

Intelligence and Spying

During the 1930s, three friends met at Cambridge and became part of the Cambridge Five as double agents for the Soviet Union. The three became members of the British MI-6 secret-intelligence service. One of the men, Harold “Kim” Philby, went on to become the head of counterespionage and was sent to work with the American CIA. While there, he passed intelligence on to the Soviets stating that the Americans had tapped into the phone system in Berlin, as he discovered through the Venona files.

Then in 1951, Philby warned his friends Donald Maclean and Guy Burgess they were about to be arrested and should defect to an eastern country. Philby tried to cover himself by turning in the two to the agency. The British removed him from the agency in 1955 to avoid an embarrassment. But then in 1962, they interviewed Philby about his spying, and he confessed in a three-day interview and then defected to Moscow, where he died in 1988.

The British worried that Philby’s tell-all book in 1968 would expose another Soviet spy that would embarrass the government. That person was Sir Anthony Blunt, who was not prosecuted. The other member was John Cairncross, the last member to be identified as a Soviet spy.

The FBI in 1987 understood that they had a Soviet mole in the agency and assigned Robert Hanssen, who was an agent from 1976 to 2001, to track down the mole. Hanssen in 1976 began passing information to the KBG. He was promoted to counterintelligence.

Aldrich Ames was arrested for espionage in 1994, and the agency realized information was still being passed to foreign governments. In 2001, Hanssen was arrested and convicted on 15 counts of espionage and given a sentence of life in prison. His arrest led to two other groups of moles in the 1990s, the Nicholson family and Edwin Earl Pitts.

The British and Americans place moles in charge to hunt down moles—go figure!