
Opening Extract from...

Stalin's Englishman

The Lives of Guy Burgess

Written by Andrew Lownie

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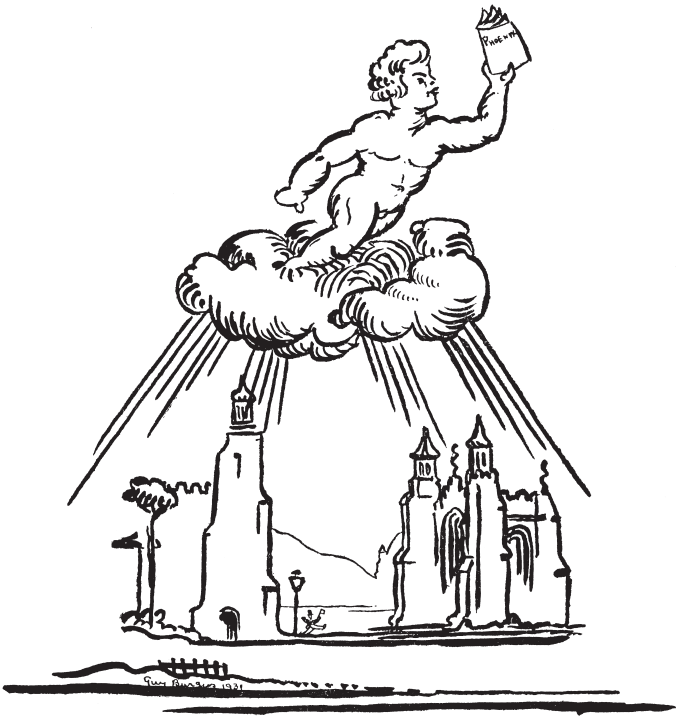
ANDREW LOWNIE



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Prologue:

Full Circle: Saturday, 5 October 1963

In the descending gloom of an autumn evening, a small funeral party has gathered in the graveyard of the church of St John the Evangelist, a Gothic edifice faced with knapped, squared flints and roofed in blue slate, which stands in the Hampshire village of West Meon. It is a pleasant, sleepy, ancient spot, where a succession of churches have stood since the twelfth century.

Around the funeral party stand lichened gravestones dating back more than four centuries. The buried include William Cobbett, the radical pamphleteer, and Thomas Lord, the cricketer and founder of the cricket ground in St John's Wood that bears his name. To the north of the church and about three-quarters of the way up a shallow embankment is a low grave with a cross, and it is here in the evening darkness that the funeral party stand.

There are just five of them. The Reverend John Hurst has been vicar here since 1950. Beside him is a slim man of fifty wearing spectacles, and with him, his wife and his son who is in his early twenties. There are three wreaths – the largest reads, 'For my darling, dearest boy with all my love, from Mum'. The elderly mother is too ill to attend. Another is from the man's brother, Nigel, who is at the graveside, and the third is from a group of friends. It is a simple service with no music, hymns or sermon.[1]

They have gathered in darkness to bury quietly the ashes of a son of West Meon – a man as English as this place in which he spent his childhood, a man proud and fond of his country, yet a man who was also a traitor, a man so unwelcome here that even in death his remains must be interred in secret.

'There was such strong feeling aroused,' the Reverend John Hurst would recall many years later, 'that I thought some reporter might

have followed Nigel down to West Meon when he brought the ashes, so I did not dig the hole for the casket till ten minutes before he was due to arrive.' As he places the small casket into the hastily prepared hole, the vicar experiences an awkward moment: it isn't quite deep enough for the ornate vessel. 'There was a plaster spike on top, of which the tip was just level with the grass, so I broke off the tip and put it in my pocket.'[2]

The dead man's ashes are placed in the family plot besides those of his father, who had died almost forty years earlier. On the front of the cross is inscribed: *Malcolm Kingsford de Moncy Burgess died 1924*. To it would now be added: *Guy Francis de Moncy Burgess d. 30 August 1963*.

Guy Burgess had finally had his wish and returned home.

I

Beginnings

Guy Burgess's roots were in Kent, but the family were originally Huguenot. This ancestry was to be important to him and he was to equate the flight of his Huguenot forebears to Britain for conscience's sake in the seventeenth century to his own journey to Moscow some three centuries later.[1]

Abraham de Bourgeois de Chouilly, with a minor title and connections at court, had arrived in Canterbury in 1592, aged thirty-five, to escape religious persecution in France. The family quickly assimilated themselves into Kent life, where, during the Napoleonic wars, the family prospered as bankers in Ramsgate and Margate.[2]

More immediately, Guy Burgess came from a family with a strong tradition of military service. His paternal grandfather Henry Miles Burgess had joined the Royal Artillery aged fifteen in 1854 and spent much of his career abroad.[3] In August 1865 he had married Amelia Kingsford, the daughter of a rich merchant who had settled in Lewisham, and they had five children, of whom the youngest, Burgess's father, Malcolm Kingsford de Moncy, was born on 13 August 1881 in Aden.

Little is known of Malcolm's early life – the 1891 census has him at St Mary Bredin, near Canterbury in Kent – but his career path was clear: he was destined for the navy. In January 1896, at the age of fourteen, he joined the HMS *Britannia* training ship, then moored on the River Dart near Dartmouth. Here he undertook a mixture of naval training and school work, ranging from navigation to French, but his school career was undistinguished with reports describing him as 'inclined to be lazy but improving'.[4]

In January 1898 Malcolm entered Dartmouth as a midshipman third class, at a time when the Royal Navy boasted three hundred

and fifty ships and almost a hundred thousand sailors and the British navy was larger than the navies of France, Russia, Germany or the United States. It was also a prestigious career, as the navy enjoyed close links with the royal family – the future King George V had been at Dartmouth fifteen years earlier.[5]

Malcolm's progress was solid, but not inspiring. He was just a junior officer on a large ship, which made it difficult to stand out. His position was not helped by the fact that he lacked social cachet in a fashionable service with a number of aristocratic officers and that a court of enquiry in 1902 had found him responsible for a collision between his own vessel *Thrasher*, and another, *Panther*. Though the court only admonished him 'in view of his inexperience', his career was never to recover. His captain's damning comment on his service record read: 'This officer's deficiencies in seamanship render him unfit for service in destroyers.'[6]

Then in March 1904 a court martial found him in neglect of duty when the flotilla signal book was lost from the battleship *Prince George* while the Channel Fleet was in Vigo.[7] The navy were prepared to give him another chance 'in any other class of vessel' and Malcolm thereafter served on a succession of battleships and cruisers where his reports began to improve. They were still not, however, the reports for a future senior officer and in 1907 he returned for shore training with the reserve – the kiss of death to a naval career – in Devonport.

It was in Portsmouth that the twenty-six-year-old naval officer married Evelyn Gillman in December that year. Four years younger than her husband, Evelyn was the daughter of William Gillman, a partner in a small family bank, Grant, Gillman & Long, based in Portsmouth and Southsea, which had been sold to Lloyd's in 1903 and had left William a rich man of leisure.

W.G. Gillman, named after the cricketer W.G. Grace, had himself already married money. His wife, Maud Hooper, whom he had met while travelling in North America, was an heiress from Scottish pioneer stock and came from a prominent Canadian family. A freemason, a senior magistrate, and a director of both the Portsmouth Gas and Water Companies, Gillman was a man of some standing in Hampshire. Evelyn, the youngest of his three children, had been brought up in a large home with servants at Rutland House, on the

north side of Southsea Common looking out to sea, before being sent to boarding school in Hendon.

Malcolm and Evelyn Burgess's first married home was 2 Albemarle Villas, one of a series of detached three-bay, stucco, two-storey houses, with wrought-iron balconies looking out over Stonehouse Creek in Devonport, built in about 1825 to accommodate retired sea captains. It was there that their first son Guy Francis de Moncy Burgess was born on 16 April 1911, to be followed two years later by another son, Nigel.

Malcolm was often away from home – some three-quarters of his career was spent either at sea or in a foreign naval outpost – so it was very much a female household with a housemaid, Bertha Oliver; a cook, Alice Poole; and a maid, Emily Harte – all under thirty. It meant that from an early age the young Guy Burgess began to develop a very close relationship with his mother and it was one without a balancing masculine influence.

Just after his thirtieth birthday in September 1911, Malcolm was promoted to lieutenant commander and at the beginning of 1914 he took command of the torpedo gunboat *Hebe*, which had been converted to a submarine depot ship, based on the Tyne – not the most glamorous of commands. It was on *Hebe* that he was to spend the first part of the First World War – in port, rather than at sea – servicing the submarines hunting German U-boats in the North Sea.[8]

In June 1916 Malcolm was promoted to commander and given command of the 6th Submarine Flotilla, based in Harwich, a post he held until the end of the war. The remarks on his naval record from his superiors are generally good – 'Very zealous and able and has been of the greatest assistance . . . a capable executive officer & good organiser' – but it had been a modest war.[9]

With the cessation of hostilities in Europe, Malcolm was made second-in-command of HMS *Hannibal*, a depot ship for auxiliary patrol craft at Alexandria, supporting forces operating from Egypt and those in the Red Sea, but this was not a prized seagoing command. Subsequently he was appointed to serve on the staff of the Rear-Admiral in Egypt, as the maintenance commander, living in Ismailia, Malta and Egypt until the summer of 1920. Guy Burgess

would later claim that as a small boy of eight he had lived in a villa at Ismailia, the main station on the Suez Canal, in the European quarter on the east side of town.[10]

Malcolm's next posting was a few months on HMS *Benbow* as the commander dealing with supply and administration, which included maintaining discipline and dress. His commanding officer was to write:

> The appearance of the ship has been very creditable considering the reduced complement . . . Is of good physical and smart appearance, dances and is fond of social life. Is leaving this ship at his own request and I wish to place on record that he has continued to perform his duties satisfactorily.[11]

Realising, however, his chance of reaching flag rank was now impossible, at his own request in July 1922, Malcolm was placed on the reserve list. His early retirement may also have been on health grounds and possibly disillusionment with the navy. His younger son had a faint memory that his father had been in dispute with a senior officer in Malta and, though in the right, had come off on the losing side. If true, this may have unconsciously affected the attitude of his first-born to authority.[12]

Not needing to be near the coast, the Burgess family moved to West Meon, a pretty Hampshire village of about two hundred people and a favourite of retired naval officers. The Burgess home, West Lodge, was a large, elegant, Georgian, bow-windowed house, with a roof of blue-grey slate and faded red brickwork, and a moulded portico with pretty fanlight. It comprised a dozen well-proportioned rooms, including a study and music room, elegant hall, five bedrooms, walled kitchen garden, a groom's cottage and yard, and eight acres of rear lawn, paddocks and woodland. The family knew everyone in the area and the children were often to be seen with their nursemaid, Olive Dearsley, spending their pocket money at Mr Tully's general stores.

Guy Burgess's early schooling is unknown, though it's almost certain he was taught at home by a governess, but in September 1920, aged nine, he left home for a boarding preparatory school. This was traditional for boys of his upbringing, but perhaps a

spur was his mother's ambitions for her clever son, and his father's wish for him to be subject to stricter discipline and have more masculine influences.

Lockers Park was a small prep school that had been founded in the early 1870s as a feeder school for Rugby, and was one of the earliest purpose-built prep schools in England. Situated on a twenty-three-acre site near Hemel Hempstead, it boasted a chapel, library, swimming pool, gym, squash court and rifle range, and was less than an hour by rail from London. It quickly became very popular, in part because of its healthy situation, and also due to its positioning on the route from London to Rugby.

At a time when even rich children often died from epidemics, it benefited from an endorsement from Queen Victoria's Physician-in-Ordinary Sir William Jenner. 'I have never been over a school more healthily situated or one in which the drains were more perfectly constructed', stated a letter which was proudly printed in the school prospectus, like a Royal Warrant, for the next three decades.

The most expensive prep school in England, it had also become fashionable in aristocratic circles, with the majority of boys going on to Eton, Harrow, Winchester and Wellington.[13] The school was run in a partnership by Tommy Holme and Norman Wood Smith, who had taken on the school only the year before Burgess came up. Lockers Park was a small school with just eighty boys and a strong naval tradition – one of Burgess's contemporaries was the Hon. Peter Beatty, son of the First Sea Lord, Admiral David Beatty. Another pupil, just before the First World War, had been Prince Louis Mountbatten, son of the Second Sea Lord and great-grandson of Queen Victoria. Burgess's father's attainments seemed modest in comparison. The boys were split between houses, called sets – the Navy sets wore blue blazers (Beatty, Cradock and Jellicoe) and the Army sets (Haig, Roberts and Kitchener) wore red blazers. Burgess, in Kitchener, was even at this stage a 'Red'.

Dress was flannel suits or black coats with dark grey trousers, Eton collars to be worn outside the jacket, and boaters, and the clothes list included two pairs of braces, a tweed cap, a straw hat and eighteen handkerchiefs. Fees were fifty guineas a term with music, boxing, shooting, dancing and carpentry extra. Parents were not allowed to

visit within the first three weeks and could only then visit on Saturdays and the first Wednesday of every month. Nor were they allowed to send sweets, but instead were 'to limit their generosity to *occasional* gifts of cake and fruit.'

It must have been a shock for a young sensitive boy. A Burgess contemporary, Peter Coats, heir to a Scottish cotton fortune, remembered:

> The masters at Lockers Park were at that particular time a repellent lot . . . One seemed to be a downright sadist and delighted in reducing small boys of nine, who had never been away from home before, to tears. He would give one what he referred to as 'clips over the head', which were cruelly hard blows, his tiny eyes gleaming and flecks of froth gathering in the corners of his mouth, making one cry with fear and impotent rage.[14]

Brought up in a female household, and, according to his brother, with an 'unhealthily close' relationship with his mother, Burgess found it hard to adjust.[15] A contemporary, Stanley Christopherson, remembered, 'I just kept away from him. He wasn't the kind of boy I wanted as a friend. He wasn't quite right.'[16]

The forms were arranged partly by age and partly by ability, ranging from the top A1 through to C3 for the youngest boys. Burgess began in C1 and immediately shone academically, with a final placing of second in his class. In his second term, he was moved up into B2, this time graduating at the end of the summer as top of the class.

After two terms in A2, where he had been second in the whole school, he moved into the top form A1 in the summer of 1922. He was just eleven and was to spend the next five terms there until he left at the end of 1923, second in the class. He was a conscientious pupil, consistently awarded VG for effort. And it was not just academically that he excelled. He took up the piano, performing a solo, 'The Spirit of Your Race', at a school concert in November 1922, and played at half in the school's second XI football in winter 1922 and in the first XI in winter 1923.

It was clear that Burgess, aged twelve, had outgrown Lockers Park intellectually, but he couldn't start at Dartmouth, where his father wanted

him to go, until he was thirteen and a half. A compromise was found to please his mother. He would fill in a year at Eton, so at Christmas 1923 Burgess swapped his tiny prep school of eighty pupils for over a thousand at Britain's most famous public school.