

# An Alternative Cumming

How a relative helped crack a KGB bug puzzle and recruit a most controversial intelligence officer

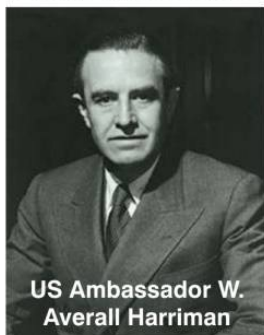


Long gone in Piccadilly - the 'In and Out Club'

**T**hough the name Cumming is synonymous with MI6, Britain's domestic intelligence service MI5, also had in its employ a Colonel Malcolm Cumming (joined in the 1930s via War Office) who would go on to recruit one of the most famous and controversial spycatchers and characters in British Intelligence history - Peter Wright of *Spycatcher* fame!

Wright was a scientist and navy electronics specialist. In 1951 he was approached by Cumming and other intel figures to try and solve a major problem for their intelligence counterparts in America. They had in their possession the puzzling device which the KGB had secreted into a carving of America's Great Seal and presented to US Ambassador W. Averall Harriman in Moscow, August 1945. This was meant as a good will gesture following the end of WWII. And here it remained listening for six years until a British radio operator heard conversations coming from the ambassador's office! After a

lengthy search specialists found the odd device in the carving and duly despatched it to London. After much research in determining how it worked, Peter Wright



US Ambassador W. Averall Harriman



The bugged seal was displayed at the United Nations in 1960 by US Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge Jr.

called Cumming and duly revealed its simple but effective operating system. Interestingly, the test to duplicate its function was first conducted in the office of none other than Roger Hollis at



33 South Audley Street, London

33 South Audley Street, London In later years Hollis would go on to head the Service, but Wright always believed he was KGB - a claim vigorously rejected by MI5 even today.

Back in the early 1950s, MI5 had no scientific officer and Wright pondered he might like to serve his country. Cumming duly invited Wright for a bite to eat at the 'In and Out Club' - a famous spy recruiting establishment in Piccadilly. Wright was told if he joined it would be as an ordinary officer only and initially rejected the move. He told Cumming MI5 would "get nowhere without a problem-solving scientist."



Peter Wright

Wright returned to his laboratory work in Great Baddow, but four weeks later Cumming made contact again and soon he was appointed as MI5's first scientific officer.

In *Spycatcher*, Wright makes it known that Captain Cumming loved to tell all and sundry within MI5, that he was related to the famous Sir Mansfield Cumming, though this must have been down May Cumming's family line.