



Dame Stella Rimington DCB nee Whitehouse 1935- 2025

Director General of MI5, Writer

Stella was born in south London but the family moved out of London during WW2 firstly to Essex but also to Wallasey where she attended Crosland Convent School. When her father worked in Ilkeston the family moved there and she attended Nottingham Girls' High School. She studied English at Edinburgh university and then archive administration at Liverpool university.

She started her working life as an archivist in Worcester. In 1963 she married John, whom she had met in Nottingham as well as knowing him in Edinburgh and they moved to London, where she successfully applied for a position at the India Office Library. In 1965, her husband was offered an overseas posting as First Secretary (Economic) for the British High Commission in New Delhi, India, and the couple sailed to India in September. In 1967, after two years in India, Rimington was asked to assist one of the First Secretaries at the High Commission, she agreed, and then discovered that he was the representative in India of the British Security Service- MI5. Stella gained her security clearance, and worked in the MI5 office for nearly two years, until she and her husband returned to London in 1969, and she applied for a permanent position at MI5.

Between 1969 and 1990, Rimington worked in all three branches of the Security Service: counter-espionage, counter-subversion, and counter-terrorism. In 1990, she was promoted to one of the two Deputy Director General positions, where she oversaw MI5's move to Thames House. In December 1991, she made a visit to Moscow to make the first friendly contact between British intelligence services and their old enemies the KGB. On her return from Russia she was told she had been promoted to Director General.

In her first months as Director General, she was subject to a determined campaign by the British press to identify her, with covert photographs of her published. She went on to oversee a public relations campaign to improve the openness of MI5 and

increase public transparency. On 16 July 1993, MI5 published a 36-page booklet titled *The Security Service*, which revealed publicly, for the first time, details of MI5's activities, operations and duties, as well as the identity and even photographs of Stella Rimington as Director General.

She retired from MI5 in 1996 and was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the Bath (DCB) in the 1996 New Year Honours. Her role in the service was considered a model for Dame Judi Dench's portrayal of M in the James Bond series starting in *GoldenEye*.

After leaving MI5 she was a non-executive director for companies such as Marks & Spencer and BG Group. She published her memoirs, entitled *Open Secret*, in 2001. In 2004, her first novel, *At Risk*, about a female intelligence officer, Liz Carlyle, was published. A series of further 9 novels followed. She continued her interest in archives, fostered by her early career, through involvement with the Archives Task Force, where she visited a number of archives throughout the country and contributed to the report for the future strategy of archives in the UK. In 2009, Rimington received an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Social Science from Nottingham Trent University in recognition of her support for openness about the work of the secret service.

She was chair of the judges for the 2011 Man Booker Prize. She and her fellow judges were widely criticised for focusing on "readability" rather than literary quality. Rimington responded during her speech at the Booker ceremony with a "diatribe" in which she compared British literary critics to the KGB.

In 1984, she separated from her husband with whom she had two daughters and in later life they reconciled, living together during the COVID lockdown of 2021.

She died on 3 August 2025, at the age of 90.