

BEING CARLETON (I)

Hugh Carleton Greene used his middle name throughout his career to distinguish himself from the other Hugh Green, the patron saint of insincere sincerity better known as Hughie, who was already famous long before Carleton Greene took command of the BBC. If anything, the gameshow host with the face of an evil John Lithgow should have changed his.

Greene was born Hertfordshire in 1910, as the youngest of six children to the headmaster of Berkhamsted School, Charles Greene, and his wife Marion Raymond, who also happened to be his cousin. His siblings, mostly brothers, included Raymond Greene, the doctor and adventurer who climbed not quite all the way up Mount Everest and treated Charles de Gaulle, and most prominently Henry Graham, spymaster, novelist and eventual Nobel shortlister, who like Hugh used his middle name, but unlike him used it in lieu of his first.

Greene's education came at Berkhamsted School (not coincidentally) and Merton College, Oxford, where he obtained a second in Classics and English - the usual qualifications required to pursue a career in journalism, which he did. Not in Britain, however, but in Germany, where he'd spent his gap year. That would have been in the dying days of the Weimar Republic. Now he embedded himself in Munich as a correspondent for the likes of the Daily Herald and New Statesman just in time for the rise to power of the Nazis. By 1934 he was even closer to the action, working in Berlin for the Daily Telegraph, watching appalled as Hitler made the country over in his own image while gradually absorbing surrounding parts of Europe.

By 1939 he was the Telegraph's chief correspondent in Germany, but not for long: in May, one of his German counterparts, Rudolf Rösler, was expelled from Britain for spying, and although Greene wasn't doing anything similar himself he found himself banished under the principle of tit-for-tat. Greene may have considered himself better off out of it, except that in the event he was posted to Warsaw, so in practice he was neither.

Inevitably Greene was legging it out of Poland after four months, and subsequently spent the first few months of World War II flitting through the continent trying to stay one step ahead of the Nazis. It wasn't a particularly phoney war for him, filing reports for the Telegraph from Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, the Netherlands, and Belgium before finally ending up in France. He narrowly managed to escape Paris before the German tanks rolled in and finally made it back to Britain in June 1940, by which time it was almost the only non-fascist country left in Western Europe.

He briefly swapped the Telegraph for RAF intelligence, before the BBC got wind of his almost unprecedented experience of European journalism in general and Germany in particular going to waste on some planes, and poached him out of the armed forces to become News Editor of the Overseas Service's German section - from London, obviously.

Once the war was over, Greene returned to Germany, this time at the behest of the Government, to rebuild the broadcasting industry in the conquered nation, or its British Zone at least. This was where we first met him in this chronicle, establishing Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk along the lines of the BBC, before hopping back to Britain in time for the Soviets to start sabre-rattling and helping to create the East Zone Programme to counter it.