



SCIENCE MUSEUM SPY TRAIL – South Kensington spies

The local area around the Science Museum is full of spy history. A 1930s guide for KGB spies, now held in the National Archives, recommends South Kensington as a suitable base because of its good reputation with the police. See the sights of some real life spy stories with this local spy trail.

- Use an A to Z to find the streets for each of the locations given.
- Start from the Science Museum on Exhibition Road.

1: EXPLORERS, SURVEYORS & SPIES

Location: ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY, 1, Kensington Gore, SW7 2AR (main entrance is on EXHIBITION ROAD).

History: Founded in 1830, the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) was used as a front for spying when Imperial Russia and Britain fought for control of Central Asia in what become known as *The Great Game*.

In 1832, the society awarded its first Gold Medal to Richard Lander, 'for important services in determining the course and termination of the Niger'. On one of Lander's expeditions he was accused of being a British spy against the slave trade and forced to drink poison. He survived, but was later shot by ambushers.

The death of another RGS medal-winner, and later society President, Francis Younghusband, almost sparked off a war between British India and Tsarist Russia when he was presumed to be acting as a spy in the Pamir Mountains.

2: SENDING MESSAGES AT CHURCH

Location: THE LONDON ORATORY, BROMPTON ROAD, SW7 2RP.

History: Before the days of wireless spy rocks, agents passed messages remotely via dead letter boxes (DLBs). One spy leaves a message in an agreed location. Another agent picks it up later. The choice of location is key – it should be accessible, but not watched and there should be little risk of someone else finding the message.

In 1985, Russian agents were sent directions to a DLB behind a stone column inside the London Oratory church on Brompton Road. The communication was passed on to the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, also known as MI6) by Oleg Gordievsky, a Russian agent who defected to the West a month later.

Gordievsky also revealed a DLB in the grounds of the Holy Trinity Church behind the Oratory. It was located at the foot of a tree next to a statue of St Francis of Assisi.

3: DOUBLE AGENT RENDEZVOUS

Location: CAFÉ DAQUISE, 20, THURLOE STREET, SW7 2LT (on the corner with EXHIBITION ROAD).

History: This atmospheric café was founded by a Polish fighter pilot in 1947. It was used by teams from the Russian Committee for State Security (KGB) and Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) (and intelligence officers from other Eastern Bloc countries) because of the authentic Eastern European food and range of vodkas.

Double agents Oleg Gordievsky, Anthony Blunt, Kim Philby and Donald MacLean are all said to have been customers.

Blunt, Philby and Maclean were part of the famous 'Cambridge five' spy ring who operated during World War II and the early 1950s. Recruited by the KGB at Trinity College in the 1930s their later positions in MI6, The Foreign Office and MI5 enabled them to pass sensitive British information to the Soviet Union for many years.

4. SPY FACT TO SPY FICTION

Location: 50, HARRINGTON ROAD, SW7 3ND.

History: The Russian Tea Room formerly on this site was set up by the last Naval attaché for the Imperial Russian Embassy in London, Admiral Nikolai Volkov. His daughter, Anna, was a Nazi sympathizer, secretary of the pro-fascist Right Club (which met above the café), and one-time dressmaker to the Duchess of Windsor.

In 1939, she became friends with a young code clerk at the US Embassy, Tyler Kent. Kent gave her copies of secret telegrams between President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, which she passed on to an Italian Diplomat, before they ended up in Berlin. In 1940, an MI5 agent named Joan Miller infiltrated the Right Club and gained Volkov's confidence. Once a cosmetic sales girl and aspiring actress, Miller's work culminated in Kent and Volkov's arrest under the Official Secrets Act.

Volkov's arrest was witnessed by an 11 year old boy whose mother worked at the tea room. Called Leonard Cyril Deighton, the boy grew up to write many successful spy novels including *The Ipcress File* which introduced the world to Harry Palmer.

5: SCOUTS, SPIES & BUTTERFLIES

Location: BADEN-POWELL HOUSE, 65-67, QUEEN'S GATE, SW7 5JS (on the corner with CROMWELL ROAD).

History: Sir Robert Baden-Powell (1857-1941), best known for being the founder of the world scouting movement, spent 3 years in the British Secret Intelligence Service.

One of his favourite missions was when he disguised himself as a butterfly collector in what was then Dalmatia (now Croatia). Carrying a butterfly net and sketchbook he walked through the hills near an important fortress and hid detailed hand-drawn plans of the structure and its armaments in anatomical sketches of butterfly wings and moth heads.

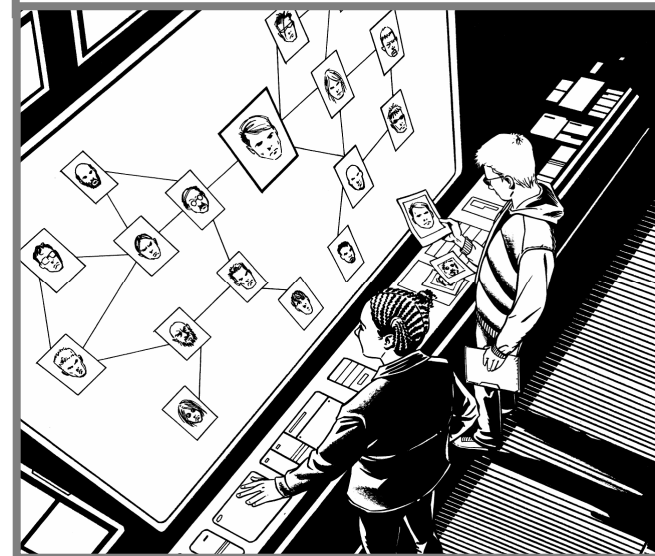
Clearly taken by the romance and excitement of spying, Baden-Powell suggests in his 1915 book, *My Life as a Spy*, that, 'for anyone who is tired of life, the thrilling life of a spy should be the very finest recuperator!'

5. GADGETS ON DISPLAY

Location: NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, CROMWELL ROAD, SW7 5BD.

History: Between 1942 and 1945 the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) sealed off several galleries within the Natural History Museum and used them as a 'demonstration room' for gadgets and weapons. The equipment included camouflaged explosives (with charges hidden in cow pats, rat skins and oriental statues), radios hidden in books and secret inks. There was even a working tailor to produce genuine German clothes.

In 2004 a plaque dedicated to those who served in the SOE was unveiled at the entrance to the Mammals gallery.



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