

## Transcript of the Dame Stella Rimington Interview

**Andrew Marr:** And you entered the intelligence services at the time of the Cold War was still going on, I'm just wondering which novels and how and why they mirrored the experience of the world that you discovered then?

**Dame Stella Rimington:** When I joined MI5, which was in fact rather strange. I joined MI5 in India quite by accident actually. I was in India, having giving up my previous career, with my husband who was a diplomat, and one day somebody sidled up to me in the British High Commissioner compound, tapped me on the shoulder and offered me a job as a parttime clerk typist. And it wasn't until I went into the office to see what this job was all about that I discovered I'd joined MI5. So that was not quite the normal way. But then when we came back to Britain, I decided that this looked possibly like rather an interesting career. More interesting than my previous career, which had been as a historical archivist, I applied for a job and I started off in MI5's headquarters in London in, I suppose it was, early, no, in the middle of 1969, and it was a bit like John Le Carre's Circus.

**Andrew Marr:** Tell us a bit about that, because he goes on it's always cold in John Le Carré novels. Wherever you're it's cold. It's kind of beige, it's a bit battered and there's a smell of cigarette smoke, and lots of kind of slightly pouchy, mutually suspicious old men glaring at each other. Was it a bit like that?

**Dame Stella Rimington:** Not quite like that, but it was certainly gloomy. Our first headquarters was in a building called Leconfield House, which was at the top of Curzon Street, and it was grubby. And it was divided up into small rooms by cardboard partitions. And we sort of looked out of these grubby windows across the road at all the gambling clubs and things that were going on on the other side and rather marvelled that there was another world out there. But it was, it was a very inward looking, closed sort of organisation. It was male dominated, I have to say, and I was one of a number of women with degrees and previous careers who had joined. But when we joined we realised that we had joined to a sort of second-class career structure. Because, although this was a civilian organisation, the men were the officers and the women were the other ranks, and we were there to help the men, you know.

**Andrew Marr:** Very hierarchical.

**Dame Stella Rimington:** Yes, very hierarchical, but I mean we are talking about the 1970s. So it was not quite what I'd imagined it was going to be, but nevertheless we did break through in the end.