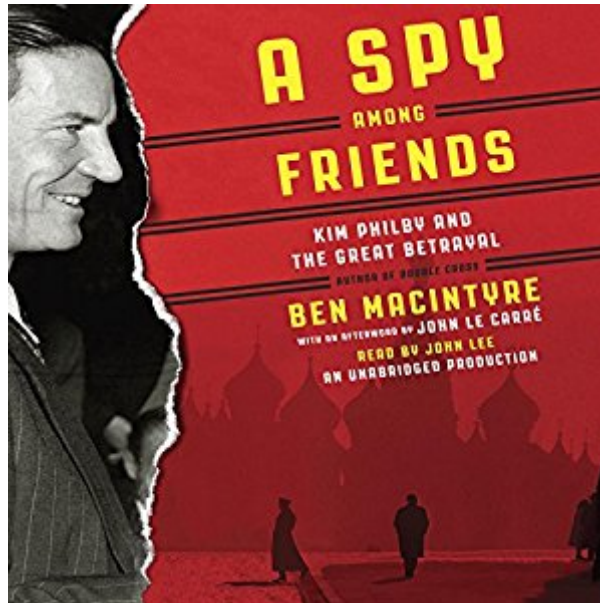




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A Spy Among Friends: Kim Philby And The Great Betrayal



Synopsis

Master storyteller Ben Macintyre's most ambitious work to date offers a powerful new angle on the 20th century's greatest spy story. Kim Philby was the greatest spy in history, a brilliant and charming man who rose to head Britain's counterintelligence against the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War - while he was secretly working for the enemy. And nobody thought he knew Philby like Nicholas Elliott, Philby's best friend and fellow officer in MI6. The two men had gone to the same schools, belonged to the same exclusive clubs, grown close through the crucible of wartime intelligence work and long nights of drink and revelry. It was madness for one to think the other might be a communist spy, bent on subverting Western values and the power of the free world. But Philby was secretly betraying his friend. Every word Elliott breathed to Philby was transmitted back to Moscow - and not just Elliott's words, for in America, Philby had made another powerful friend: James Jesus Angleton, the crafty, paranoid head of CIA counterintelligence. Angleton's and Elliott's unwitting disclosures helped Philby sink almost every important Anglo-American spy operation for twenty years, leading countless operatives to their doom. Even as the web of suspicion closed around him, and Philby was driven to greater lies to protect his cover, his two friends never abandoned him - until it was too late. The stunning truth of his betrayal would have devastating consequences on the two men who thought they knew him best, and on the intelligence services he left crippled in his wake. Told with heart-pounding suspense and keen psychological insight, and based on personal papers and never-before-seen British intelligence files, *A Spy Among Friends* is Ben Macintyre's best book yet, a high-water mark in Cold War history telling.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 11 hours

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Random House Audio

Audible.com Release Date: July 29, 2014

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00K5YXG70

Best Sellers Rank: #37 in [Books > Biographies & Memoirs > True Crime > Espionage](#) #61 in [Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Europe](#) #76 in [Books > Audible Audiobooks >](#)

Customer Reviews

Ben Macintyre is a great writer and, in this latest book, he has turned his attention to Kim Philby. This is one of the Cambridge Spies. Historically, this book may not offer much that is new, but it does tell the story from a different viewpoint; that of his friendships, most notably with Nicholas Elliott. In other words, this is not really a straight-forward biography of Philby, but focuses on his personality and on the Old Boy network that enabled him to evade detection for so long. The book begins with the meeting between Philby and Elliott in Beirut in January, 1963, with Elliott confronting his former friend about his betrayal of his country and trying to obtain a confession. He must certainly have felt betrayed personally too, as he had done much to protect Philby from earlier suspicions by MI5. This fascinating account looks at the early life of both men, their meeting during WWII and their career in the Secret Intelligence Service. Kim Philby was, from the beginning, a Soviet agent. Along with the Cambridge Spies; Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, Anthony Blunt and John Cairncross, he was so successful that his Soviet spymasters suspected him of being a double agent. As well as being a close friend of Elliott, he also became the mentor of James Jesus Angleton, an American and one of the most powerful spies in history. The Old Boy network which had brought both Elliott and Philby into the intelligence service meant that while agents were secretive outside of their immediate circle, they were horribly indiscreet within it, trusting on bonds of class and social networking to protect them. During this book, we read of Elliott's and Philby's career, and personal life, including the jaw dropping appointment of Philby as head of the Soviet Section. As the Second World War ended and the Cold War began, Philby was able to inform Moscow of exactly what Britain was doing to counter Soviet espionage and, indeed, their own espionage efforts against Moscow. There is no doubt that Philby's actions were an odd mix of defiant belief in the Soviet Union and an inability to take responsibility for his own actions. His passing of information to his Soviet masters led to many people losing their lives. Yet, despite his own reluctance to finally defect to Russia (he called himself a Russian but lived there as an almost stereotypical Englishman) he was insistent that he had carried out instructions out of a (misguided) loyalty and was seemingly untroubled about the, often terrible, consequences. Also, although he was constantly loyal to Russia, he rarely spoke of politics. It was as though, having decided on his beliefs, he simply put them out of his mind and stayed true to them, despite any conflicting, or disturbing, evidence.

As such as the disappearance of successive Soviet spymasters that he looked up to and respected. As Kim Philby's life descended into the drama of defection, Macintyre asks whether he was, in fact, allowed to escape. Would his possible trial have been such an embarrassment to the British government that he was simply given the chance to leave? However, the real core of this book is his friendship with Nicholas Elliott and the two men are almost given equal space. Angleton comes to the fore when Philby is in the States, and is important to the book, but the central relationship was Philby and Elliott. Personally, I found this a really interesting read and there is an enjoyable afterword, written by John le Carre. It is impossible to defend Kim Philby for his actions, but his story is both personal and as a spy is certainly larger than life. If you have read anything by Ben Macintyre before, you will know that this is not a dry and academic account, but reads almost like a spy novel. If you were not aware that it is factual, you would assume that this astonishing account was pure fiction but it is certainly a riveting read and another well written and entertaining book from the talented Ben Macintyre.

Ben Macintyre has consulted virtually every available source on Kim Philby and selected the best bits for this delightful read. No matter if "A Spy Among Friends" contains few startling insights there is always room on the bookshelf for well-written, scrupulously annotated research. Macintyre does highlight one thing perhaps not widely appreciated, though it was previously pointed out by Graham Greene: Philby was among other things an effective manager, a leader who inspired loyalty in his team because he repeatedly demonstrated loyalty to them. While it's true that he came from the right social background, that alone does not explain why for decades he was protected by the solidarity of "a chosen brotherhood." (pg. 185) What's more telling is that he seems to have been genuinely liked by everyone at MI6, even though they separately loathed each other. Philby may at times have suffered from having chosen to lead a double life, but I suspect he also took some pleasure in disguising himself without resorting to make-up or masks, simply relying on having the right background, a winning personality and conversational skills. A risk-taker without remotely being a Bond-like adventurer, he enjoyed deciding who would get to know how much of the truth, and which version of it. He must also have relished the opportunity to play God, determining who lived or died without his victims ever suspecting that he was the ultimate arbiter. "Victims?" one imagines Philby saying with Harry Lime "don't be melodramatic." Macintyre's new angle comes from his refocusing our attention on Philby's relationship with his closest friend and fellow intelligence officer

of Nicholas Elliott. Elliott was perhaps the most likeable member of the well-connected set who enabled Philby to remain undetected, if not entirely unsuspected. Whatever it was that finally convinced Elliott of Philby's treachery (the theory offered here is not entirely believable), it came as a severe shock to his system. Macintyre describes well how shaken he must have felt at suddenly confronting a truth he had so long and so confidently denied. The title of this book is "A Spy Among Friends," but a more accurate one might have been, "Intelligence Agents Have No Friends." For a more detailed version of this review, see my blog:

hamiltonbeck.wordpress.com

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