Before Goronwy Rees died last month he disclosed new facts about diplomat-spies to ANDREW BOYLE

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

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

Last November Rees was living in Charing Cross Hospital and in the hectic days following the exposure of Blunt, it was rumoured his knighthood by Royal decree and the all-too-public humiliation of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, the sick man—together with other patients—was blockaded by striking hospital workers with a banner: 'Goronwy Rees, the spy's friend, is here,' and 'Get well Goronwy—others can't even get treatment.'

But Rees himself, although close to Burgess, was never a spy, or a homosexual, or even a member of the Communist Party, and he later suffered grievously from Blunt's evil influence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Fascism for Guy was a way of looking at the world which seemed as natural and unforced as breathing. You can imagine my incredulously on learning some two years later that the odd man out from failing to achieve all that was expected of him academically, Burgess had inexplicably turned a political somersault, declared himself a Fascist and gone down from Cambridge. I had left Oxford by then to work on the Manchester Guardian, as a leader-writer, briefly meeting...
Malcolm Muggeridge about a week before he and his wife departed for Moscow, where he rapidly shed illusions about Stalinist Marxism as a short-cut to the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Burgess and Blunt, of course, also paid visits to Moscow; these were brief visits in the spirit of pilgrims, but very importantly important visits for all that. I couldn’t imagine why Burgess had openly renounced his Communist faith and reneged on his former friends and associates. It didn’t make sense. Only when, in 1935, he became editor of *London* did I hear his explanation.

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

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

"How can you be so certain?"

"I insisted. Burgess possessed a powerful Walter Mitty streak that you had difficulty in knowing when or if to believe him."

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

"After making one initial pass at me which I firmly resisted, Burgess cheerfully accepted the fact that I was not attracted to men as lovers. This didn’t stop him talking endlessly and often tediously about his conquests, of whom Blunt was one."

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

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

"I’m not seeking now to excuse myself by saying I was one of the 'ennemi profond' who allowed himself to be taken in. There were many of us who had a good deal of rebelliousness against the complacency and irresolution of government was justified, especially during the Spanish Civil War. But, equally, I was hopelessly duped by Burgess on the unforgettable evening he tried to lure me into that spy ring."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

One unforeseen event rocked Burgess's imperturbability: this was the Nazi-Soviet Pact of the eve of the Second World War, in common with 'Blunt and the rest, Burgess gradually adjusted himself to the cynical Moscow line and quietly went on working for the Soviet Union against the imperialists,' Britain and France.

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

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

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

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

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