# MI5: Official Secrets exhibition opens at the National Archives



The MI5: Official Secrets exhibition has officially opened at the National Archives in Kew, South-West London, marking a significant moment in the history of the United Kingdom's Security Service. This event, which runs from 5 April to 28 September 2025, is the first collaboration between MI5 and the National Archives, allowing the public unprecedented access to artefacts and documentation that have previously remained secret.

Sir Ken McCallum, the Director General of MI5, stated that the exhibition represents the agency’s ongoing commitment to transparency, explaining, "Having worked for MI5 for nearly 30 years I can tell you that the reality of our work is often different from fiction." He emphasised that the exhibition reflects the lives of ordinary individuals who undertake extraordinary efforts to ensure the nation's safety, saying, "MI5 life is about ordinary human beings together doing extraordinary things to keep our country safe."

Among the notable items displayed are artefacts directly linked to historical espionage, including a leather briefcase left by Guy Burgess, one of the notorious members of the Cambridge Five spy ring. This briefcase, which bears Burgess's initials, was abandoned at the Reform Club in London as he fled to Moscow in May 1951, fearing arrest for espionage activities. This is the first time it has been displayed to the public, along with Burgess's British passport.

Another significant exhibit is a 110-year-old lemon, previously unknown to the public, which was used by German spy Karl Muller for invisible ink during the First World War. The lemon was discovered in his overcoat when he was arrested in 1915, having been used to convey secret messages regarding British troop movements. This intriguing piece serves as a testament to the inventive measures adopted by spies during this tumultuous period.

The exhibition also features various other historical items, such as the first surveillance camera used by MI5, a Houghton Ensignette purchased in 1910, and modified talcum powder containers that concealed microdot readers. These items vividly illustrate the evolution of espionage techniques and the crucial role MI5 has played in national security over the decades.

The process of curating the exhibition involved years of collaboration between MI5 and the National Archives, which has been the repository for a vast collection of documents, with over 6,000 released since 1997 pertaining to the agency's history. While the exhibition highlights the agency's stories and accomplishments, it is noted that certain aspects remain undisclosed, as MI5 continues to uphold the necessity of secrecy in many of its operations.

Steve Burgess, head of events and exhibitions at the National Archives, expressed excitement about the partnership with MI5. He remarked on the agency’s generosity in sharing details that had not been publicly accessible before, adding that this collaborative effort has allowed for a more authentic portrayal of the agency's history.

The MI5: Official Secrets exhibition is part of a broader movement towards transparency within intelligence services, a shift that continues to evolve as public interest in espionage and national security remains high. Visitors are encouraged to explore the rich tapestry of tales that compose the complex narrative of the UK's domestic intelligence agency.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/news/mi5-official-secrets-exhibition/> - This URL supports the claim about the MI5: Official Secrets exhibition opening in the spring at The National Archives, highlighting its significance as a first-time collaboration between MI5 and the National Archives.
* <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/mi5-official-secrets> - This URL provides information on the exhibition's dates and accessibility, as well as the variety of historical espionage-related items on display, aligning with the article about the exhibition's content.
* <https://tinctureofmuseum.wordpress.com/2025/04/02/the-lemon-is-in-play-mi5-official-secrets-the-national-archives-april-2025/> - This blog post mentions the opening of the MI5: Official Secrets exhibition, corroborating details about its dates and the intriguing items featured, such as the historical lemon used for invisible ink.
* <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/news/mi5-official-secrets-exhibition/> - This article also quotes Sir Ken McCallum and highlights the significance of the exhibition in showcasing MI5's history and role in national security.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - Given the source mentioned as Noah Wire Services, this URL is referenced as the original source of the article about the MI5: Official Secrets exhibition. However, specific details within the article need corroboration from other sources.
* <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/mi5-official-secrets> - This URL supports the claim about the exhibition offering a glimpse into MI5's history, showcasing historical artefacts and documents, and providing insights into espionage methods and national security.