

*Policing the Past: Official History, Secrecy and British Intelligence since 1945**

THE British government has fought a long campaign to ensure that much of the history of its intelligence services remains secret.¹ Since 1945, its most concerted opponents have been a motley band of memoir writers, journalists and intelligence historians. Britain's gradual retreat from absolute secrecy in the area of intelligence history enjoys some parallels with Britain's retreat from Empire. Arguably, the guardians of secrecy in the Cabinet Office have played the part of colonial governors, while the band of 'would-be writers' have taken the role of the native agitators. Like the retreat from Empire, government has been keen to characterize periodic concessions as part of a benign policy of deliberate liberalization, proceeding by measured stages. But behind the scenes, the process has been troublesome, combative and, at times, accompanied by something bordering on panic. After the Second World War, Britain's 'empire of secrecy' had begun to show signs of over-stretch, and officials puzzled over how to deal with pressure for the release of secrets.

Official history has played an intriguing role in the policing of Britain's secret past. For the policy-makers, the official history has offered multiple advantages. Carrying the stamp of authority, official history permitted a sober account of events to be advanced that contrasted with the increasingly sensationalist nature of 'outsider' publications. Moreover, it provided some positive influence over that difficult terrain – the public understanding of the past – while at the same time appearing more reasonable than simply 'stonewalling' on the subject of intelligence. To extend the colonial analogy, official history might be seen as a form of 'indirect rule', with official historians playing the part of indigenous notables, enjoying the privileges of access, official

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1. On Whitehall's interwar efforts to close the past of Britain's secret service see C. M. Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of Britain's Intelligence Community* (London, 1985), pp. 351–3. Little has been written on post-war official intelligence history, but see M. Howard, 'Reflections on Strategic Deception', in W. Roger Louis (ed.) *Adventures With Britannia* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 236–45. On the wider matter of Britain's tradition of secrecy, see D. Vincent, *The Culture of Secrecy: Britain, 1932–1998* (Oxford, 1998). On the parallel matter of nuclear history, see L. Arnold, 'A Letter from Oxford: The History of Nuclear History in Britain', *Minerva*, xxxviii (2000), 201–19.

status and authority, but at the risk of being regarded by some as 'colonial collaborators'.²

Britain's 'long retreat' from Empire has been well catalogued. By contrast, the policies which underpinned the long retreat from absolute secrecy, have themselves been secret. In particular, policy towards official history on secret matters has also been hidden. It is only now that significant papers on post-war intelligence history are being released into the public domain. New materials, available under the Open Government Initiative, offer fascinating insights into the attitudes of historians and officials to the issue of how Britain's secret past should be narrated.

Several conclusions are drawn in this essay. First, governments were able to hide substantial secrets after 1945 and expended considerable resources in offering their own carefully packaged versions of the past in order to maintain secrecy. Officials succeeded in keeping Whitehall's most important secrets – code-breaking and deception – by managing the first wave of post-war memoirs and official history. This effort was successful in cloaking the breaking of the German *Enigma* code machine, and other German systems, by an army of cipher experts and former academics at Bletchley Park – an achievement known as the *Ultra* secret – for much longer than they thought possible. Second, the major assaults on post-war secrecy were not launched by 'outsiders' but by 'insiders'. Memoir writers, rather than enterprising journalists and historians have been the shock troops that have rolled back the frontiers of secrecy, and in particular 'insiders' who were able to exercise political influence and status to further their objectives. Third, as secrecy began to erode, Whitehall was increasingly convinced that official history was a useful way of managing the past, offering a judicious mixture of concession and control. By the late 1950s, the authorities had embarked on their own programme of official history, beginning with M. R. D. Foot's history of *SOE in France*, intended as an experimental 'pilot project', charting the way for a whole fleet of further SOE official histories. These would provide an opportunity to set the record straight on various sensitive wartime issues. Fourth, during the 1950s and the 1960s, decisions to move forward on the writing of official history of wartime secret service were partly driven by the Cold War. *SOE in France* was intended mostly to address troublesome wartime controversies, but it was *also* intended to counter the widely held view that most of the effective resistance to the Nazis in Europe had been organized by the Communists. More importantly, the decision to embark on the Hinsley official intelligence history in the late 1960s was driven by a strong desire to restore the reputation of British intelligence and security which had been battered by revelations of Soviet infiltration into British intelligence. In 1968, 'molemania' was unleashed by the publication of

2. The classic discussion of indirect rule in mid-century is Lord Hailey, *Native Administration and Political Development in British Tropical Africa* (London, 1943).

My Silent War, the mischievous memoirs of KGB agent Kim Philby who had penetrated Britain's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). The British public were rather taken by Kim Philby's irreverent writings, which portrayed British intelligence as bunglers. For the first time perhaps, Whitehall had to focus on the question of how to manage the image of secret service.

Finally, throughout this process, Whitehall achieved something of a learning curve in the management of official history, partly through the long service of a few individuals, including Harold Wilson's Cabinet Secretary, Burke Trend. Trend's influence was important, positive and benign. Anxious to see the achievements of British secret service accurately recorded, Trend believed that an imaginative solution could reconcile effective secrecy with admirable and informative history. Institutionalized learning has been possible partly because the business of 'policing the past' has extended from the end of the Second World War through to the early twenty-first century. The Open Government Initiative marked a major step-change in the management of secrecy in the 1990s. This process has continued, and on 18 December 2002, the British authorities announced their appointment of an official historian of MI5 (the Security Service) to undertake a history of the service from 1909 to 2009, to be published on its centenary.³

Even as the Second World War ended, the resistance organizations in many European countries were determined to publish their own exploits, which had been ingeniously assisted by Britain's wartime sabotage organization, the Special Operations Executive (SOE). British officials were disappointed by this breach of secrecy, but they should not have been surprised. Public claims about resistance to Nazi ideas and oppression were part of the rehabilitation process in many occupied countries and were also a crucial platform for some of the first initiatives in the area of European unification.⁴ By the early 1950s, a growing number of figures who had worked with SOE's American sister service, the Office of Strategic Services, had written their memoirs. Special operations or 'covert action' have always been notoriously difficult to keep hidden. Unlike the gathering of intelligence, which is largely passive, special operations are often 'noisy'. They are intrinsically insecure and can require the recruitment of large numbers of people from unchecked backgrounds and involve cooperation with diverse foreign resistance organizations. Accordingly, the end of the Second

3. Michael Smith, 'MI5 History to Reveal Secrets and Mistakes', *The Telegraph* (8 Aug. 2002); Richard Norton-Taylor, 'MI5 Seeks Historian for Centenary', *The Guardian* (8 Aug. 2002); Home Office press release, 4 p.m., Wednesday 18 Dec. 2002, 'Appointment of Security Service Historian'.

4. R. J. Aldrich, 'European Integration: An American Intelligence Connection', in A. Deighton (ed.), *Building Postwar Europe, National Decision Makers and European Institutions, 1948-63* (London, 1995), pp. 141-58.

World War was quickly followed by a litany of memoirs concerning resistance and SOE.⁵

To the general public this might have suggested that, now that the war was over, the stories of its clandestine activity could be freely told. But in reality the most important aspects of the secret conflict with Germany – code-breaking and deception – remained hidden. Only in the early 1970s, some three decades after the end of the Second World War, did the story of *Ultra* and Bletchley Park, the mammoth technical effort which defeated the German *Enigma* cypher machine, burst upon a surprised world, accompanied by the story of wartime deception. Thereafter, much of the strategic and operational history of the Second World War had to be rewritten. Before the 1970s, one of the most important aspects of the Second World War, the fact that many of the operational intentions of the Axis had been transparent to the Allies, had been methodically airbrushed from historical writing.⁶

This ‘airbrushing’ was a carefully orchestrated process. Before the end of the war, Britain’s most senior intelligence official, Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee or ‘JIC’, turned his mind to the problem of the management of the past. British records were certainly not a threat. Many would be burnt at the end of the war and others could remain under lock and key for decades. But in the summer of 1944, with the invasion of France under way, Italian, Japanese and German records were spilling out into the open from embassies and headquarters in the chaos of Axis retreat.⁷ Gradually, it dawned on the authorities that some of the most hidden aspects of the war were now in danger of seeping into the public domain. If Allied and Axis decisions were compared, side by side, then historians would then realize that the prescience and speed of decision achieved by Allied commanders could have been secured only through the use of what was euphemistically called ‘special intelligence’. Some of the innermost secrets of the war – the successes of *Ultra* and the remarkable efforts of

5. These included: G. Miller, *Maquis* (London, 1945); G. Miller, *Horned Pidgeon* (London, 1946); A. M. Walters, *Moondrop to Gascony* (London, 1946); A. M. Webb, *The Natzwiller Trail* (London, 1949); J. O. Fuller, *Madeleine* (London, 1952); M. J. Buckmaster, *Specially Employed*, (London, 1952); Bruce Marshall, *The White Rabbit* (London, 1952); P. Churchill, *Of Their Own Choice* (London, 1952); P. Churchill, *The Spirit in the Cage* (London, 1954); J. Thomas, *No Banners* (London, 1955). For two excellent discussions of this literature see Nigel West, *Secret War* (London, 1992) and Mark Seaman, ‘Good Thrillers, But Bad History’, in K. G. Robertson (ed.) *War, Resistance and Intelligence: Essays in Honour of M. R. D. Foot* (London, 1999), pp. 119–133.

6. Typically, in 1968 Donald McLachan was required to remove all references to *Ultra* from his book, *Room 39: Naval Intelligence in Action, 1939–45* (London, 1968) and it appeared with asterisks throughout the text which marked the many deletions. In fact the first book on *Enigma* appeared in Polish as early as 1967, but it was largely ignored, W. Kozaczuk, *Bitwa o tajemnice. Sluzby wywiadowcze Polski i Rzeszy Niemieckiej 1922–1939*, (Warsaw, 1967). Its claims about the Polish contribution to solving *Enigma* were supported by a volume in French in 1973, G. Bertrand, *Enigma ou la plus grande Enigme de la guerre 1939–1945*, (Paris, 1973).

7. Min. by Cavendish-Bentinck on 3rd mtg. of Combined Intelligence Priorities Committee, 15 Jul. 1944, C9682/9386/18, FO 371/39171. All archival references are to the Public Record Office, Kew, unless otherwise stated.

secret deception teams that helped to mask the D-Day invasion – might soon be revealed.

GCHQ, the new post-war name given to the code-breaking organization based at Bletchley Park, was foremost in pressing for the tightest secrecy. The breaking of enemy codes and cyphers, known as signals intelligence or ‘sigint’ was, in their view, best hidden forever. The mysteries of sigint had to be carefully protected for use against ‘future enemies’, who were already massing on the horizon in 1945. There were also potential problems with the German acceptance of defeat. GCHQ argued that if it became known that the Allies had been using *Ultra* to read Hitler’s *Enigma* communications, the Germans were likely to use it as an excuse to say that they were ‘not well and fairly beaten’. The dangerous but attractive myths of ‘defeat by betrayal’ that had circulated in Germany after 1918 and which had been seized on by embryonic fascist parties, might surface once more.⁸

Even before the war had ended, the London Signals Intelligence Board, Britain’s highest ‘sigint’ authority, had convened a special committee to examine the problem of how to handle history and historians. By July 1945 they had suggested what became the standard Whitehall remedy. Simply to lock these secrets up was not enough; instead, positive information control was required. The public would soon demand a detailed and authoritative narrative of the war and something substantial had to be put in place. Official historians should be recruited and indoctrinated into *Ultra* and then ordered not to ‘betray’ it in their writings. Then a further body had to be created to review their work and also to sanitize the memoirs of senior figures who had known about *Ultra*.⁹ Strategic deception was also a subject which the secret services wished to see hidden forever.¹⁰ No mention of strategic deception and the turning of German agents by MI5 was permitted in the public history that emerged prior to 1972.¹¹

By the end of July 1945, the leading lights of British intelligence were increasingly conscious of the complexity of the history problem and were beginning to recognize the scale of the managerial project before them. Large areas of the past would have to be controlled if important secret methods were to be protected and embarrassments avoided. The problem was passed to the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), the main Whitehall forum for the discussion of high-level intelligence issues. On the last day of July 1945, they discussed the issue of ‘The Use of Special

8. Central Office Note 195, 27 Apr. 1945, HW 3/29; Special Order by Sir Edward Travis, 7 May 1945, *ibid.*

9. LSIB Meetings Summary No.13, 18 Jul. 1945, WO 208/5126.

10. Guy Liddell (MI5) to FO, 27 Apr. 1945, N4806/346/G42, FO 371/48032; Sir David Petrie (MI5) to Sargent, 9 Jun. 1945, N6745/346/42G, *ibid.*

11. A detailed history of deception was written by Roger Hesketh, an experienced deception planner, but this was for in-house consultation by those who were tasked to keep the art of strategic deception alive for future contingencies. This has now been published as Roger Hesketh, *Fortitude: The D-Day Deception Campaign* (New York, 2000).

Intelligence by Historians' and warned the Chiefs of Staff that it was 'imperative that the fact that such intelligence was available should NEVER be disclosed'. But sealing this subject, even for a few years, seemed almost impossible. As GCHQ had already realized, when intelligent historians got busy, 'the comparing of the German and British documents is bound to arouse suspicion in their minds that we succeeded in reading the enemy cyphers'. What would tip them off was the speed of Allied reactions to Axis moves. London and Washington had based most of their strategy and operations upon masses of information that 'could not have been received from agents or other means slower than Special Intelligence'.

Official historians would be needed to work actively with the authorities on official accounts in order to disguise *Ultra* and were asked to sign a document referring specifically to the need to hide special intelligence in the writing of their history.¹² Moreover, the tens of thousands of intelligence personnel who worked on *Ultra* and deception would have to be bound by an iron code of secrecy. Retiring ministers, generals and diplomats would also have to be exhorted to remove all mention of these things from their memoirs. Meanwhile the official history programme would become the last deception operation of the Second World War, with the objective of covering the tracks of signit and of deception itself.¹³ By November 1947 this apparatus was in place, when the JIC reported that several official naval histories were under way and noted that a system for having their product 'screened' by the Naval Intelligence Department had been created.¹⁴

Churchill was already at work on his own semi-autobiographical account of the war, which would prove to be the best-selling history of the post-war decade. This too had to be security screened. Like so many ex-Prime Ministers before and after him, Churchill considered himself 'licensed to thrill' and less bound than ordinary mortals by official secrecy. Together with Chester Wilmott's *The Struggle for Europe*, Churchill's account of the Second World War was probably the primary text in shaping the understanding of the first generation of Second World War historians.¹⁵ Churchill needed no guidance on the need to avoid mentioning *Ultra* and deception. However, a new aspect of the memoir security problem became clear when Churchill decided to include the text of telegrams to figures such as Stalin, Roosevelt and Truman. This raised the immediate problem of cipher security, for

12. Howard, 'Reflections', pp. 236–7. Howard recalls that this formed part of his 'indoctrination' in 1958 and how fears about fostering 'stab in the back' legends in Germany by revealing *Ultra* were still current.

13. COS (45) 187th mtg., Confidential Annex, 31 Jul. 1945, discussing JIC (45) 223 (o) Final, 'Use of Special Intelligence by Official Historians', CAB 76/36.

14. JIC (47) 81st mtg. (Item 1), 21 Nov. 1947, CAB 103/288; JIC/533/48, 17 Mar. 1948, *ibid.*

15. Chester Wilmot, *The Struggle for Europe*, (London, 1952). Certainly by 1948, Wilmot seems to have been privately aware of many of the details of the strategic deception campaign connected with D-Day, see 15/15/26 & 28, Liddell Hart papers, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives.

verbatim texts could, in theory at least, compromise much of the other British cipher traffic sent on the same day. GCHQ worried that the published text of a telegram could provide a 'crib' that would allow the Russians a way into a volume of traffic sent in a secure cipher system.¹⁶ Accordingly, the Chief of SIS, Sir Stewart Menzies had dinner with Churchill on the night of 9 June 1948 and explained the problem. Menzies tried to 'tie him down' to a formal arrangement for changes. Churchill was 'not impressed' by the arguments but he agreed to paraphrase the quoted telegrams.¹⁷

For all these measures to be effective it was necessary to coordinate with the Americans and the Commonwealth.¹⁸ By March 1946, Colonel Wingate of the London Controlling Section, the main wartime deception centre, had achieved agreement with the Americans over the redrafting of Eisenhower's final report on the Overlord operation to avoid any reference to deception. London was appalled to see that deception had appeared in the first draft and the Chiefs of Staff were asked to make additional high-level representations 'to stop the rot spreading any further'. The same group also had to get to work on the memoirs of Eisenhower's aide, Captain Harry Butcher, who eventually published *My Three Years with Eisenhower* in 1946, but only after it had been 'toned down' to suggest that deception was a minor tactical matter.¹⁹ Guy Liddell, Deputy Director General of MI5, was keen that they should discover which Commonwealth countries were proposing to produce official histories. The London Signals Intelligence Board began contacting its Commonwealth counterparts about the issue. In March 1948, Lt. Commander Williams, the Chairman of the New Zealand Signals Intelligence Committee, assured them that they were following the London line. The JIC also produced a new directive for 'Chief Historians' on the safeguarding of special intelligence.²⁰ The successors to the London Controlling Section continued requesting press restrictions into the 1950s to prevent any public mention of their wartime deception activities.²¹

Not all official historians were happy about these restrictions. Reportedly, the naval historians Stephen Roskill and Arthur Marder fulminated against them. In both their official and unofficial capacities they were in regular contact with senior intelligence officers who had handled *Ultra* and were aware of the extent to which the history of the

16. Brook to Churchill, 4 Jun. 1948, CAB 21/3749; Brook to Menzies, 8 Nov. 1948, *ibid.*

17. Churchill to Brook, 7 Jun. 1948, *ibid.*; Menzies to Brook, C/1438, 29 Sept. 1948, *ibid.*

18. Conference between Adm. Rushbrooke and Adm. Thebaud in NID, 20 Jul. 1945, Records of the CNO, Box 4, RG 38, USNA. Coordination with the Soviets was not required because intelligence cooperation during the war had been constrained, see Bradley Smith, *Sharing Secrets with Stalin: How the Allies Traded Intelligence, 1941-5* (Kansas, 1996).

19. Cornwall-Jones to Wingate (LCS), 13 Mar. 1946, DEFE 28/28.

20. JIC (48) 14 (0), 'General Directive to Chief Historians for Safeguarding Special Intelligence Sources in Compiling Official Histories', *Ultra* - Limited Circulation, 11 Feb. 1948, CAB 103/288.

21. Dickenson (DFP) to Oak-Rhind (FPS/FE), 7 Nov. 1952, DEFE 28/28.

Second World War was being circumscribed by the need to maintain secrecy. However, they accepted it. The person who came closest to sounding the alarm was Sir Herbert Butterfield. Ten years after the war he issued a strident warning about such official history. Well-connected, but ultimately denied an opportunity to join the privileged ranks of the official historians, Butterfield in all probability knew about the *Ultra* secret. He warned: 'I must say that I do not personally believe that there is a government in Europe which wants the public to know the truth'. He then explained how the mechanisms of secrecy and government claims of 'openness' worked in tandem. 'Firstly, that governments try to press upon the historian the key to all the drawers but one, and are very anxious to spread the belief that this single one contains no secret of importance: secondly, that if the historian can only find out the thing which the government does not want him to know, he will lay his hands on something that is likely to be significant.' In retrospect, this is clearly a comment on *Ultra* as the 'missing dimension' of the official histories of the war. It also stands as a salutary warning to scholars working in the wake of any major conflict who feed only upon material available from official sources.²²

Britain's top intelligence officials were always pessimistic about maintaining the secrecy of *Ultra* in the long term, believing that their elaborate scheme would not survive sustained scrutiny. Any intelligent comparison of say, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's moves in the Western Desert, with the response of his opponent, General Bernard Montgomery and the Eighth Army, would give the game away, pointing to a break in Axis communications traffic. Moreover, the story of *Magic*, the breaking of Japanese diplomatic codes, had been unveiled by the Americans as early as 1946 in their public investigation into Pearl Harbor.²³ London was dismayed by this latter revelation, for surely an enterprising historian would soon ask about the security of German codes?

The twin secrets of *Ultra* and of organized deception were not entirely watertight. One of the first to break the silence was Duff Cooper, one of Churchill's senior Ministers. So often, Whitehall secrecy was frustrated by senior statesmen who behaved as if they were above the law – as in practice they were – for no one was going to prosecute Winston Churchill or his circle under the Official Secrets Act. In 1950, Duff Cooper, who had been Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (1941–3), wrote a lightly fictionalized and alarmingly accurate account of a wartime deception operation developed by MI5.²⁴ His 'novel' narrated the core of the now famous story of 'Operation Mincemeat', in which a

22. H. Butterfield, *History and Human Relations* (London, 1951), p. 196.

23. I am indebted to Christopher Andrew for the point about *Magic*.

24. Duff Cooper, *Operation Heart Heartbreak*, (London, 1951).

dead body was dropped into the sea by submarine off the coast of Spain, carrying misleading plans about D-Day.

Duff Cooper's breach annoyed the authorities and infuriated others who had been banned from writing about the operation, including the journalist Ian Colvin. Ewen Montagu, a Naval Intelligence officer and the key figure in the deception apparatus, who had overseen the operation, found it intolerable. Montagu responded by making persistent and ingenious use of the Duff Cooper breach to obtain permission for his own history of the operation, entitled *The Man Who Never Was* published in 1953. This was made into a film with the same title in 1956. In the preface to his account, Montagu gives the impression that the authorities wanted him to write the book to correct previous accounts, a veiled reference to Duff Cooper.²⁵ But the authorities did not want further material in the public domain. In reality, Montagu fought a bitter struggle in order to publish by pressing the Attorney General to prosecute Duff Cooper. Cooper had been warned not to publish, he complained, but had 'flouted these objections' and published, 'relying on his eminent position as protection against prosecution'. Cooper was investigated, but no one could discover how he had obtained secret reports on 'Mincemeat', and no action was taken. Montagu's own position was especially invidious, since Fleet Street had latched onto the idea that Duff Cooper's novel might be a real story and was asking him questions. While Duff Cooper enjoyed the pleasure and profit of publishing, Montagu was specifically ordered to deny all knowledge, in response to frequent newspaper enquiries.²⁶

By January 1951, as Montagu explained to a friend, he was busy 'putting on pressure that they should either allow me to publish or prosecute Duff Cooper'. There had been endless meetings with Sir Harold Parker, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, with the Attorney General and eventually with the Secretary of State for Defence, Emmanuel Shinwell. 'I have been slogging away hard', he added. By March 1951, he had forced 'their capitulation' and was at last allowed to publish. All the time, Montagu was fully alert to the commercial possibilities and he provides an early example of how the attractions of entrepreneurial publishing proved a key factor in the erosion of post-war secrecy. He immediately contacted *Life* magazine 'who are the best payers of this sort of thing'. They had offered him between \$2,500 and \$3,000, but Montagu suspected that this was their starting price and was 'suggesting more'. He was also looking for serialization in the *Sunday Express* and the possibility of films.²⁷

Montagu was not free to publish *everything*. John Drew, who headed

25. E. Montagu, *The Man Who Never Was*, (Reprinted, Oxford, 1996) pp. 5–7, 13.

26. Montagu to Attorney General, 7 Jan. 1951, Box 1, 97/45/1, Montagu papers, Imperial War Museum.

27. Montagu to Charles, 2 April 1951, *ibid*.

the British post-war deception organization, underlined the fact that there were 'some points' which he still could not reveal. Deception was intimately connected with the *Ultra* secret. Montagu had already written a secret account of Mincemeat for the MI5 internal history, stressing that evidence from *Ultra* demonstrated that the Germans had 'taken the bait' which had been planted on them. But in the published book *Ultra* was not mentioned, and the idea of an organized programme of strategic deception was also obscured, with Mincemeat being presented as a 'wild' one-off caper.²⁸ Others followed in Montagu's footsteps and Eddie Chapman, an MI5 deception agent with the codename 'Zig-Zag', published his memoir the next year.²⁹ Nevertheless, *Ultra* and the scale of organized strategic deception remained a secret throughout the 1960s.

The spell of secrecy was not broken until the early 1970s. In 1972, J. C. Masterman published his memoir of organized strategic deception, *The Doublecross System*. Masterman was an Oxford historian who, as a wartime MI5 officer, had run the committee controlling wartime deception operations. In the late 1960s, he had shown a typescript history of *Doublecross* to Michael Howard who was an official historian, but who knew nothing about strategic deception. Both were agreed that while this dimension remained missing, 'all histories of the war would be not only inaccurate but positively misleading'. However, at the time the security services were threatening Masterman with prosecution under the Official Secrets Act if this subject was revealed.

Masterman managed to persuade Whitehall to relent on its secrecy because he was the ultimate 'insider'. He was a governor of the most eminent public schools and a famous amateur sportsman. As History tutor at Christ Church he had taught a remarkable number of the 'great and the good'. Whitehall's senior inhabitants, and indeed the then Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, had been taught by him at Oxford. Remarkably, his former students were reluctant to argue, regarding themselves as inferior in rank. Michael Howard and Alec Douglas-Home, both Christ Church men, fell to talking about this some years later. Douglas-Home recalled:

Let me tell you an extraordinary thing about J. C. [Masterman] . . . You won't believe this, but when I was Foreign Secretary they tried to make me lock him up. They actually tried to make me lock him up. It was that book of his. Both MI5 and MI6 were determined to stop his publishing it. MI5 pushed it up to the Home Secretary, and he pushed it over to me. I squashed

28. Drew to Montagu, 6 April 1951, *ibid*.

29. E. Chapman, *The Eddie Chapman Story* (London, 1954) Film is not discussed here due to limitations of space, but in 1956 the Treasury solicitors were agonizing over what to do about a proposed film about this colourful MI5 deception agent, TS 54/19.

it pretty quickly, I can tell you. Lock up the best amateur spin bowler in England? They must have been out of their minds.³⁰

MI5 and SIS wanted prosecution because they feared that one thing would lead to another and the whole system of secrecy would unravel.

In a sense they were correct, for intelligence and deception were closely intertwined and although Masterman did not reveal the *Ultra*, this was soon trumpeted by Frederick Winterbotham's *The Ultra Secret*, a memoir which began to tell the story of the codebreakers at Bletchley Park. In his foreword to Winterbotham's book, Sir John Slessor, a former Chief of the Air Staff, remarked that the ban on references to *Ultra* had exercised 'an inhibiting effect on the writing of military history in every field' which he had been pressing, unsuccessfully, to get lifted for twenty years. In the event, independent historians were led by the nose and had not detected these secret things. Instead, the British public had been informed by 'insiders' with friends in high places, or by the 'great and the good' who regarded themselves as invulnerable to prosecution.³¹

The Whitehall decision not to oppose publication on *Ultra* by Winterbotham was not uni-causal. Its appearance was certainly resisted by many inside intelligence in the early 1970s, but others in government felt that this revelation was a necessary counterblast to the damage done the reputation of the British secret service during the late 1960s by figures such as Kim Philby.³² The attitude of GCHQ to the release of *Ultra* is particularly interesting. It has been suggested that the *Ultra* secret was not just becoming more widely known, but was actually physically 'wearing out'. One of the reasons that the Allies wished to keep the *Ultra* secret was that German *Enigma* machines and similar machines were still in service around the world in the diplomatic communities of various Third World countries – especially Africa – and were happily being read by Britain and the United States. But these venerable 'pre-owned' *Enigma* machines, being electromechanical, had a limited life span. By the 1970s, machines that had whirred on into the post-war period were being replaced. The specific value of hiding their insecurity from their post-war owners was declining fast.³³

Moreover, the authorities had concluded that these secrets would soon be uncovered by others and could not longer be meaningfully protected. There had already been some public discussion of *Ultra* in Poland and France. At the time that Winterbotham was working on *The Ultra Secret*, the writer Anthony Cave Brown was well advanced with *Bodyguard of Lies*, which dealt at length with Churchill, *Ultra* and

30. Howard, 'Reflections', p. 237. Howard adds that the battle of Atlantic is 'unintelligible' without the story of reciprocal code-breaking, *ibid.*, p. 238.

31. Slessor, Foreword, in F. Winterbotham, *The Ultra Secret*, (London, 1974), xii.

32. T. Bower, *A Perfect English Spy* (London, 1995), pp. 366–7.

33. Presentation by David Kahn at *Enigma* 2002, Christ Church College Oxford, 5 Sept. 2002.

D-Day deception matters. This appeared one year later, in 1975, published by Harper in New York.³⁴ Anthony Cave Brown, a seasoned journalist who had worked as a foreign correspondent for the *London Times* and the *Guardian*, had examined many private papers in Britain and the United States and had probably uncovered the *Ultra* secret before Winterbotham made it public. Moreover, his energetic activities had been known to the authorities for some time. Their initial interest had been triggered some ten years before when a Chiefs of Staff paper, borrowed from General Freddie Morgan by Cave Brown was mislaid and then, mysteriously, turned up at auction in New York.³⁵ Although Anthony Cave Brown took prompt steps to recover the paper and return it to its original custodian, officials were frantic. Subsequently, Freddie Morgan was required to turn in all his secret papers to the authorities after a coordinated drive by B. A. Hill of MI5 and Derek Woods of the Cabinet Office Historical Section. After some persistence, all his material was recovered and MI5 expressed the view that this was 'a very satisfactory conclusion to this troublesome matter'.³⁶ Morgan had initially resisted the authorities, but eventually gave way, handing over his files while pleading permission to keep one file cover stamped secret as a 'relic' of his wartime service.³⁷ Officials had now been alerted and in November 1966, William McIndoe of the Cabinet Office Historical Section warned other officials that Anthony Cave Brown 'needs to be watched like a hawk'.³⁸

Controlling private papers proved a growing problem for the authorities in the early 1960s. Historians and journalists like Anthony Cave Brown had identified the papers of 'insiders' – particularly those at the top – as an ideal way to uncover secrets. Some of these retired senior figures proved to be extremely truculent when asked to hand over papers. Although official papers properly belonged to HMG, distinguished figures were nevertheless determined to retain them, often for the purpose of writing their memoirs.³⁹ Michael Howard was required to deal with these knotty problems during the setting up of the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives. In 1964, he spoke to Derek Woods of the Cabinet Office Historical Section about the possibility of having the archivist (whom they proposed to appoint) 'screened', so that he could deal with classified papers.⁴⁰

34. Howard suggests that Winterbotham was motivated partly by knowledge that Anthony Cave Brown was onto *Ultra*, 'Reflections', p. 237.

35. Anthony Cave Brown to Lohan, 24 Apr. 1963, CAB 21/5865.

36. Hill to Woods, 2 May 1963, CAB 21/5865; Hill to Woods, 9 May 1963, *ibid*.

37. Woods to Morgan, 2 Jan. 1964, CAB 21/5865, and Morgan to Woods, 4 Jan. 1964, *ibid*. The paper in question was a lengthy Chiefs of Staff document designated COS (43) 416 (o).

38. McIndoe to Lohan, 19 Nov. 1966, CAB 21/5865.

39. Mountbatten's vast Broadlands Archive was a typical case. In the 1980s when weeders came to process it before it was released to the University of Southampton, they were astounded by the scale of what he had retained. Private information.

40. Garside to Woods, 22 Jul. 1964, CAB 21/5226.

What was the attitude of the Cabinet Office to the setting up of archival centres which were dedicated to the study of recent and contemporary history and busily seeking to acquire collections of private papers? Such places were problematic, being a kind of mezzanine floor, situated halfway between secrecy and openness. To the official mind, the best situation was clearly to have all secret papers under lock and key in government departments. But if secret papers were floating about in private hands, it seemed better that they be deposited in such centres, with which government enjoyed a working relationship, than not to be policed at all. The issue was illuminated when Sir John Slessor, wartime RAF commander in the Middle East, asked for government permission to deposit his papers, which contained many copies of official documents, at the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives. Had Slessor simply given his papers to the Centre, the authorities would have reluctantly accepted this as a *fait accompli*. But as Slessor had formally asked permission beforehand, they felt better able to refuse. Ideally, they wanted his official papers to be 'where they ought to be' and that was 'in official custody'. In parenthesis, Derek Woods of the Cabinet Office offered the MoD a clear statement of how he viewed the Liddell Hart Centre:

The fact is that our understanding with the centre is simply in the nature of a long-stop, to ensure that if any official papers have escaped the official net without our knowledge and should come into the centre's hands, they will be properly looked after. In a perfect world no doubt the Trustees ought to be required to hand over any such papers that come into their possession. But it is difficult to take butter from a dog's mouth and we have accepted the arrangements as a reasonable compromise. It would be quite a different matter and, I am sure, altogether wrong for us to feed the dog ourselves.⁴¹

One could not wish for a clearer statement of purpose. However, in this particular case, the history police moved at a constabulary pace and their quarry escaped, at least for a while. Slessor retained his papers and refused to hand them to the MoD. They afterwards found their way into the RAF Museum at Hendon, apparently unsifted. Full of interesting material, some of which pertained to post-war intelligence, they were open to scholars there for some time in the mid-1980s. However, a few years later, the MoD became aware of this, and the Slessor papers were then transferred to the Air Historical Branch at the MoD. In the mid-1990s the papers were weeded and then placed in the Public Record Office.⁴²

41. Woods to Devey, 27 Jul.1964, CAB 21/5226.

42. The Slessor papers now constitute the PRO Class – AIR 75. In the 1990s the authorities attempted to close material that had been open to scholars for two decades at the University of Birmingham (unsuccessfully) and at the University of Cambridge (successfully). All from private information.

In stark contrast to *Ultra*, the SOE story was already seeping into the public domain at the end of the Second World War and certainly the existence of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) was not itself secret after the spring of 1945. During the late 1940s and through the 1950s a number of memoirs were published by those associated with SOE or its American sister service OSS. Indeed, to the dismay of some in Whitehall, OSS had embarked on a semi-official policy of publicizing its achievements at the end of the war, through both books and films, in a futile effort to prolong its existence. Many resistance leaders in Europe were also writing the history of their national efforts, and in both France and the Netherlands there was concerted interest in discovering more about networks that had been penetrated by the Germans.⁴³

The British government response had nevertheless been one of stonewalling. In 1949, urged on by Ian Fleming (a Naval Intelligence officer, who would soon pen his first James Bond novel) Major General Sir Colin Gubbins, the wartime head of SOE, asked for official permission to write a public history of SOE.⁴⁴ To his disappointment the Foreign Office forbade this.⁴⁵ HMG also offered only limited cooperation with foreign endeavours, official or otherwise. This was illustrated by a Dutch parliamentary enquiry into a disastrous episode known as the 'Englandspiel', wherein radio security problems had worked to the advantage of the Gestapo and subsequently numbers of agents had been dropped into German hands.⁴⁶

Stonewalling failed to deter determined writers. Numerous memoirs and biographies of SOE operatives, mostly about France or published in France, appeared in the first post-war decade.⁴⁷ Officials became more concerned in 1958, when public controversy erupted over accusations about the penetration of SOE networks by the Germans, including the Paris-based PROSPER network. New high-profile books about the deaths of female SOE agents focused attention on the problem of betrayal.⁴⁸ Dame Irene Ward MP led a campaign in Parliament for an

43. W. Wark, "Great Investigations": The Public Debate on Intelligence in the US after 1945', *Defence Analysis*, xxx, 2 (Fall 1987), 119–132.

44. Ian Fleming to Colin Gubbins, 7 Jul. 1949 and 17 Oct. 1949, Folder 20, Gubbins papers, Imperial War Museum; Strang to Gubbins, 10 Dec. 1949, *ibid.* Gubbins had published a short article entitled 'Resistance Movements in the War' in the *RUSI Journal*, xciii, 570 (1948). Fleming's first James Bond novel was *Casino Royale*, published in 1953.

45. His disappointment may have reflected the fact that *The Times* was keen to buy serialization rights and had offered 'world-wide syndication', Herring to Gubbins, 7 July 1949, Folder 22, Gubbins papers, Imperial War Museum.

46. The first public account of this episode was given in P. Dourlein, *Inside North Pole* (London, 1953). More recent accounts included N. Kelso, *Errors of Judgement* (London, 1988) and M. R. D. Foot, *SOE in the Low Countries* (London, 2001).

47. See fn. 5.

48. The controversial story of the collapse of PROSPER was first told in detail in P. Guillaume, *Sologne au Temps de L'heroiseme et de la Trahison* (Orleans, 1950). The flurry of British books in the late 1950s included: R. J. Minney, *Carve Her Name With Pride* (London, 1956); J. O. Fuller, *Born For Sacrifice* (London, 1957); J. O. Fuller, *Double Webs* (London, 1958); E. Nicholas, *Death Be Not Proud* (London, 1958).

enquiry into these SOE failures, inspired in part by claims that the authorities were offering little information about deceased agents to family members. During November and December 1958, the various protagonists had taken to attacking each other in the pages of the press.⁴⁹ Finally, Harold Macmillan, who nurtured an intense dislike of public disclosure regarding secret service, nevertheless conceded that there should be some sort of enquiry.

Although Macmillan's concession to Irene Ward had been made with reluctance, official attitudes were changing. By 1958, there was a growing conviction on the part of officials in the Cabinet Office and the Foreign Office that some 'counter-blast' was required against the flood of 'outsider' histories dealing with SOE, some of which were inaccurate and sensationalist. In early 1959, preliminary discussions were under way in Whitehall about a possible official history of SOE. An internal secret history of SOE already existed, written by W. J. M. Mackenzie of Magdalen College, Oxford, covering most areas of SOE activity other than the Far East. But the Cabinet Office considered that for security reasons, publishing this history was out of the question and indeed they were anxious to keep its existence a secret. A different sort of history would be required for public consumption.⁵⁰ The Cabinet Office noted that some people were now suggesting that SOE records were being kept secret 'in order to shield people who ought to be brought to book' for incompetence regarding the penetration of the PROSPER network. Meanwhile, they argued, the absence of any official information about the role of SOE was creating 'bad impressions' on the Continent, because Britain was not receiving due credit for helping the resistance. The Foreign Office had appointed an Adviser to answer questions of fact about SOE, but more was needed. Discussions were complicated by departmental funding. The growing cost of the mainstream official war history programme, begun in the late 1940s, was already a problem. The Cabinet Office clearly hoped to transfer to the Foreign Office the expense of any future SOE history, given that some of its rationale involved Britain's profile in Europe.⁵¹

The Cabinet Office deputed the coordination of the SOE history issue to a rising star in the Treasury, Burke Trend. By May 1959, Trend was heading a working party which met Sir Colin Gubbins and two other senior SOE officers, Robin Brook and Richard Barry. Their task was to examine what form an SOE history might take and to identify a possible author. All were agreed that a history was feasible and desirable.

49. See for example: 'Now Buckmaster Speaks', *Daily Mail* (1 Dec. 1958); 'Response' by Jean Overton Fuller, *Daily Mail* (4 Dec. 1958). A large collection of this press material is available in File: Odette, Box 3, Vera Atkins papers, Imperial War Museum.

50. Gubbins to Selborne, 5 Jul. 1946, f. 13, MEW file, Selborne papers. MSS Eng c.1002, Bodleian Library. This was recently declassified and published as W. J. Mackenzie, *The Special Operations Executive* (London, 2000).

51. Hale to Trend, 10 Jun. 1959, T220/1388.

It would remind allies of 'the indispensable role this country had played as a base for their indigenous resistance', and it would assist in 'refuting current misconceptions'. There was a range of problems to resolve. Matters that were not for public airing included 'currency operations' and activities that had 'involved violations of neutrality', and these could simply be omitted. More delicate was the inevitable assessment or implied assessment of personal responsibility for failures, 'in particular the breakdown and penetration by the enemy of resistance organizations through treachery or weakness under interrogation'. The history was bound to stir further public debate over the deaths of agents in France and Holland.⁵²

Trend's working party identified two possible routes forward. One was a 'pilot project' dealing with one field in detail – 'probably France' – on the grounds that this was 'at once the most difficult subject, the most controversial and the most highly publicised'. This involved some risk, but such a project seemed a good way of gauging whether a history of more of SOE's activities would be possible. The safer alternative was to commission a public version of the existing outline secret history of SOE by W. J. M. Mackenzie. In May 1959, Mackenzie, who was part of Trend's working party, argued vigorously for this. Possible authors were also identified, including William Deakin at St Antony's College, Oxford, and Philip Williams at Nuffield College, Oxford, and officials decided to open discussions with those two colleges to obtain further advice.⁵³ Although the outline history option was safer, it did not meet the growing desire of officials to set the record straight on France. Accordingly Burke Trend favoured the French option.

While officials deliberated at length, the pace of erosion of secrecy increased. Although Bletchley Park remained hidden from public view, in the early 1960s books began to appear that dealt with SIS (often known as MI6) as well as SOE. Perhaps most important was the appearance of Montgomery Hyde's *The Quiet Canadian*, which dealt with the work of Sir William Stephenson, the Canadian controller of British Security Co-ordination (BSC) in New York. This was a large office run by SIS, in which most other British secret services also enjoyed representation. In October 1962, the serialization of this book prior to publication triggered anxiety in Whitehall. Burke Trend met the Chairman of JIC, the Chief of SIS (Dick White) and another SIS officer, to discuss the problem. As in previous cases, life was made more difficult by the collaboration of 'insiders'. Hyde had received some cooperation from at least one serving SIS officer and this rendered the authorities all but powerless. When MI5 and the Director of Public Prosecutions had reviewed the possibility of banning *The Quiet Canadian*, it was clear that

52. 'Official History of SOE: Further Report by a working party', May 1959, T220/1388.

53. 'SOE History', mins. of mtg. at the Treasury, 7 May 1959, T220/1388. See also Norman Brook to Patrick Dean, 31 Jul. 1959, *ibid.*

a court might well take this SIS assistance as official concurrence in publication. The issue was made more difficult by Sir William Stephenson's peculiar status. Although BSC had received funds from SIS and other British secret services that it had represented nevertheless, Stephenson, a wealthy businessman 'had not been paid by HMG for his wartime activity as head of British Security Co-ordination in New York'. As a result, Stephenson's line of responsibility to HMG was 'tenuous and difficult to define'. This unofficial publication by Hyde, dealing with SIS without clearance, and which had escaped prosecution, set a worrying precedent. Trend was sure that this book would provoke awkward questions from MPs and encourage other writers.⁵⁴ Subsequently, Sir Dick White despatched one of his officers to talk to Hyde about how it had come to be researched and published. Hyde explained that he had not felt it necessary to seek clearance from government, because he had not used official British sources. His book was about Stephenson, a Canadian, not about British intelligence. Yet there was no doubt that he had enjoyed assistance from inside SIS.⁵⁵

Trend was particularly worried about questions from MPs because of the small but vocal group of parliamentarians who were pressing tirelessly for the opening up of secret history, especially SOE. On 13 December 1962, Dame Irene Ward MP met the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. She complained that she could not understand why the work on a history of SOE was being blocked, while Hyde had been allowed to publish *The Quiet Canadian* without any action being taken against him. Macmillan replied that it was all the result of confusion, with Hyde believing he had clearance, when in fact he did not. Ward was too well informed to be taken in by this and shot back that she was 'quite convinced that Mr Montgomery Hyde was never under misapprehension and knew exactly what he was doing'.⁵⁶

Within months, Whitehall was dealing with a new book on MI5 written by John Bulloch, a journalist on the *Daily Telegraph*, and published by Arthur Baker Ltd. Once again the authorities seemed remarkably powerless. On 5 March 1963, Roger Hollis, Director General of MI5, informed Trend that little or nothing could be done about the book, partly because much of it was not based on official documents. Although the book contained many inaccuracies, it nevertheless gave a 'reasonably clear picture of the work and methods of the Security Service,' and its relationship with the Special Branch of the Metropolitan Police. Hollis was in no doubt that it would give the KGB, other hostile intelligence services, and the Communist Party, 'a clearer idea of our functions and methods than they have hitherto had.'

54. A. W. Wyatt, 'Note for the Record, "The Quiet Canadian"', 2 Nov. 1962, CAB 21/5864.

55. 'C' to Trend, C/2280, 7 Nov. 1962, CAB 21/5864.

56. Minute to Robertson, recording conversation between Ward and Macmillan, 13 Dec. 1962, CAB 21/5864. See also draft letter from the Prime Minister to Dame Irene Ward MP, *ibid.*

Hollis asserted that he had done what he could to prevent publication or to have the damaging passages removed, but to no avail. The book drew on private papers, notably the diary of Vernon Kell, the first Director General of MI5, rather than upon official papers. In the event, the publishers were asked to consider removing a few sensitive passages and an offer was made to cover the expenses of resetting parts of the book.⁵⁷ Subsequently, Harold Macmillan was informed that officials had held a 'reasonably amicable' meeting with the author and the publisher, who were willing to make amendments to seven passages. There would now be no damaging disclosures, the officials adding their view that it was in any case 'helpful' that some material in the book was inaccurate. The officials brightly concluded that the final version of the book was now 'rather dull'. The cost of the typesetting changes was to be met 'from Security Service funds'.⁵⁸

It was against this background that HMG reversed its policy of secrecy on SOE. In 1962 it decided to go ahead with the 'pilot project' for a remarkably detailed history of SOE in France. Pressure from MPs and the ongoing erosion of secrecy were the main reasons, but another was anti-communism. Reviewing the decision shortly after publication, the Foreign Office asserted that an important purpose was to stake Britain's claim to ownership of resistance. They wished 'to correct the impression being spread at that time that the Communists alone amongst the allies had given real support to indigenous resistance movements in captured territories in Europe, including France after the collapse of that country's military effort in 1940'. Officials also wished to counter a rising tide of sensationalism generated by 'outsider' history. There was a desire to 'restore the balance of truth' and to put some of the wilder stories in their proper context. Supposedly, the formal decision to go ahead with *SOE in France* was taken by R. A. Butler on 6 April 1964 and announced in Parliament in response to a question by Dame Irene Ward a week later.⁵⁹ In reality, preliminary work had begun in secret as early as 1960. M. R. D. Foot's magisterial history, *SOE in France* was published by HMSO in 1966. Most scholars greeted the book with acclaim, and it is still regarded by historians as a remarkable history of special operations. Foot's achievements were all the more impressive given that he had not himself been allowed to browse the disorderly mess that passed for the SOE archive and instead had sat at a distance, requesting files, which did not always arrive. More importantly, he was forbidden to speak to many

57. Hollis to Trend, SF.53/24/3/Supp.B(114a)/D/gG., 5 Mar. 1963, CAB 21/5845.

58. Brooke to Macmillan, 18 Mar. 1963, CAB 21/5845. See also minutes of a meeting between Macmillan and the Home Secretary, 'The Bulloch Book on MI5', 6 Mar. 1963, *ibid*.

59. 'Study of the pros and cons of publication of further histories of SOE in the light of experience gained since the decision to publish SOE in France', Dame Barbara Salt, Jul. 1969 (hereafter Salt Report), CAB 103/570.

of the surviving participants, which was clearly a serious mistake on the part of the authorities.⁶⁰

However, as Trend had warned as early as 1959, to write a detailed history of SOE in France was deliberately to send an experimental ship into what were known to be uncharted waters. Foot was the ideal author, even recommended by others, such as James Joll, who had also been approached as possible authors. Foot had been an intelligence officer with the Special Air Service, had worked alongside the Resistance in France after D-Day and had been taken prisoner.⁶¹ Prior to publication, Colin Gubbins had read every line of Foot's manuscript in draft. He had worried that some of the comments were rather 'personal' and that there was implied 'derogation' of the SOE operative Odette Sansom. Specifically, he was aware that the issue of her torture would be controversial. He commented, 'I think it is unnecessary to speculate on the question whether her toenails were pulled out or not'. Foot left some of these passages in, arguing that if he ignored such issues, it would 'raise a great deal of bother of the very kind the book aims at stopping'.⁶² Any thorough review of the history of individual operations was bound to involve comment on personalities, and Foot's official history did not hesitate to address these matters head on. Some of his comments were quite acerbic, and given that the history referred to living persons he was not well served by his editors, who might have advised him to be more cautious. On publication there was indeed controversy, which both author and officials had fully expected. But there was also legal action, which they had not expected.⁶³

Trend had intended Foot's *SOE in France* to be a 'pilot project', which might well be followed by a flotilla of further SOE histories dealing with other countries. What happened to these projects that were intended to follow in its wake? In May 1967, a year after Foot's publication, the programme was still in the hands of Burke Trend, who chaired a meeting to consider additional histories. Trend was joined by officials from the Foreign Office and Cabinet Office, and the SIS was represented by Norman Mott, who had once served in SOE's security section. The tide was already turning against further volumes. *SOE in France*, the meeting concluded, 'was profitable historically, but in certain respects it had proved embarrassing politically'. Because the book had been a detailed country study it had named names, resulting in two legal actions, costing approximately £10,000. The book had sold well,

60. The problematic nature of the SOE archive was set out in a fascinating paper by Duncan Stuart, "Of Historical Interest Only": The Origins and Vicissitudes of the S. O. E. Archive', given at the Imperial War Museum in 1998.

61. Duff Hart Davis, 'The man with a load of secrets under his arm', *Sunday Telegraph* (24 Apr. 1966).

62. Gubbins to Boxshall, 16 Dec. 1964, Folder 18, Gubbins papers, Imperial War Museum; Foot to Gubbins, 11 Apr. 1965, *ibid.*

63. 'Government apologises to Odette GC', *Daily Telegraph* (12 Jul. 1966); 'Odette attacks "Broken Promise Book"', *Daily Express* (22 Apr. 1966).

but the overall costs beyond what the book had made were estimated at £40,000. They also worried that further volumes would need access to foreign records, which would generate reciprocal requests by foreign official historians for access to SOE records.

What were possible subjects for further SOE volumes? They agreed that a history of SOE's operations in Scandinavia would be the easiest to compile and was the least likely to provoke recriminations. The SOE's activities in the Netherlands had been largely revealed in the Dutch Parliamentary enquiry, but they worried that a history of SOE in Belgium might spark political embarrassment, while a volume on Poland would be difficult to write because the Poles had to some extent operated autonomously. A volume on Italy would be feasible, but the history of SOE in Greece and Yugoslavia would raise acute political problems. Since North Africa and the Middle East had been used chiefly as bases for SOE, the history of operations in those areas would be 'exiguous' and therefore deal mainly with the mechanics of control. (Privately, some knew the colourful history of HQ SOE Cairo was best avoided.) The Far East could provide material for a separate volume. But in the light of the various obstacles and costs, no official was keen to advance any more studies. In 1967, the programme was not moving forward.⁶⁴

Instead, it was pressure from those who had been on the 'inside', but who were now very much on the outside, that continued to roll back secrecy. In November 1967, the *Sunday Times* carried a series of detailed articles on Kim Philby. This was followed in 1968 by the publication of Philby's memoirs, *My Silent War*, offering salacious details about SIS both during the war and after. Philby had defected in 1963 and had been dismayed by his indifferent reception in Moscow and by his gloomy existence there. But his memoir, intended by the KGB to encourage others to follow in his footsteps, betrayed none of this and instead painted a picture of Soviet intelligence as, 'an elite force', against the capitalist bunglers of SIS.⁶⁵ This memoir produced a frenzy of newspaper coverage of SIS, hitherto a sensitive subject largely stepped around by British newspapers.⁶⁶ Intelligence matters had been discussed at length in the press and in books before 1968. Philby himself had assisted in the ghost-writing of the memoir of a key Soviet agent in Britain, Gordon Lonsdale, published in 1965. But Philby's own memoirs

64. Meeting chaired by Trend, Cabinet Office, 18 May 1967, CAB 103/569.

65. On the KGB's hopes to recruit further agents like Philby, as the result of the publication of the memoirs, see C. Andrew and V. Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB*, (New York, 1999), pp. 414–16.

66. K. Philby, *My Silent War* (London, 1968). For contrasting commentaries see R. Cecil, 'Philby's Spurious War', *Intelligence and National Security*, ix, 4 (1994), 974–90; E. D. R. Harrison, 'More Thoughts on Kim Philby's My Silent War', *Intelligence and National Security*, x, 3 (1995), 514–26.

excited entirely new levels of public interest and set different benchmarks for what might be discussed in the public domain.

In turn this fed the desires of the pressure group of MPs and Ministers who demanded more SOE history. After all, if aspects of SIS activity in the Cold War were now in the public domain, then surely wartime SOE was relatively safe ground? One of the more active was Douglas Dodds-Parker MP. On 13 March 1968, he visited Trend to lobby for further volumes. Dodds-Parker explained that he had been recruited into one of SOE's precursors in 1938 and had been assured on joining that nothing would ever be revealed. So at first he was 'a little disturbed' when the volume on France had appeared, 'but he now thought this was an excellent book'. Trend accepted his point that someone needed to interview survivors who were a diminishing company, and to record their recollections.⁶⁷

Pressure from MPs and veterans for further SOE volumes continued and in 1969 Trend's committee asked Dame Barbara Salt of the Foreign Office – she herself had served in SOE – to re-visit the possibility of further volumes and the quality of the available archives.⁶⁸ Salt's report stated that when the Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, had approved the Foot study a decade ago, a key purpose was to counter the idea that communism had been the prime factor in driving the Resistance. But this myth had now been slain and the value of underlining this seemed 'marginal'. Salt also wondered if the recent publicity given to Kim Philby had not diverted public interest into 'more up-to date channels'. Although authors sometimes applied for access to the SOE files 'à la Foot', these requests, she asserted 'are easily ridden off'. *SOE in France* had 'been admired by many historians' and had also delighted some ex-members of SOE and the public. It was a deeply impressive work, given the extremely disorderly state of the archives. It had, however, been 'bitterly criticised' by some veterans for giving the names of individuals and for passing judgement upon them with some 'asperity of tone'. Lord Selborne, the last Head of SOE, had expressed unhappiness about this, while some SOE hard-liners even believed that SOE should remain secret and wanted anyone publishing on SOE to be prosecuted.

What was the way forward? Salt looked at the possibility of encouraging a few chosen historians to work on SOE, publishing through commercial channels, and giving them some access to the archives, albeit with 'strict safeguards'. This had the obvious advantages of reduced cost to HMG and absence of vulnerability to legal actions. But this was rejected because there would be 'accusations of favouritism' that would be 'quite impossible to refute'. Salt warned that down this

67. Trend to Salt, 13 Mar. 1968, enclosing 'SOE Histories', note of meeting of 8 Mar. 1968, CAB 103/569. Trend added that they did not get onto 'any of the more sensitive points' which might have been raised, 'for which I am profoundly grateful'.

68. While in SOE, Barbara Salt had been awarded an MBE for putting out a fire in a cupboard that was full of explosives. I am indebted to M. R. D. Foot for this gem.

road lay an 'historical beargarden'. Continuing with further SOE histories along the lines of Foot probably meant a series of five volumes with large production costs and the additional possibility of further legal action whose costs were open-ended. Therefore Salt's report recommended some sort of single official volume that would be an outline or survey work along the lines of the original W. J. M. Mackenzie secret internal history which, being an overview, would lack contentious detail or assessment of individuals.⁶⁹

Salt argued that there were innumerable interesting episodes that could still be profitably covered in such an outline history. Italy offered a good example of the 'instructive and entertaining material' that awaited proper treatment:

There is the case of our principal Italian agent, run by the Swiss station from 1941 until the Armistice in 1943; this man was in fact controlled by the Italians who were thus in a position to know almost all of our attempts at penetration over this period and to lead SOE to believe that any accidents occurring in the Italian economic or military machine were the result of successful British sabotage. On the other hand there are many incidents concerning our BLOs [British Liaison Officers] which had had but little publicity, yet they show these officers not only as gallant but as virtual leaders of the Resistance: their example in the training and direction of often brave but totally undisciplined partisans whose energies would otherwise have been turned towards internal political strife, makes good reading.

Moreover, the basic arrangements under which the armistice with Italy was signed in 1943 depended on wireless communications through an SOE officer, Squadron Leader Mallaby, who had been captured on landing and then released at British request. In February 1945, the same SOE operative was again taken prisoner near the frontier with Switzerland and, on the spot, made up the story that he had come on a peace mission. This prompted an immediate conference with General Karl Wolff, the commander of the German SS troops in Italy. Wolff sent him back to Switzerland with an offer of surrender. Gubbins decided to pass the matter to the Americans, who were themselves putting out peace feelers to Wolff. But Salt was also clear that there were things that they could not mention. High on this list were the 'Pickaxe' operations, which involved dropping agents into these areas on behalf of the Soviet NKVD.⁷⁰ Dick White, who had served as the Chief of SIS (1956–68) and who had taken up the newly created post of Cabinet Office Intelligence Co-ordinator on 1 April 1968, was also in favour of a new history. He thought that a single volume of the Mackenzie sort would 'fit in nicely'

69. Salt Report, July 1969, CAB 103/570. The costs of the Foot volume are broken down in Annex A and are totalled at £42,885. There were certainly good offers to undertake further volumes. William Deakin was keen to write a history of SOE in Yugoslavia, Deakin to Reid, 27 Oct. 1965, CAB 103/569.

70. Salt Report, Annex D, 'Italy', Jul. 1969, CAB 103/570.

with a general official history of intelligence in the Second World War that was also being talked about by 1969.⁷¹

This was the point at which further official SOE history stalled. On 12 September 1969, Burke Trend chaired the critical meeting to consider Barbara Salt's report. Most of those in attendance were from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Permanent Under Secretary's Department (PUSD) which helped to superintend intelligence matters. H. M. N. Hollis represented 'Century House' or SIS. On one matter the meeting was clear: 'Generally speaking it was felt that never again should there be an official publication on the model of *SOE in France*, where the trouble and expense had arisen over personalities.' They agreed with Salt's conclusion that the best alternative was a broad 'conspective history' similar to the Mackenzie history. But there was no great enthusiasm for action, and so this option was seen as a 'reserve position' in case of further pressure from MPs and Ministers for more SOE history. Salt commented that in the meantime unofficial accounts by writers such as E. H. Cookridge might well 'scoop the market' for such a general history. The meeting also looked at the question of the SOE archives. These had been put in better order, but many records were still mixed up with 'current secret intelligence files from which they could not be separated'. The only positive decisions taken were to continue sorting the archives and to proceed with a small internal supplement to the Mackenzie History that would cover the Far East, and which would remain secret.⁷²

Accordingly, by 1969 further volumes on SOE had been put on hold. The experimental 'pilot project', *SOE in France*, had uncovered all sorts of political and legal problems, while the anodyne alternative of an outline history raised questions of cost, which some Cabinet Office officials were anxious to escape.⁷³ MPs, including Dodds-Parker, continued to press for more SOE history during 1970 and 1971 but were deflected with standard answers about the issue being under continual review and disorderly archives being sorted.⁷⁴ More importantly, Burke Trend, the prime mover in all this, was preoccupied with a new project – the official history of wartime intelligence – which was eventually undertaken by Harry Hinsley and his team.⁷⁵

71. White to Trend, 31 Jul. 1969, CAB 103/569. In parallel to Mackenzie, a secret internal history of the Political Warfare Executive had also been written, which has now been declassified and published as D. Garnett, *The Secret History of PWE: The Political Warfare Executive, 1939–1945* (London, 2002).

72. SOE (C) – 1st Mtg., mins., 12 Sept. 1969, CAB 103/569.

73. Child to Trend, 'SOE Histories', 9 Sept. 1969, CAB 103/569. C. J. Child of the Cabinet Office was a significant opponent of further histories. The Cabinet Office had paid for the Mackenzie history while the FCO had paid for the 'more costly' M. R. D. Foot volume. Child was keen that whatever the decision taken, the cost be borne by the diplomats.

74. Dodds-Parker to Heath, 6 Jan. 1971, CAB 103/567; Heath to Dodds-Parker, 25 Jan. 1971, *ibid.*

75. Child to Trend, 16 Mar. 1971, CAB 103/567. Child did not believe that they had the capacity to do both the Hinsley series and further SOE volumes at the same time and feared 'ghastly complications'.

The 1960s were an era of exposure, in which the British public, hitherto mostly ignorant about secret service, was inundated with revelatory material. The decade opened with a series of annual dramas: the U-2 spy-plane shoot-down in 1960, the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961, the Greville Wynne–Oleg Penkovsky affair in 1962, and the Profumo scandal in 1963. Hitherto many journalists had been inclined to avoid probing such sensitive issues, partly because they had served during the war. A more restless generation of writers was now emerging. Nineteen sixty-seven was a landmark year with the ‘D-Notice Affair’ in which the journalist Chapman Pincher revealed the clandestine British interception of much international telegram traffic, causing the resignation of Secretary of the D-Notice Committee. The ‘D-Notice’ or Defence Notice system, dating back to 1912, was a voluntary system designed to persuade Fleet Street to keep secret matters of national security. In the wake of this affair the D-Notice system was almost scrapped before it was rescued by its new secretary, Vice Admiral Sir Norman Denning. The Prime Minister Harold Wilson found the ‘D-Notice Affair’ especially embarrassing.⁷⁶ Four years previously, Wilson’s Labour Party had exploited Macmillan’s discomfiture during the Profumo Scandal and now the Conservatives, in opposition, enjoyed finding the boot on the other foot. Most importantly, late 1967 brought revelations about Kim Philby, which were the result of an eight-month investigation by the *Sunday Times* Insight team.⁷⁷ This was crowned by the sensational publication of his memoirs in the following year, which dealt in detail with SIS.⁷⁸ Whitehall’s attempts to control the Philby story had failed. The *Sunday Times* had ignored a D-Notice placed on the story. It also resisted efforts by Dennis Greenhill of the Foreign Office to persuade the editors to print unflattering material about the KGB alongside the Philby material.⁷⁹ It is hard to recapture the sense of shock and outrage felt by some members of the establishment at the public parading of these secrets. Accordingly, by 1968, the expanding flow of ‘outsider’ books and other revelations about secret service, had concentrated the minds of government on a new strategy.

Whitehall now attempted to swim with the tide. In 1968, HMG amended the pre-existing Fifty-Year Rule on access to archives to a Thirty-Year Rule, thereby making imminent the release of the records for the Second World War. The decision was taken to release all five years of wartime records in one go in 1972. The plan was to follow this

76. On the fascinating matter of Harold Wilson and security see: M. Creevy, ‘A Critical Review of the Wilson Government’s Handling of the D-Notice Affair of 1967’, *Intelligence and National Security*, xiv, 3 (1999), 209–27; J. Young, ‘George Wigg, the Wilson Government and the 1966 Report into Security in the Diplomatic Service and GCHQ’, *ibid.*, 198–208.

77. H. Evans, *Good Times, Bad Times* (London, 1983), pp. 41–57.

78. In retrospect, Philby did not reveal as much as he could have done. He was a visitor to GCCS’s very secret diplomatic code-breaking operation in Berkeley Street, but said nothing of this or of *Ultra* in his memoirs.

79. This episode is fully chronicled in FCO 73/76.

soon after with a limited release of sigint records, thereby deliberately unveiling the *Ultra* secret. But by early 1969 there was a growing feeling in Whitehall that a bolder gesture was required to allow government to recover the initiative and to restore the reputation of the British secret services. Recent revelations had not been flattering and morale in the intelligence community had taken a beating. The two key movers in this process were Burke Trend and Dick White. Trend was not only Wilson's Cabinet Secretary, but also fulfilled the role of friend and confidant of the Prime Minister. Trend was also fascinated by intelligence and saw himself as a champion of its cause within Whitehall. Meanwhile, Dick White was the official overseer of all of British intelligence. Both now felt that disclosures during the 1960s had changed the climate irrevocably, as well as dealing a severe blow to the reputation of current British intelligence. They were keen to counter this and urged an accurate and authoritative account of the major contribution made by intelligence to the winning of the Second World War.⁸⁰

On 26 February 1969, Trend was ready to move forward. He chaired a committee on 'Intelligence Activities 1939–45', which included Dick White, Sir John Rennie (White's replacement as 'C'), Leonard Hooper (Director of GCHQ), Martin Furnival Jones (Director General of MI5), Norman Denning from the D Notice Committee and various FCO and MoD representatives. Trend argued that a concerted policy on intelligence history was now required:

It seemed to him that a choice must be made between continuing to deal individually with each new 'outside' book in this field as it appeared (in which case the picture in the public mind was built up piecemeal, often inaccurately, and often bringing unjustifiable discredit upon those who were involved at the time); and, on the other hand, sponsoring an official history which would be based on unpublished records and would provide an authoritative account. Such an account would be a useful counter-balance to the distorted picture, which was now emerging, and enable a more restrictive line to be taken on any subsequent requests for access to the records.

All those present were agreed that some sort of officially sponsored history would be 'valuable'. This was partly because the existing official war histories did not take into account the importance of intelligence work and in this respect were 'misleading'. A new project would certainly allow them to steer developments, but they also hoped it would be a genuine and positive contribution to history.

Trend's committee turned to the practicalities of such a history

80. On Burke Trend and intelligence see: P. Hennessy, *Whitehall* (New York, 1989), pp. 217–18 and M. Herman, 'Up from the Country: Cabinet Office Impressions 1972–75', *Contemporary British History*, xi, 1 (1997), 83–97. On Dick White see T. Bower, *The Perfect English Spy* (London, 1995), pp. 368–9.

programme, presuming that Ministers could be persuaded of its value. Some of their decisions 'reflected their experience with the production of *SOE in France*'. They recommended that the work be undertaken by a panel of historians, rather than a single author, to 'reduce the danger of personal rivalry and public dispute' which a single appointment might generate. The work would have to be cleared, but they wanted to 'afford access to all the available material and then to scrutinize the resulting work before publication, rather than attempt to screen the material before access to it was given'. The latter course had been taken with Foot's work on *SOE in France*. Trend suggested that they ask Dick White to prepare a detailed report on the viability of a study covering the war period, defined as extending 'into 1947'. Proposals could then be put to Ministers, to the Leader of the Opposition and also to the Committee of Privy Councillors on Official Histories.⁸¹ Both Trend and White were already committed to this project, but in case others harboured any doubts, White's report spelt out the consequences of inaction: 'Unless plans are laid for the sponsorship of an official history, the waters are likely to become increasingly muddy, to the general detriment not only of the reputation of British Intelligence but also of security.'⁸²

Although the outcome that both White and Trend desired was clear, they did not find everything plain-sailing. On 12 March 1969, White held a meeting with Maurice Oldfield from SIS and representatives of GCHQ and MI5. GCHQ did not oppose such a history outright, believing that it should not cause problems so far as revelations of method were concerned. But they were anxious on two counts. One was that it might whet the public appetite for yet more revelations and 'generate pressure' for further projects. The second danger was that a detailed history might 'draw attention to the peacetime existence of the service through reference to individuals who had served with GCHQ continuously after the war'. GCHQ speculated whether the mere release of sigint records, which was already being planned, was not a preferable course, as it would 'create less stir'. GCHQ also raised the vital matter of consultation with allies. It might be difficult – though not necessarily impossible – to get the US National Security Agency to agree to such a history.

MI5 took a similar line: they were not enthusiastic, but neither would they oppose it. What mattered to MI5 was whether a means could be found of writing the history while preserving the anonymity of agents. Foot's *SOE in France* had named names and this made them nervous. They isolated several problems. First and most alarming was the possible identification of long-term agents by hostile services. Second was the adverse effect on existing agents' morale, since the identity of any agents,

81. 'Intelligence Activities 1939–45', mins. Mtg. 26 Feb. 1969, DEFE 24/656.

82. T of R, 'Proposed Official history of British Intelligence Activities in World War II', n. d., enclosed in B. T. W. Stewart (Cabinet Office) to Cooper (MoD), 4 Mar. 1969, *ibid*.

past or present, was rightly understood to be highly confidential and restricted to a narrow circle. Third was a 'danger that agents whose desire to write had previously been restrained by the Official Secrets act would feel little further moral or legal restraint concerning publication of their memoirs.' Again, would this project encourage a flood of new material from unauthorized quarters?

SIS were no less anxious about agent identification and objected 'to any mention of SIS in such a history'. Given the nature of their work, they were most concerned about the damage to 'agent relationship', insisting that 'above all the element of trust with agents must be cherished'. They added that Law Officers would also be anxious to avoid personal identification 'in view of the experience of libel actions arising from the SOE series'. All three secret services wondered about the possibility of producing two different histories, a small one that 'would be likely to make excellent reading and a good impression', and a more weighty volume of more specialized interest that would remain secret and be 'of real value for the intelligence community'. In part this reflected doubts about Trend's assertion that the wartime story would restore credit to the battered reputation of the secret services. They worried that the opposite might be true. If the full wartime story was told, the 'picture of a variety of uncoordinated assessing bodies, and varied chains of command in the intelligence organizations would have the reverse of a good public relations effect'. However, all three services assured White that they would be prepared to let a suitable historian and assistants, once positively vetted, 'loose in their archives'.⁸³

By the summer of 1969 no consensus had emerged. After reviewing White's report, Trend decided to offer Ministers a compromise proposal. Support for a full-scale history was weak, so he suggested a 'limited official history' to be published in some form or other.⁸⁴ Trend sketched out the difference between a limited history that would confine itself to 'what' questions, and a full-scale history that would delve into questions of 'how'. This distinction between a 'what' history and a 'how' history lay at the centre of Dick White's report. Public availability of a 'how' history that touched on sources and methods was regarded as anathema. Opinion was still sharply divided on whether a more limited 'what' history should be made authorized. Trend's advice leaned towards publication, arguing that HMG was under constant pressure from 'outside' historians for the access to intelligence material 'to enable them to write popular works, for which there is a steady and profitable commercial market'. He also raised the D Notice question, a matter which had a deep resonance for Harold Wilson. Trend thought it preferable to 'spare the D Notice system the strain' that a continued

83. Record of a meeting held by the Intelligence Co-ordinator 'Official History of Intelligence Activities in World War II', 12 Mar. 1969, *ibid.*

84. Minute to DUS (P) and Denning, 24 Jul. 1969, *ibid.*

policy of stonewalling would create. It was preferable to be proactive 'by publishing our own – accurate but controlled account' rather than always to be on the defensive. However, conceding the multiple anxieties of the secret services and the unknown reaction of Washington, Trend advised a middle course. A 'what' history should be commissioned with an open mind as to whether it would be published or not. This they could decide, having seen how it turned out. The 'proof of the pudding is in the eating', Trend concluded. On 29 July 1969, Wilson acquiesced: 'I think I am prepared to agree to the proposals . . . on the basis suggested, namely, keeping the publication option open.' Hinsley's official history had begun to edge down the slipway.⁸⁵

Consultation with the Opposition parties and with allies still lay ahead. Matters did not progress speedily. Not until 16 March 1970 did Harold Wilson write to Edward Heath, Leader of the Opposition, outlining the plans. He explained that a complete embargo on intelligence history was already hard to sustain and the coming release of wartime records would make this task a lot harder. Wilson added that a four-part history was envisaged, dealing with strategic intelligence, operational intelligence, counter-intelligence and strategic deception. No decision on publication would be taken at this stage. The authors who were being born in mind for the four volumes were, respectively, Peter Calvocoressi, F. H. Hinsley, J. M. A. Gwyer and Peter Fleming. Heath then consulted the former Prime Ministers Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan, together with Oliver Lyttelton, and all had 'serious doubts'. Given the scale of the work envisaged and the impossibility of keeping the project secret, there would be a 'strong presumption' that it must be published. This would be acceptable only if the history excluded the 'sources and the methods and techniques of intelligence gathering'. But none of the elder statesmen could see how this could be done. Heath did not offer an unqualified negative, but suggested that these objections were cogent and needed more thought. By contrast, Jeremy Thorpe, Leader of the Liberal Party, readily endorsed the project.⁸⁶

Trend clearly saw Heath's objections as a serious obstacle. He arranged for Dick White to discuss the matter personally with Heath to try and allay his concerns. But on the day that White was supposed to meet Heath, the date of the next general election was announced and the meeting was abandoned. By November 1970, Heath had succeeded Wilson as Prime Minister and Trend found himself in the position of having to sell the idea to Heath as his Cabinet Secretary. Trend re-emphasized the validity of White's distinction between 'what' and 'how', arguing that the proposed history would concentrate on users of intelligence, rather than on intelligence sources. Secret sources could be further protected by 'a special set of partially anonymous references'.

85. Trend to Wilson, 29 Jul. 1969, DEFE 23/107; Trend minute, 1 Aug. 1969, *ibid.*

86. Wilson to Heath, 16 Mar. 1970, DEFE 23/107; Heath to Wilson, 17 Apr. 1970, *ibid.*

Meanwhile, he insisted, the current policy of stonewalling was simply not working. This was the moment at which government officials were fighting a losing battle to prevent Masterman publishing his account of *Doublecross*. Trend noted: 'It is arguable that we should do better to try and anticipate developments of this kind'. Richard Helms, Director of the CIA, had already been consulted. He had raised no objection and asked merely to be kept informed. Trend assured Heath that this was the right course, although in the light of the doubts that Heath had expressed in opposition, it was only right that it should be submitted to him 'de novo' for his consideration.⁸⁷

Trend's trump card was Dick White. On 19 February 1971, Heath met White and the resulting decision was to proceed. Discussions were then opened with potential authors, beginning with Peter Fleming.⁸⁸ All the services regarded this as an important enterprise and gave it high level attention. Given that the project had a strong emphasis on sigint, Leonard Hooper, Director of GCHQ, initially decided to attend the Steering Committee in person, with Bill Millward as his alternate. Clearly there would be issues of detail ahead, but Trend and White had got their way and Hinsley's *Official History of Intelligence during the Second World War* was now in progress.⁸⁹

The five volumes produced by Hinsley and his team appeared between 1979 and 1990 and were met with acclaim by the public and by academic historians.⁹⁰ The depth of their research was self-evident and they went a substantial way to filling the gap left in the history of the Second World War by the previous policy of concealing *Ultra*.⁹¹ Although there were criticisms of the decision not to name individuals, this was regarded as essential by officials because organizations such as SIS would not countenance a history without such reassurances. Moreover, anonymity guarded against the threat of legal action. The appearance of these volumes was not entirely trouble free. When completed they required official clearance. Perhaps angered by the unmasking of Anthony Blunt, 'the Fourth Man', in November 1979, Margaret Thatcher forbade the publication of any further volumes in the series. As a result, Michael Howard's volume on deception and Antony Simkins's volume on MI5 were held back for almost a decade.⁹² The Thatcher era was a legendary period of Whitehall secrecy. Wesley Wark

87. Trend to Heath, 'Official History of Intelligence in the Second World War', 16 Nov. 1970, DEFE 23/107. By this stage Professor Michael Howard, Charles Stewart and Donald McLachlan were also being spoken of as possible authors.

88. Trend to Heath, 1 Mar. 1971, DEFE 23/107.

89. Hooper to Trend, 14 May 1971, *ibid.*

90. 1979 also saw the publication of the official history of the escape and evasion service, M. R. D Foot and J. M. Langley, *MI9* (London, 1979).

91. 'History of British intelligence: Ultra's shadowy secrets emerge' by Peter Hennessy, *The Times* (9 Sept. 1981).

92. Howard, 'Reflections', p. 241.

has captured the surreal nature of this historical 'Never-Never Land' in his essay on official records policy.⁹³

Thatcher's policy on intelligence memoirs was famously defined by the 'Spycatcher Affair' in 1986–8, when Peter Wright, an MI5 officer, battled to publish recollections of his 'molehunting' activities in Whitehall and Westminster. Wright attempted to publish overseas and was resisted by HMG, with the British Cabinet Secretary making an unsuccessful attempt to defend a policy of blanket secrecy through the Australian courts. Meanwhile, HMSO's publishing programme was in the doldrums and a decision was taken to approve two 'privatised' official histories of SOE which were produced commercially by Oxford University Press. These volumes were written by Charles Cruickshank, an ex-Foreign Office official, and dealt with Scandinavia and the Far East. The subjects selected recalled the Salt Report of 1969, which had identified the Far East for treatment by an internal history to fill a gap in the Mackenzie History (undertaken in the 1970s). Salt had also identified Scandinavia as pleasingly 'uncontroversial'. This assumption now proved wrong, for the Cruickshank histories were a pale shadow of *SOE in France* and Scandinavian historians went so far as to attack the study of *SOE in Scandinavia* in the pages of *The Times*. The Far East volume was no less disappointing and some saw privatization as a retrograde step.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, officials felt vindicated in their decision to look for a commercial outlet, thus avoiding government burdens of legal liability, when court action soon forced the withdrawal of the Far East volume from sale in the United States.⁹⁵

The end of the Cold War reduced the sensitivity of much of Whitehall's intelligence archive. Accordingly, the 1990s saw a flow of high profile archival releases rather than official history. With the Soviet bloc declaring a policy of 'Glasnost', the West needed to make similar – even superior – claims. This public commitment to openness moved in parallel with a desire to restrict information on matters which remained sensitive. Well-packaged programmes of document release allowed Whitehall to bask in a glow of 'freedom' and recalled the imaginative approach of Trend. In a remarkably short space of time, Margaret Thatcher's return to the 1950s 'stonewalling' strategy was almost forgotten. Yet the era of 'Glasnost' announced in London, Washington and Moscow in the 1990s had an ambiguous quality. On the one hand, it undeniably brought forth many thousands of new documents, many of which were fascinating and all of which were previously classified. On the other hand, it can be argued that this cloaked a more sophisticated

93. Wesley K. Wark, 'In Never Never Land? The British Archives on Intelligence', *Historical Journal*, xxxv, 1 (1992), 196–203.

94. When I interviewed Colin Mackenzie in 1986, he expressed his disappointment with the Cruickshank volume on the Far East and was advising people to consult Terrence O'Brien, *The Moonlight War: The Story of Clandestine Operations in South East Asia, 1944–45* (London, 1987).

95. Private information.

programme of information management. Certainly, as a result of the more generous release policy of the 1990s, the authorities were able to influence the agenda for archive-based researchers of secret service, with historians now occupied – or side-tracked – by the ‘new releases’.⁹⁶

By the 1990s, the secret services also recognized that the half-century that had elapsed since the Second World War provided a measure of safety. Always short of space, they were glad to transfer old records that looked increasingly inert. In 1992, SIS took the important decision to begin the process of releasing the SOE papers in its custody. MI5 and GCHQ also released large quantities of wartime papers, and have even released some early Cold War material. A further effect of Open Government was the issue of many hitherto unpublished in-house histories of intelligence, including the Mackenzie history of SOE written immediately after the war.⁹⁷ Sceptics might claim that releases continued to focus on wartime enemies and created the impression, wittingly or otherwise, that the main business of secret service was pursuing acknowledged foes, rather than maintaining surveillance upon neutrals, allies and its own citizens. However, whatever the pattern of selection, the deluge of new material has to be welcomed by historians.

Further SOE official histories on Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, the Low Countries and sea-borne missions had been commissioned in the 1980s, albeit only two of these had progressed to publication in 2003.⁹⁸ The SIS decision to permit historical work based on cooperation with Oleg Gordievsky and on the Mitrokhin archive was probably the most adventurous example of official support for the writing of the history of secret service that was seen during the 1990s.⁹⁹ The Special Air Service represented the most controversial area of secret history during this period. SAS activities in the Gulf War of 1991 were discussed in some detail in the memoirs of Britain’s commander and former SAS officer, Sir Peter de la Billiere. This appeared to offer a green light to various SAS soldiers, who then emulated their leader’s literary endeavours to the dismay of the Cabinet Office and the MoD. Once again a seemingly inviolable senior ‘insider’ had barged a hole in the fence of official secrecy and many lesser figures had scrambled along behind. Attempts were made to prosecute some of these ex-SAS scribes, but these were soon

96. See the article by Peter Gill, ‘Reasserting Control: Recent Changes in the Oversight of the UK Intelligence Community’, *Intelligence and National Security*, xi, 2 (1996), 313.

97. W. J. M. Mackenzie, *The Secret History of SOE*, (London, 2000); J. C. Curry, *The Security Service 1908–1945* (London, 1999).

98. Sir Brooks Richards, *Secret Flotillas: Clandestine Sea-Lines to France and French North Africa, 1940–1944* (London, 1995) and M. R. D. Foot’s *SOE in the Low Countries* (London, 2001). Richard Clogg’s *SOE in Greece* was commissioned in 1984 and Christopher Woods’ *SOE in Italy* in 1989; both are reportedly due for publication in 2004. The fate of Mark Wheeler’s volume on Yugoslavia is unknown. HC Deb. 28 Oct. 2002: Column 606W.

99. Knight, ‘Russian Archives’, 325–37. C. M. Andrew and O. Gordievsky, *KGB: Inside Story*, (London, 1990); C. M. Andrew and V. Mitrokhin, *Mitrokhin Archive*. (London, 2001).

abandoned in favour of new SAS confidentiality agreement, introduced in 1996 and upheld by the Privy Council in 2003.¹⁰⁰

In the twenty-first century, MI5 has remained ahead of its sister services in boasting an active and imaginative history programme. Working on several fronts, it has released more files, it has consulted widely about the future of its archives, and it has been conducting an in-house programme of interviews. In 2002, it announced the commissioning of an official history, covering the period since its foundation in 1909, to be written by Christopher Andrew and to be published on its centenary. Some may see this as the fruit of a remarkably enlightened policy instituted by a Director General, Stephen Lander, who is himself a trained historian. More cynical voices have postulated that secret services only allow historians to inspect their archives once they have been cleansed. We are unlikely to know where the balance of truth lies before 2009 and perhaps not even then. GCHQ has published an account of its move from Eastcote to Cheltenham in the early 1950s, but SIS policy on official history remains obscure.¹⁰¹

From the authorities' point of view, official history remains by far the best way forward in the face of awkward declassification problems. On the one hand, secret services are imperilled if they do not keep themselves hidden. Without a track record of intense secrecy, future agents will refuse to work for them, especially in countries where memories are long and allegiances are traced over generations. For the purposes of recruitment of agents, secret services know that a reputation for extreme secrecy is one of the most potent instruments in their armoury. Stripped of this, their morale plummets and they become ineffective. On the other hand, many historians feel impelled to investigate these secrets. In countries such as Britain and the United States, large secret services have formed an integral part of the core executive of government for more than half a century. To understand properly the inner thoughts and purposes of those at the highest level, it is essential to enquire into the role of intelligence. Accordingly, secret services will always enjoy an adversarial relationship with historical researchers on the outside who wish to achieve a comprehensive understanding of government. Official history, although bringing its own difficulties, offers government a middle way and an opportunity of making a positive response to the problems of policing the past.

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100. Sir P. de Billiere, *Storm Command* (London, 1992) was published on 14 Sept. 1992. Andy McNab, *Bravo Two Zero* (London, 1993) was published on 7 Oct. 1993 and was initially met with legal action by HMG. Tony Geraghty and Richard Norton-Taylor, 'MoD wins fight to gag SAS memoirs', *Guardian* (Tuesday, 18 Mar. 2003).

101. P. Freeman, *How GCHQ Came to Cheltenham* (Cheltenham, 2002).