Declassified Documents Online: Twentieth-Century British Intelligence, An Intelligence Empire
“Britain began the twentieth century with an enormous Empire. From the islands of the Caribbean to the sub-continent of India, British government and influence reached across the world.

The British intelligence network that developed in this context included several permanent security services, the inter-agency Joint Intelligence Committee, and intelligence and security branches of many departments. In this collection, papers of five of these departments have been brought together to allow researchers access to the inner workings of an intelligence empire. Scholars have access to a wide and varied field of human, signals, technical and scientific intelligence selected for their geographical breadth and direct relevance to the collection and analysis of intelligence.

With many files recently declassified, this uniquely candid and detailed material allows unparalleled insight into the diplomacy, politics, warfare and conflict of the twentieth century. From personal files on African independence leaders to details of the French Resistance, these papers bring reports, analysis, personal and private correspondence, transcripts, telegrams, debates and decisions to a digital platform for exploration, teaching and research on a century of change.”
ABOUT THE ARCHIVE

Declassified Documents Online: Twentieth-Century British Intelligence, An Intelligence Empire makes available over half a million pages of British government papers relating to security and intelligence work in the twentieth century. The files include material from the Security Service (MI5), the Special Operations Executive (SOE), the Intelligence and Security Departments of the Colonial Office in the twilight of Empire, the Ministry of Defence, and files from the Cabinet Office including Joint Intelligence Committee reports, documents from the Special Secret Information Centre of WWII, and papers of the Cabinet Secretary relating to intelligence and espionage matters.

Much has been written of the work of such agents as Zigzag and Garbo, of Operations like Mincemeat and Overlord, of the breaking of Enigma in a hut in Buckinghamshire, of the Cambridge Five and of men disappearing behind the Iron Curtain. But behind these headline stories lay hundreds of people gathering, interpreting, decrypting, translating, analysing, transmitting and processing information over every facet of policy, strategy and diplomacy in Britain and the British Empire.

Number of pages
Over 500,000

Source library:
The National Archive, UK
Personal, Subject and Policy files dating from 1905-1978. The selected subseries of KV 2 holds personal files on subjects of Secret Service enquiries, whilst KV 3 contains subject files on espionage activities of groups or other intelligence organisations, including the only subject files known to have survived from the First World War period. KV 4 holds section histories and policy files.

These series include registered files, reports and memoranda of the Directorate of Scientific Intelligence, the Defence Intelligence Staff and the Defence Signals Staff focused on the technical and scientific interests of the British government from the Second World War to the decades of the Cold War and the Atomic Age. With files dating from 1912-2002, these series bring the coverage up to the end of the twentieth century, and include defence records on the Falklands, the Middle East, UFO incidents and details of Soviet weapon systems.

These are records of the Ministry of Economic Warfare and the Special Operations Executive (SOE), which functioned during WWII to promote sabotage and subversion, and assist resistance groups in enemy occupied territory, famously directed by Winston Churchill to ‘set Europe ablaze’. Records date from 1935-1988 and include histories & war diaries in HS 7, and headquarters records in HS 8.

THE COLONIAL OFFICE: INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY DEPARTMENTS:
REGISTERED FILES (ISD SERIES):
CO 1035

This series contains registered files of the Colonial Office relating to the security of British colonies, and intelligence on colonial matters and decolonisation, including reports by Security Intelligence Advisors throughout the British Empire. Running from 1954-1966, these files represent a vital piece of the intelligence picture of the global Cold War and decolonisation at the end of Empire.

The material in these series dates from 1936-1974 and shows how intelligence matters were considered, analysed, and processed through the Cabinet Office. Records from the Joint Intelligence Committee appear alongside Policy and Strategy files from the Special Secret Information Centre, and selected intelligence material from the Cabinet Secretary’s Miscellaneous Papers held in CAB 301.
Hermann Goertz – German Secret Agent

Hermann Görtz (1890-1947) was a German spy operating in England and Ireland before and during the Second World War. ‘Sabre-scarred and thick-set’ he was arrested at Harwich in 1935 and convicted of espionage for gathering information about the RAF airbase at Manston, Kent. Held in Maidstone Prison, he was eventually deported back to Germany in 1939, where he was employed by the Abwehr. In 1940, he was parachuted into Ireland in order to make contact with the IRA and enlist their aid in the event of a German invasion. Goertz was discovered and arrested in November 1941, and spent the rest of the war interned, being released and allowed to remain in Ireland at the end of it. He was however re-arrested in 1947 and issued with a deportation order. He committed suicide by poisoning and was buried in Dublin.

Eddie ‘Zig-Zag’ Chapman

One of the most infamous British double agents, Eddie Chapman was a professional criminal in the years leading up to WWII, he was arrested after burgling a nightclub in Jersey and was still in prison when the Germans invaded the Channel Islands in 1941. Recruited by the Germans as a spy he trained for a year in German-occupied France and Berlin, parachuted into England, and rather than disappear into the criminal underworld promptly handed himself over to the police and MI5. Interrogated in Camp 020 by Lt Col Robin “Tin Eye” Stephens – he was accepted as a ‘model secret agent’ and became Agent ZigZag, working with MI5 and faking sabotage to make it appear to the Germans that he had worked on his principle mission to blow up De Havilland factory – using ‘an elaborate system of camouflage’. The Germans awarded him the Iron Cross for this act, and Chapman remains the only British citizen to be awarded this German honour. This report contains details of Chapman ‘whose case is sufficiently interesting to warrant a somewhat full account in this brief summary’

Christine Granville

Christine Granville, a Polish countess born Krystyna Skarbek, was Britain’s first female special agent and one of its most prominent. She enlisted an Olympic skier to escort her across the slopes into Nazi-occupied Poland to deliver British propaganda and frequently used her wits to escape capture, once biting her own tongue to fake tuberculosis. Also known as Pauline Armand, Christine was the partner of Andrzej Kowerski, also known as Andrew Kennedy. Having lost part of a leg, he became the first disabled man to complete SOE’s parachute training.

2) “Mrs. Christine Granville.” Daily Mirror, 12 Sept. 1952
The study of Intelligence and security casts light on international relations and politics, on social conditions and personal experiences in a time of conflict and shifting global alliances, on the running and dismantling of Empire and on the secret operations and planning of global conflicts. The politics of today are a direct result of the events of the twentieth century, and the depth and breadth of information gathered by British intelligence agencies revealed in this product, from British communists, to African independence leaders and German Abwehr agents, allows scholars to follow the decisions and events that formed the world we live in.