

Dame Stella Rimmington - Hon LLD (Honorary Doctor of Laws)

Mr Vice-Chancellor,

Today, we honour Dame Stella Rimmington, author of ten books and former Director of the UK Security Service, otherwise known as MI5.

Stella Rimmington is Britain's most famous security chief, the first woman to run MI5 and the first Director General to be publicly named. Her long career, which covered more than a quarter of century took her into all the most important branches of the security service. These included counter-espionage against the Russians and counter-terrorism against the IRA.

She transformed her service – moving it out of the shadows and into the spotlight – quite literally. In 1994, to the undisguised horror of stuffy Home Office bureaucrats, she agreed to give the 20th BBC Dimbleby lecture in 1994, choosing to speak about the relationship between security and democracy. She argued that security agencies that were both accountable and that obeyed the law improved the quality of democratic governance and protected its freedom giving institutions. Appearing at a moment when intelligence and security agencies were being given a new parliamentary oversight body - this was a decisive step and signalled a different approach.

She was also the first intelligence and security chief to publish a memoir – again to the disquiet of more traditional minds in the Home Office. Called “Open Secret” her personal account knits together the fascinating story of key security events and social changes of the second half of the 20th century. It captures the stuffy organisation called MI5 that she joined in the 1970s, full of florid former colonels and colonial civil servants. It also looks forward to the organisation that she tried to create, characterised by partnership with the general public. This new spirit culminated in a remarkable official history of MI5 that covers events from 1909 to the present day. No other security service in the world has achieved this.

Dame Stella also began ongoing programme of releasing MI5 material to the National Archives. Thousands of hitherto top secret MI5 files have now made their way there and are available for members of the public to read as they wish.

They tell the fascinating story wartime deception against and of battles with Russian spies in London. This declassified material has advanced the academic study of intelligence and is now being used by staff and students alike at the University of Warwick.

In December 1991, with the end of the Cold War, she made a visit to Moscow to make the first friendly contact between the British intelligence services and their old enemies the KGB. Thereafter, one of her tasks as the new chief was to promote ideas of accountability and lawfulness to East European security services that had previously been part of the Soviet Empire. Many former Eastern Bloc countries have followed the UK's lead and have written key sections of the European Convention on Human Rights into their security legislation. Since then she has regularly offered her views on security matters - including vehement criticism of the idea of UK identity cards.

Dame Stella's memoirs, were followed in July 2004 by her first novel, "At Risk", about a female intelligence officer, "Liz Carlyle". Her eight further novels have now appeared and she speaks regularly at top literary festivals. Her novels are part of a tradition of "insider" spy fiction written by former intelligence officers, from John Buchan to John LeCarre. Accordingly, in 2011 she was chair of the judges for the Man Booker Prize. She and her fellow judges famously focused on "readability". During her forthright speech at the Booker ceremony she compared dreary professional British literary critics to the KGB.

Stella Rimington has never been afraid to speak her mind. She has helped to transform her service at a fascinating moment in international history, preparing it for challenging times ahead. Creating a security service that is simultaneously effective and accountable is difficult and Britain is widely admired around the world for what it has been achieved.

Committed to transparency and freedom, and with a heart of novelist. Mr Vice-Chancellor, in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, *Dame Stella Rimington*.