favour of ditching the bomber offensive and re-allocating men and resources so that a Second Front could be mounted in 1943 at the probable, though accept-

able, cost—as they saw it—of an Allied holocaust on the beaches of France."

Although many voices were raised at that time in the clamour for a 'Second Front Now,' Gordonwy Rees believed that the Soviet sympathisers of Bentinck Street helped to orchestrate the discord. If their activities had been confined solely to propaganda, the damage would not have been too serious, but—

"When Mrs Thatcher told the Commons that Anthony Blunt could not be held responsible for any *British* lives while he was in MI5, that may have been so, but what about the lives of Poles, of Finns, of Ukrainians, even of German Communists from 1940 until the invasion of Russia mid-1941?"

"Just as Philby's position of trust in SIS increasingly enabled him to tip-off his Kremlin masters about plans like the post-war attempt at a counter-coup in Albania, so Blunt at his desk in the security directorate obviously did damage to Britain on the Soviet Union's behalf. He held a strategic post, under Liddell in the German section, with access to all the secretariat files that mattered: the strengths and weaknesses of MI5 itself, its composition, its internal problems, especially the laxity of its surveillance over an atomic physicist like Dr Klaus Fuchs when Fuchs was eventually recruited to spy for Russia."