

The Baker Street Irregulars at a parliamentary event

On the 70th anniversary of the disbanding of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), an app is being created to mark their story.

The SOE was a secret service created to support resisters in occupied countries in the Second World War. It requisitioned buildings and estates all over Britain as training schools or as covert wireless stations, but its secret headquarters was at London’s 64 Baker Street and the surrounding buildings. The service was disbanded in January 1946.

The Legasee Educational Trust has teamed up with students from St Marylebone C of E Secondary School and a host of Second World War 'spy' veterans to produce the app - which will allow users to immerse themselves in the secret world of the SOE and wartime London.

A magical history tour

The Spooks, Spies and Videotape app combines video and audio interviews, photos and documents and geolocation mapping, to reveal remarkable information about these buildings and the people involved in secretive work during the war. The video interviews were collated from Legasee’s Secret War archive and the original documents and audio footage were supplied by the National Archives and the Imperial War Museum respectively.

From the hallowed halls of BBC Broadcasting House, which transmitted top-secret coded messages; to the impressive frontage of 4 Carlton Gardens, where French leader Charles de Gaulle spent his wartime exile, people can take a magical history tour of the capital's wartime past. Other notable buildings featured include:

- The secret headquarters of SOE at 64 Baker Street
- The General Post Office Film Unit in Saville Row which was re-purposed to make films for the war effort
- The underground shooting range next to Baker Street Station which was used to train secret war operatives – with the incentive often being a packet of cigarettes

[quote=Martyn Cox, oral historian]"This project will serve as a remarkable and lasting tribute to the men and women who worked in such secrecy during the Second World War."[/quote]

"This project will serve as a remarkable and lasting tribute to the men and women who worked in such secrecy during the Second World War, playing vital roles in the detection and undermining of enemy activities which helped lead to the Allied victory," says Martyn Cox, an oral historian working on the project.

"When it comes to Second World War veterans who took part in any kind of secret work their personal testimony (or first-hand accounts) can be particularly engaging and revealing, not to mention inspiring, and I'm delighted that HLF and the Legasee Educational Trust have enabled their memories to be preserved as a unique learning resource for future generations."

How to find out more

Read more about the Spooks, Spies and Videotape app on the Legasee website.