

Reviews

'Spycatcher': A study on alcohol consumption; MI5, MI6, MI drinking too much.

A forbidden book review

The following book review was written in 1987. It was submitted to the *British Medical Journal* who were unable to publish it because of the injunctions obtained by the Government, which prevented any direct quotations from *Spycatcher*. It was published in March 1988 in the *Irish Medical Times* in Dublin.

Following the loss of the Government's final Appeal in the House of Lords it is possible to read it in England. It is reprinted for two reasons. The reviewer draws attention to the heavy use of alcohol by some members of various secret services, which may have impaired their effectiveness. It is also of interest as an example of the remarkable lengths to which the Government had gone to prevent any publication of, or quotation from, this book. It suggests that the utmost vigilance and resolve will be needed in future to prevent further draconian limitations of freedom of speech. What is presented as reform of Section 2 of the official Secrets Act may end up as a strengthening of its powers. It bodes ill for the future of open Government if the following book review is the type of publication liable to be strangled at birth.

Spycatcher (The candid autobiography of a Senior Intelligence Officer).

By Peter Wright. New York: Viking Penguin. 1987. Pp 392.

There have been many reviews and accounts of Peter Wright's book *Spycatcher*, but I know of no medical scrutiny so far. The levels of consumption of alcohol by the protagonists have not yet been carefully considered. Peter Wright's early youth was ruined by his father's alcoholism and drink flows pretty freely wherever Wright himself is conducting serious conversation. It starts early when he describes his invitation to join the Secret Service. This came from Colonel Malcolm Cumming, a member of MI5 and later head of D. Branch. The proposal came over lunch at Cumming's club.

"Finally he ordered two brandies and turned to the purpose of his hospitality" . . . "I paused while brandy was served" . . . "Cumming cupped his glass and gently rolled its contents" . . . "Cumming drained his glass with a flick

of the wrist" . . . "Cumming tapped the side of his brandy glass gently and assumed an expression of surprise" . . . "After lunch we emerged from the rich leather and brandy of the In and Out Club to the watery brightness of Piccadilly".

Meetings between MI5 officers appear often to have been accompanied by alcohol. "It was the sort of meeting which began quietly. F. J. (Furnivall Jones) had a bottle of scotch on the table" . . . "That night F. J., Patrick Stewart and I went to my club, the Oxford and Cambridge, to discuss the interrogation: F. J. settled down into a corner with a large scotch" . . . "Arthur Martin was a former Army signals officer who joined MI5 soon after the war. Hollis had instructed Arthur to begin an investigation of the Deputy Director General. He had been doing this for a short time until he and I exchanged ideas . . . Arthur opened his desk drawer and pulled out a small bottle of scotch. He poured us both a small measure in his coffee cups" . . . "Furnivall Jones promised that he would make an appointment to see Dick White if I undertook to restrain Arthur from any rash course of action. I telephoned Arthur from my club; it was late but I knew he would be up, brooding over a scotch bottle. I said I had to see him that night and took a taxi round to his flat. 'I suppose you have come to tell me you have decided to throw your hand in too' he said acidly. For the second time that evening I settled down to a long drinking session, trying to talk Arthur round. He looked desperately strained. He had been seriously over-working since before the Lonsdale case, and was putting on weight drastically. His flesh was grey, and he was losing his youthfulness".

Alcohol is mentioned frequently in other contexts, for example when Wright visited Victor Rothschild, a former member of MI5.

"Hanley agreed to go with me one evening to Victor's flat in St. James'. I had one drink and made a tactical withdrawal to my club . . . The next day Victor rang me up. 'We must meet tonight and make our plan'. That night, over a particularly fine claret, we drew up our campaign".

On another occasion he visited the head of MI6.

"In the Summer of 1975 I dined with Maurice Oldfield at Lockets. 'I was called in by the Prime Minister yesterday', he said. 'He was talking about a plot. It's serious, I need to know everything'. I ordered another brandy and decided to tell him everything I knew. When I finished, he asked me if Hanley knew. 'No', I replied, 'I thought it best to forget the whole thing'. 'I want you to go back to the office tomorrow and tell him everything'. Maurice tottered up to bed".