



Blunt, Anthony (1907-1983)

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Anthony Frederick Blunt enjoyed a prestigious career as one of Britain's most notable art historians. His last years, however, were marked by shame and ostracism after public revelations that he had been a spy for the Soviet Union and had been the unnamed "fourth man" in the 1950s Cambridge spy scandal.

Blunt was born September 26, 1907, in Bournemouth, England, into an affluent family of Anglican clergymen. His grandfather was a bishop, and his father was eventually appointed chaplain to the British ambassador to France. He spent his childhood and adolescence in Paris, where he was introduced to the French Renaissance art that would later be the focus of his academic career.

Blunt returned to England to attend Marlborough School and, subsequently, Trinity College, Cambridge, from which he graduated in 1932. He was appointed to a fellowship at Trinity upon receiving his degree, and thus he remained at Cambridge throughout the 1930s.

During this period, Blunt, despite his privileged background, became an ardent Communist. In 1934, he traveled to Moscow, where he made his first connections with the KGB, the Soviet Union's intelligence agency. Upon his return to Cambridge, he began to recruit a number of his finest students (many of whom were homosexuals) for the Communist cause. Among these were Guy Burgess (who was for a time Blunt's lover), Donald Maclean, and Harold "Kim" Philby.

With the onset of World War II, Blunt enlisted in the British army and was commissioned as an officer. In 1940, he volunteered for service with MI5, the British counterintelligence agency. His purpose was to collect military secrets and pass them on to his KGB connections.

Apparently even after the end of the war in 1945, he continued to act as a double agent. Burgess, Maclean, and Philby were also strategically placed in various government positions that gave them access to secret information, and the four men worked in collaboration.

After the war, Blunt embarked on a brilliant career as an art historian and seemed to live a charmed life for the next three decades, during which he became one of the world's foremost art critics and authorities. In 1945, he was named Surveyor of the King's (later Queen's) Pictures, in which capacity he administered the Royal Family's extensive collections and had considerable access to the monarchy. He held this position until 1979.

He was appointed director of the Courtauld Institute of Art in 1947, became a Fellow of the British Academy in 1950, was knighted by the queen in 1956, and became professor of art history at the University of London in 1960. All the while he continued his contacts with the KGB.

His fellow conspirators, however, were unable to avoid detection. In 1951, Blunt learned from his contacts that Maclean was about to be arrested for espionage. Accordingly, Blunt and Philby, with help from the KGB, facilitated an escape for Maclean and Burgess, who defected to the Soviet Union where they remained

for the rest of their lives. Philby's involvement was subsequently discovered, and he likewise defected.

Because of the homosexual element of this scandal, British law enforcement found "justification" for increasing its surveillance and prosecution of gay men throughout the 1950s and early 1960s; and gay men in the United States and the United Kingdom were, as a rule, banned from sensitive government posts as they were assumed to be security risks.

Although British intelligence had long believed there was a fourth man involved in the spy ring, Blunt remained undetected until 1963, when an American art critic being scrutinized by the FBI revealed his connections to the Cambridge spies. The MI5 confronted Blunt with this evidence, but granted him immunity in return for his testimony.

Blunt's crimes were not made public, and he was allowed to retain all his posts and honors because the British government did not want a scandal concerning one so closely connected to the Royal Family, particularly in the wake of the Profumo sex and espionage case only months before.

Thus, in spite of acts that had severely damaged his country's military security throughout the Cold War, Blunt remained unscathed until publication of Andrew Boyle's *The Climate of Treason* (1979), which documented Blunt's culpability, but which, because of British libel laws, did not identify him by name.

Margaret Thatcher's government was quick to act on this revelation, however, and the Prime Minister herself divulged Blunt's identity in a speech before the House of Commons. Consequently, Blunt was stripped of his knighthood, his honors, and his appointments. He retreated from public life and died in disgrace on March 26, 1983.

The deeds of Blunt and the other Cambridge spies have become the basis for a variety of works, including Marek Kaniiewska's film *Another Country* (1984) and Alan Bennett's play *A Question of Attribution* (1991).

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