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The Thames was included in the mapping of Britain, begun under Stalin, left

Soviet spy maps of UK better than our own

Jonathan Leake

Russian spies travelled the length and breadth of Britain, mapping cities and towns in preparation for an invasion, researchers have found.

Agents measured the widths of roads, the height of

bridges and pinpointed strategic buildings such as factories and military bases. The data was sent to the Soviet Union to make maps more detailed than those by Ordnance Survey, the UK's mapping agency.

The disclosure in a new

book, *The Red Atlas*, follows the discovery of thousands of Soviet-era maps in an old military depot in Latvia – where invasion forces were stationed until the 1990s.

"Starting from 1950, the Soviet army conducted a secret programme in which they mapped Britain in exquisite detail," said John Davies, a cartographer and co-author of *The Red Atlas*.

The mapping programme, which also covered other European countries and America, was begun under Stalin and Khrushchev. At its peak it involved a dozen mapping "factories" producing tens of thousands of maps, which were stored in military depots.

"Their maps of Britain show far more detail than on contemporary maps from Ordnance Survey," said Alexander Kent, president of the British Cartographic Society, Davies's co-author.

A 1982 Soviet map of Chatham Dockyard, in Kent, where British nuclear submarines were built and maintained, shows every building, even though the area was secret and excluded

from British maps. Similarly, a 1950 Soviet map of Pembroke Dock, in west Wales, shows a seaplane base that was excluded from British maps.

Some maps even reveal the underwater contours of rivers such as the Thames, Mersey and Forth. "Russian ships visited these rivers and were secretly equipped to survey them, perhaps for military vessels," said Kent.

Yet even for the Soviets, things sometimes got lost in translation. A 1985 map of central London, targeting the Queen's residence, shows her living not at Buckingham Palace but at Her Majesty's Theatre, a mile away in the West End – and sharing it with the prime minister.

Some places mapped by visiting Soviet agents also appear to have had no military relevance – including Torquay in Devon, Margate in Kent and Eastbourne in East Sussex. The *Red Atlas* authors suspect the spies' liking for mapping holiday resorts may reflect their own personal preferences.

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