

RCMP EYES ONLY

APPENDIX 4

William John VASSALL

In October 1962, William John VASSALL, a British Admiralty clerk, was convicted under the Official Secrets Act and sentenced to eighteen years imprisonment for passing classified information to members of the RIS. VASSALL's recruitment was based on homosexual compromise and his case is illustrative of the methods and techniques utilized by the RIS.

VASSALL first entered the British Admiralty service as a temporary clerk in 1941. He continued with the Admiralty, apart from a four-year period with the RAF during the war, and in March 1954 he was posted to Moscow to take up the position of clerk to the Naval Attache at the British Embassy.

Among the locally employed members of the British Embassy staff in Moscow was a Pole named Sigmund MIKHAILSKY. MIKHAILSKY made himself useful to many of his colleagues by obtaining railway and theatre tickets, etc. He was particularly popular with the junior members of the staff and one of the people with whom he struck up a friendship was VASSALL who was anxious to explore the theatres, museums and restaurants of Moscow. Moreover, MIKHAILSKY was also a homosexual and this, in retrospect, must have contributed towards the progress of his friendship with VASSALL.

In October 1954, MIKHAILSKY and VASSALL dined together at the Aurora Restaurant in Moscow. They found themselves sitting next to two Russians who, during the course of dinner, got into conversation with them. Both Russians spoke excellent English and before parting company one of them, a skier, arranged to have dinner with VASSALL a couple of days later. At this meeting the skier told VASSALL that a friend of his had just arrived from the country and that he would like to introduce him to VASSALL. VASSALL agreed and the introduction took place in a nearby underground station. The skier then excused himself and VASSALL accepted an invitation to dine with his new acquaintance at the Berlin Hotel.

On arrival at the hotel VASSALL was taken to an upstairs room where he was introduced to six or seven more Russians, all of whom spoke English. They had a lavish dinner after which VASSALL was plied with strong brandy. VASSALL felt the room become very hot and noticed that his companions had removed their jackets. His jacket also was removed and later he was undressed and a homosexual orgy with several members of the party took place on a divan. While this was going on the man who had brought him to the party took photographs. VASSALL was then helped to dress and finally sent home in a taxi.

In November VASSALL attended another dinner party at which he was introduced to a man who described himself as a journalist but who later proved to be an RIS officer named CHURANOV. Nothing improper took place at this dinner which VASSALL considers was arranged in order that CHURANOV could have a look at him.

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VASSALL continued to see his skier friend and through him arrangements were made for VASSALL to meet a military officer in March 1955 near the Kievsky Station. VASSALL went to the rendezvous as arranged and was introduced to the military officer by the skier. VASSALL accompanied the two Russians to a flat where they had drinks, after which the skier told VASSALL that the military officer wanted to kiss him in another room. VASSALL went into another room with the military officer who did kiss him. After about twenty minutes the lights in the room went out, the door was opened and the military officer rushed out. VASSALL, who was by then very frightened, followed and, instead of seeing his skier friend, was confronted with CHURANOV and another man known as "Nikolai". VASSALL was obliged to sit at a table with CHURANOV and his companions who interrogated him until about 3:30 the following morning.

During the interrogation they produced a pile of photographs and showed two to VASSALL of himself in shameful positions at the Berlin Hotel orgy. They told VASSALL that what he had been doing was a serious offence in the Soviet Union which could be punishable with a prison sentence. They asked him how he would like it if they were to show the photographs to Lady HAYTER¹ as an example of the way members of the Embassy staff spent their leisure. They told VASSALL that they could publish the photographs in the press to reveal how Western diplomats behaved in the U.S.S.R. They asked VASSALL how he would like his parents to know that he did this kind of thing. Later they told VASSALL that they would like him to make a statement. VASSALL refused to do this. They then told VASSALL that they would not let him leave the room until he promised to meet them again the following evening. VASSALL agreed to do this.

VASSALL met Nikolai and CHURANOV the next evening and they went to the Sovetskaya Hotel where VASSALL was again subjected to an intensive interrogation. During the interrogation Nikolai and CHURANOV told VASSALL that they knew that several members of the British Embassy staff, including some of the Service Attaches, were spies. They asked VASSALL to tell them who the spies were. VASSALL pretended that he did not know and they again produced the photographs hinting that they might cause an international incident if VASSALL told the British Embassy what had happened. Finally, VASSALL agreed to meet them again some days later near the Yaroslavskiy Station where most of the subsequent meetings with his Russian controllers took place.

VASSALL soon began meeting his Russian controllers at three-weekly intervals and at these meetings he was questioned about the activities of the British Embassy in Moscow and about the members of the Embassy staff. It was about September 1955 that VASSALL was told they required something more interesting than what he had given them

¹Wife of the then British Ambassador to Moscow.

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APPENDIX A

so far. As a result of the pressure put upon him VASSALL agreed to bring documents from the Embassy with him to further meetings. He continued to do this until he left Moscow. It appears that the documents were photographed at the safe flat and returned to him.

VASSALL's activities during his tour of duty in the U.S.S.R. were kept under close scrutiny by the RIS following his compromise and recruitment. All of his trips in and out of the U.S.S.R. appear to have required prior authorization from his Russian controllers. VASSALL's tour of duty in the U.S.S.R. ended on 2 June 1956 and prior to resuming work at the Admiralty in London he took a trip to Finland, Scandinavia, the U.S.A. and Canada. VASSALL visited an old acquaintance in Vancouver, B.C., and spent a weekend with him and with a third male who shared living accommodations with VASSALL's friend. The duration of VASSALL's weekend visit was spent at a summer cottage near Vancouver with these two persons. One of these two individuals admitted to past homosexual activity although he denied being a homosexual at that time (1956). These two individuals have been living together since 1949 and gave every indication that they were in fact active homosexuals.

Upon return to England in July 1956 VASSALL resumed work at the Admiralty. From 1956 to 1962 VASSALL was successfully run as an agent by the RIS and supplied them with numerous highly classified documents. His espionage activities, which severely damaged British secret Naval research, ended in September 1962 following an investigation conducted [REDACTED]

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