

Ref: A01192

MR. WHITMORE

With my minute of 11th January I provided notes, in question and answer form, about the various "spy" cases that might be raised with the Prime Minister in supplementary questions.

2. In the event no such questions were asked but the material remains available.

3. You will have seen the article by Andrew Boyle in yesterday's Observer, describing the conversation which he had with Mr. Goronwy Rees, when Mr. Rees was on his death bed. It really is a remarkable and disagreeable example of guilt by association and innuendo. It is said - correctly - that Guy Liddell was a friend of Guy Burgess; and from that it is insinuated first that he was a homosexual partner of Burgess and perhaps of Blunt and further that he was or might have been implicated in their espionage activities. It is also alleged that he was retired prematurely from the Security Service in disgrace.

4. The allegations are so entirely without substance or supporting evidence that I think the Prime Minister should stick to her line of refusing to comment on unsubstantiated allegations about individuals. But she could, if she wished, comment on the insinuation that Mr. Liddell was prematurely retired. As the Security Service note I sent you ten days ago made clear, that is the reverse of the truth: he was actually asked to stay on for another year after reaching the normal retirement age of 60.

5. I attach an additional "Question and Answer" note, in case this point is put to the Prime Minister and she wishes to respond.

RA

Robert Armstrong

21st January 1980

Q. Will the Prime Minister comment on the allegations on Guy Liddell made by the late Goronwy Rees and reported in The Observer for Sunday, 20th January?

A. I have read the article in question. It is all innuendo and not a scintilla of evidence; and of course it is no longer possible for Mr. Goronwy Rees to be questioned about it. I have already told the House that I am not prepared to comment on unsubstantiated allegations of this kind about individuals. Hon. Members will have seen reports of what Mr. Liddell's surviving colleagues think of these particular stories. For my part, I deplore the way in which some newspapers have, apparently without regard to the distress that they may be causing to surviving relatives and friends, published unsupported allegations and innuendoes about people who served their country well and loyally and are no longer alive to defend themselves.

On one aspect of the matter, however, I am prepared to make this comment. It is alleged that Mr. Guy Liddell was prematurely retired from his post in the Security Service because the Americans refused to work with him. That is not true: indeed, it is the reverse of true. Mr. Liddell reached the retirement age of 60 in 1952. He was asked to extend his service by one year, and he retired in 1953. So his retirement was delayed, not brought forward; and there is no evidence of any American unwillingness to work with him or representations for his early retirement. It is true that on his retirement he took an appointment as Chief Security Officer at Harwell; but that was a perfectly ordinary case of taking a job on retirement from a service career, and there was absolutely no question of demotion or disgrace about it.