

Witchfinder

Also by Andrew Williams

FICTION

The Interrogator

To Kill a Tsar

The Poison Tide

The Suicide Club

NON-FICTION

The Battle of the Atlantic

D-Day to Berlin

Witchfinder

ANDREW WILLIAMS


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Things said or done long years ago,
Or things I did not do or say
But thought that I might say or do,
Weigh me down, and not a day
But something is recalled,
My conscience or my vanity appalled.

From 'Vacillation', W. B. Yeats

For Kate, Lachlan and Finn.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

THE SECRET INTELLIGENCE SERVICE [MI6]

Sir Dick White, *chief of SIS, known as C, formerly director general of MI5*

Harry Vaughan, *fictional officer assigned to the PETERS investigation, then a member of the joint MI5 and MI6 FLUENCY working party on the penetration of both services; former head of station, Vienna*

Maurice Oldfield, *chief liaison officer in Washington, then deputy chief of SIS*

Nicholas Elliott, *director for Africa based in London, then director for Requirements, former head of station in Berne, London, Beirut*

Terence Lecky, *counter-intelligence officer and a member of the joint MI5 and MI6 FLUENCY working party on the penetration of both services*

Christopher Phillpotts, *Oldfield's successor in Washington then director of Counter-intelligence and Security*

Stephen de Mowbray, *officer assigned to the PETERS investigation*

Clive Johnson, *fictional 'watcher', then A Branch MI5, formerly Special Branch*

THE SECURITY SERVICE [MI5]

Sir Roger Hollis, *director general of MI5*

Graham Mitchell, *deputy director general*

Martin Furnival Jones, *director D Branch, assistant director general and from 1965 director general of MI5*

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Arthur Martin, *head of D1 (Investigations), then MI6 Counter-intelligence*

Peter Wright, *scientific officer, then head of D3 (Research) and chair of joint MI5 and MI6 FLUENCY working party on the penetration of both services*

Evelyn McBarnet, *D1 research officer, then D3 (Research) and a member of joint MI5 and MI6 FLUENCY working party*

Patrick Stewart, *acting head of D3 (Research), then D1 (Investigations) and a member of joint MI5 and MI6 FLUENCY working party*

Jane Archer, *formerly MI5's principal Soviet expert and MI6 Section IX Soviet and Communist Counter-intelligence*

THE CIVIL SERVANTS

Elsa Frankl Spears, *fictional permanent under-secretary at the War Office, formerly of MI5 and MI6*

Sir Burke Trend, *cabinet secretary*

THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (CIA)

James Jesus Angleton, *chief of Counter-intelligence*

Raymond Rocca, *deputy chief of Counter-intelligence*

William 'Bill' Harvey, *CIA clandestine operations specialist*

Jack Ellis, *a fictional officer in Soviet Division*

Anatoli Golitsyn, *formerly KGB major, defected 1961*

THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION (FBI)

J. Edgar Hoover, *director of FBI*

ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE

James Bennett, *assistant chief of Counter-intelligence*

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THE ACADEMICS

Sir Anthony Blunt, *Surveyor of The Queen's Pictures and director of the Courtauld Institute of Art, formerly MI5 officer*

Sir Isaiah Berlin, *professor of social and political theory and a fellow of All Souls College, Oxford*

Goronwy Rees, *journalist and fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, formerly the principal of Aberystwyth University and an MI6 officer*

THE POLITICIAN

Tom Driberg, *a Member of Parliament and of the Labour Party's National Executive Committee*

THE JOURNALIST

Huw Watkins, *a fictional Daily Mirror reporter and friend of the poet, Dylan Thomas*

THE DOCTORS

Sir John Nicolson, *senior resident surgeon at Manor House Hospital, London*

Dr Walter Somerville, *consultant at the Middlesex Hospital, London*

Author's Note

Witchfinder is an imaginary account of the turbulent years in the British intelligence services that followed the defection of master spy Kim Philby to the Soviet Union. The story is based on real events and the role played in them by prominent figures in British and American intelligence. A brief chronology of significant dates leading to the defection of Philby can be found on page 457.

1963

6 March 1963

MY NEIGHBOUR SAYS his name is Roger and he works for Jaguar Cars. I think he's telling the truth.

'I'm Vienna,' he says, 'I used to be Rome.' Planting his forearm on the rest between us, he leans close enough for me to smell the in-flight brandy on his breath. 'Ah, Rome, what a city,' and he gives me a man-to-man smile.

To be sure he's the off-the-peg salesman he appears to be, I ask him about his business. Growth at last, he says. Jaguar didn't sell with the Soviets occupying the city, but Austria has been independent for seven years now and people are ready to spend: the new model E-type is proving a sensation.

'Have you driven one?' He pauses for my name.

'Harry. Harry Vaughan. I've seen pictures.'

'Beautiful, isn't she, Harry?'

Then he asks what I drive. He would love to take me for the price of a car in the two hours we're obliged to spend together flying from Vienna to London. I don't mind. I'm relieved, because Roger is Roger. He isn't a policeman, he isn't a spy: he's a burly car salesman in his late forties.

'What do I drive? Nothing special,' I say, which is his opportunity to convince me that I'd like to. Then he asks me what I do, how long I've lived in Vienna, and if I'm Welsh. I don't want to answer his questions. Roger, it's over and out. I fold away my table, settle my chair back and pretend to take forty

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winks. I won't sleep. I can't sleep. I can only teeter at the edge. When I feel I'm falling, a shadow thought of what may await me when we land in London is enough to set my heart racing. The cause I date precisely to ten minutes to nine on 30 January.

I was shaking snow from my coat when the station duty officer scuttled from the cipher room with a MOST IMMEDIATE message.

'It's in two parts,' he said, and thrust the first at me. THE FOLLOWING NAME IS A TRAITOR. Printed out carefully in bold on the second were the letters P-H-I-L-B-Y. 'Did you know Kim Philby?' he said, consigning him to the past already.

'Doesn't everyone in the Service?' I replied. 'His name was all over the papers a few years ago.'

Roger touches my arm. 'Are you all right, Harry?'

'Fine, Roger. Why?'

He shrugs. 'You must be pleased to be home,' and he leans across me to gaze down at the countryside shrouded in snow. 'It's colder than Vienna. Colder than Moscow, I shouldn't wonder. Worst winter for two hundred years, the weathermen say. How can they tell?'

Windsor Castle is at the tip of the wing and the air hostesses are preparing the cabin for landing. We're dropping over the skirts of London, over a chequer-board of black villages and frozen reservoirs, ahead of us the runway lights and a thick coil of yellow smoke rising from somewhere in the suburbs.

'The big freeze must end soon. It's March, for God's sake.' The plane's engines roar and Roger slumps back in his chair. 'I hate flying,' he says. 'Please, please me, Mr Pilot, a soft landing, please.'

So, I'm back in London to face the music. Briefcase from the overhead and Roger twittering at my shoulder, I shuffle towards

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a hostess with an airline smile. 'Be careful,' she says. 'The steps are slippery.' This hazard I manage without difficulty, but in the luggage hall there's a young man in a Marks & Spencer raincoat who may be one of London's finest – until he rescues his luggage from the carousel and leaves. I have time as I wait for mine to reflect that the word *paranoia* comes from the Greek for madness. I remember Kim Philby used to say, 'Just because I'm paranoid doesn't mean that everyone isn't out to get me.' He stole the joke from his friend Guy Burgess, who stole it from Marx – Groucho, not Karl. I expect it will go down well in Russia.

From the luggage hall I push my trolley to a newsstand on the concourse where I buy a copy of *The Times*. I know it's foolish but while I'm there I run through an old routine just to be sure no one is following me. It doesn't make sense. I'm home and on my way to see the head of the Secret Intelligence Service, but after twenty years of looking over my shoulder I can't stop.

'The Reform Club.'

'In Pall Mall?' the cabbie enquires.

'Is there another?'

The verge is hard packed with ice, the road awash with melt-water. Winter is retreating at last. Filthy London, this is my birthday. The date on the front page of *The Times* is 6 March 1963. I am just a year short of grisly five zero. There are no felicitations from my ex-wife and our children in the paper's notices, but Philby is on page ten. 'He isn't missing,' says Mrs Philby, 'he's on an assignment for a newspaper,' and there's a photograph of her showing a cable to jackals from the press. 'All going well,' imaginary Kim writes. 'I promise to send a letter and explain soon.' No one is ready for the truth.

My cab sweeps round Piccadilly into Haymarket and pauses in the matronly shadow of Honour, her bronze arms outstretched

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to garland the fallen. Ahead of us, the white granite column of the grand old duke who marched men up and down a hill in another war. We turn on to Pall Mall and pass the classical front of the Athenaeum Club. St James's Square is on the right – the home of the Army and Navy – the Carlton Club a few hundred yards further. Buck's, Brooks's and Boodle's are in the streets to the north, White's, Pratt's, and the Oxford and Cambridge Club, too. Princes and grand old dukes are dozing in their libraries, soldiers, sailors and the civil servants of a decaying Empire sip tea or gin, while in their smoking rooms businessmen are twisting the arms of clients-to-be. In an hour or so chaps from Parliament will show their guests to tables for dinner, and in the course of the evening any one of these clubbable gentlemen may rub shoulders with a spy, because we belong here, too. In a country of circles this is the one closest to the centre. Philby loved this circle, it was just the temptation to belong to an even smaller and more exclusive one was too great.

'Here we are, sir.' The cabbie has my suitcase on the pavement. 'The Reform.'

I pay him and climb the steps to the door where the porter takes my bag and follows me into the atrium.

'Haven't seen you in a while, Mr Vaughan,' he says. 'Still refusing to wear a tie, sir?'

'Only at the club. It's been six months, Mason. The Cuban crisis, remember? The world on the brink of nuclear annihilation.'

'Was it, sir?' he says. 'Well, glad to have you back.'

Mason disappears to fetch a key and my post. I take a few steps across the mosaic floor to stand inside the Reform's famous ring of marble statesmen. The atrium is like the courtyard of an Italian palazzo. Above me there's a gallery and a lead crystal pavilion that, on a bright day, refracts light into even the darkest corners of the club. Today is not a bright day

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but gazing up at the gallery I see Philby and Burgess step from the shadows to lean over the rail. Guy Burgess is drunk, of course, and fills the atrium with noise. Philby is trying to quieten him: members don't mind a chap blowing off a little steam but there are limits. Only Burgess doesn't give a fig for rules. He stands shoulder to shoulder with Philby in that secret circle within the country's inner circle, sneering and yet relishing its pretensions. Fitting that Burgess chose to spend his last day in London here at the Reform. It was poor Mason he asked to rent the car for him: the police recovered it from the docks at Southampton a day later. By then he was well on his way to Moscow.

Mason returns with my letters. I can tell from the envelopes that there's one from the bank and three from my ex-wife. I thank him, ask him to keep them for me, and, no, I won't require a table for dinner.

I walk to 'the office'. The cold helps clear my mind: why did I work myself into a state? But turning into Broadway my chest tightens again and I have to stand in the doorway of the Old Star pub to smoke a cigarette. Six o'clock. There's a steady stream of office workers pouring into the Underground station opposite. Most of them have come from the vast art-deco headquarters of London buses and trains – it dominates the Broadway – but I recognise some Service faces, too. The cigarette isn't helping; I drop it into a drain. Best get this over.

From the pavement, number 54 Broadway Buildings looks like the smart headquarters of an international corporation; inside it's a dirty burrow. Stevenson is still behind the security glass in the lobby. He peers at me through National Health spectacles, then asks me to take a seat while he rings the fourth floor. I choose the bench against the wall, opposite the security barrier. I scratched my initials on the arm twenty-three years

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ago and they're still there. Same cheap furniture, same dirty cream paint on the walls, same closed and dusty blinds through which daylight struggles to penetrate. Friends can't imagine it any other way. It's a hole-in-the-corner sort of business, after all. From the lobby a single iron lift squeaks and grinds to the fourth and seventh floors; friends must climb the staircase to the rest. Office wags say the stair is white-tiled like a urinal because only shits would think to work here.

Stevenson beckons – 'Miss Edwards' – and hands me an in-house phone. 'How are you, Mr Vaughan?' she says, with a warmth she reserves for only a few.

It is written that no man can approach the chief of the Secret Intelligence Service – MI6 – except through Dora Edwards. Twinset and pearls, precise, private, and rich, they say.

'Noswaith dda, Dora.'

'I'm afraid C can't see you, Mr Vaughan.'

'Now or ever?'

'If you don't mind waiting . . . I believe there's a little do for Mr Fulton in the basement. I'll ring down and let you know when C is free.'

Stevenson has already written a chit for me. Stated purpose of my visit: security check.

The basement bar is crowded. Most evenings it's haunted by the small self-regarding circle of old-school-ties and scraped-a-university-third officers, who think of themselves as the Service's 'robber barons', and entry is by invitation only. But tonight they're hosting a farewell bash for 'Soapy' Sid Fulton and his chums. He's standing at the bar with a couple of secretaries.

'Harry Lime, as I live and breathe. Gin? Two more, Linda,' he says. 'You've come all this way for me, Harry? I'm flattered.'

'We've always been such good friends, Soapy.'

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Fulton laughs. 'Well, I quite like you, Harry.'

He is pink with gin and bonhomie, so it would be churlish of me to call him a liar.

'Really, Harry, why are you here? Something to do with PEACH?'

I hold my hands open wide.

'PEACH? That's what we're calling the Philby investigation,' he explains. 'You know how it is when something like this happens. Remember Burgess in 'fifty?'

'Fifty-one.'

'Well, it's the same.' He sips his gin. 'Nick's the one I feel most sorry for because they were best friends for years – for ever.'

I follow his gaze to where Nicholas Elliott is perched on the arm of an old leather couch. The deputy head of the Service is telling him a joke. They look more like boarding-school house-masters than robber barons in their tortoiseshell spectacles and three-piece suits. Nick is one of many in the Service who fought his first battles on the playing fields of Eton and became a spy because it promised even greater sport. 'They sent him out to Beirut to confront Philby,' says Soapy. 'Nick was sure Kim was ready to confess – cough it all up – then poof! Gone. Didn't even tell his wife. The shit. The funny thing . . . he'll hate Moscow. Everyone does. You know how he loved cricket.'

Soapy knocks back his gin in one great gulp. 'Never thought I'd say this, Harry, but this business with Kim, well, I'm bloody glad to be going. Really I am.'

His declaration drops into a sudden silence like a cymbal crashing on a flagstone floor.

'Cheer up,' says one of the secretaries.

'Yes, old man,' says someone else.

'I will, I will,' he says, without conviction.

In an hour or so he'll be under the table – and why not? He's grieving. They're all grieving for how the Service used to

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be. It's a wake. All we're missing is music and a body. The body has gone, but there will be music.

'Remember this one, Soapy?' I say, settling at the bar's old piano.

*Though now and then, di di ah
The world may seem so blue
A song will see you through
Let's sing again.*

It's one of the 'keep bugging on' songs we were so fond of during the war, because most of us are of the finest-hour generation, the officers anyway. My song is well sung. I'm a respectable baritone – a matter of national pride, really. And to lift the gloom a little more I stride through my Fats Waller repertoire. Soapy is tearful with gratitude. A sentimental song or two and the past washes through him again.

'I *will* miss this place,' he says, and offers to buy me another drink. When it comes I raise my glass in a secret toast to the late Mrs Bugs, who used to slap my knuckles with a ruler when I played a wrong note. If only Mrs Bugs could have walked with me through life.

'Good for you,' Nicholas Elliott says, his hand on my shoulder. 'Cheered us all up.' His hand slips to my elbow and he steers me away from the group about the piano. 'How's Vienna?'

'Same as usual.'

'Soapy says you're here for PEACH?'

'I don't know why I'm here.'

'Ah. Well, you heard about Beirut?'

'Just now.'

He nods and tries to smile.

'Sorry, Nick,' I say. 'I know you and Kim were close.'

'Everybody seems to,' he says gloomily. 'He isn't a Communist,

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you know. Doesn't have a political bone in his body. It was a game. A nasty little game of lies that he played with all of us, his wives too.'

'I don't know him, really.'

Nick laughs.

'No, really, I don't,' I say.

'Nobody does except me, apparently,' he drawls, in the nasal way they learned at Eton. 'It doesn't matter. I'm finished here. I'll always be the one who let our greatest traitor slip away. The thing is, I think that's what the chief wanted to happen. He could have picked up Philby in Beirut – he sent me to show him the evidence instead. The chief gave Kim a chance to escape and he took it – I was just a dupe.'

'Why would he want Kim to run?'

'Imagine the embarrassment of a treason trial?' He shakes his head. 'Better to have Philby out of sight and mind in Moscow.'

I gaze at my drink, rattle the ice, until Nick realises I have nothing more to say and he's standing too close to me.

'How's Elsa?' He takes a step away. 'Still at the War Office?'