

Cornwall under the Nazi Jackboot - Von Ribbentrop, Wallis Simpson, St Ives and 17 Carnations...

Written by Andy Owen



In 1938, Joachim von Ribbentrop was appointed Foreign Minister of Germany.

Hitler liked him very much. Not many others did.

He was, arrogant, obnoxious and regularly stupid. His decision-making was consistently flawed.

But, he loved Cornwall and had an agreement with Hitler, that he would have it as his own, once world domination had been achieved.

He planned to live in St Michael's Mount and have Tregenna Castle in St Ives, as his holiday 'retreat'.



St Michael's Mount, Marazion, Cornwall

Ribbentrop was once described as "the Nazi almost all the other leading Nazis hated". This was due, in the most part, to the feeling that he was a wheeler-dealer and "swindled his way into office", as Goebbels once said.

He also had Hitler's ear - and was one of the very few people who could get to see Hitler at any time without an appointment. This enraged the Nazi hierarchy, especially Goering and Himmler, who were never afforded this benefit.



His rise to prominence started in 1936, when Hitler appointed him as Ambassador to the United Kingdom. His brief was clear - to negotiate an Anglo-German alliance.

It would appear that he wasn't the sharpest tool in the box.

Far from it, in fact. And, he became a bit of a political liability.

While he was in London, he actually damaged the already poor relationship with the British Foreign Office, by never-ending blunders and social gaffes.

While staying as a guest of the 7th Marquess of Londonderry in Durham, he gave the Nazi salute in Durham Cathedral, when the organist played the opening bars of a hymn, which were identical to the German national anthem.

He had to be restrained by his host.

He convinced Hitler that he had impressed British society. He certainly had not.

The truth was, that Ribbentrop often displayed a fundamental misunderstanding of British politics and society.

His reputation in British high society was very low, because of the way he treated people. His secretary Reinhard Spitzky once said, "He behaved very stupidly and very pompously and the British don't like pompous people".

In the same interview, Spitzzy called Ribbentrop "pompous, conceited and not too intelligent" and "he was an utterly insufferable man to work for".

The British Foreign Office could not hide their growing frustration of dealing with Ribbentrop, so, he reacted by leaving the capital at every opportunity.

He visited Berlin regularly, to stay close to Hitler - and he was encouraged by his staff to travel around the UK, simply to get him out of the office.

On one such trip, he visited Cornwall.

It was love at first sight. He *adored* Cornwall.

Two places in particular caught his eye. St Ives and St Michael's Mount.

He stayed at the Tregenna Castle hotel in St Ives and used it as his base for touring the immediate area.



Tregenna Castle Hotel, St Ives

He had personal plans for it, as recently uncovered information has shown.

Whilst undertaking research for his recent book - 'Art and War in The Last Resort' and an art exhibition, artist Andrew Lanyon unearthed a number of astonishing facts about Ribbentrop and Cornwall.

"I have interviewed people who remember Ribbentrop's visits and the period in the 1930s when he stayed with Colonel Edward Bolitho, the Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall, in Trengwainton, his Cornish home," said Lanyon.

He told Bolitho he wanted to live in St Ives and that Hitler had agreed to give him Cornwall.

At first, Ribbentrop wanted to retire to Tregenna Castle near St Ives. Then he was taken across to see St Michael's Mount and once he saw it, he decided that was the right place for him.

I remember my family gardener always told me that Ribbentrop wanted Cornwall" said Lanyon, "and now I believe him. My grandfather on my mother's side played golf with him and felt so dirty afterwards, that he joined Bomber Command.

Ribbentrop's love affair with the seaside town of St Ives was *total*. He was immediately smitten by the beauty of the place.

Stories have since surfaced that he had sent clear instructions to the Luftwaffe to avoid bombing St Ives and other particular sections of the Cornish coast.

But, this apparently, fell on deaf ears, probably because of Goering's hatred of Ribbentrop. So, despite local shock, it came as no surprise when the gasworks was bombed and then people were strafed on the beaches.

Ribbentrop collected postcards of the area intended to help Nazi troops find landmarks during an attack. They were later used to illustrate a top secret German 1942 guide to the English coastline, *Militärgeographische Angaben über England Südküste*.

This guide illustrated attack points along England's south coast with photographs and large colour maps stretching from the tip of Cornwall to Foreness Point in Kent.

He also decided to keep Tregenna Castle, near St Ives, as a holiday home once the Nazis had achieved world domination.

Luckily for everyone on this planet, that did not happen.

But something else was rumoured to be going on with Ribbentrop, which was equally fascinating. It was alleged that he had a sexual relationship with Wallis Simpson, who at that time, was the lover of King Edward VIII.

When Edward abdicated in 1937, the ex-King and Wallis got married in France and became the Duke and Duchess of Windsor.

The FBI had a file open on the couple. It showed that Wallis embraced fascism, as it fitted precisely with her own upbringing, character and disposition.

She was apparently an intensely greedy woman, obsessed with her own property and how she could make more of it. According to the FBI, she had many affairs.

She was racist and anti-semitic. But, she was also very smart.

So it's easy to see why Ribbentrop, with his dubious intelligence and close connection with Hitler, had an obvious attraction for her.

She met Ribbentrop first, at a luncheon with Churchill in attendance.

How long the affair lasted, we don't know. But, it was rumoured that Ribbentrop sent 17 carnations to Simpson's home every day.

The number was significant because it was the number of times that the two had slept together during the affair in London.

After the war, Ribbentrop went into hiding, but was eventually captured by the allies in Hamburg in July 1945

He was sleeping naked in a Hamburg boarding house with a metal can of poison strapped to his body. He was using the alias 'Mr Reise'.

In his belongings, he had letters addressed to Mr Churchill, Mr Eden, and Field Marshal Montgomery. Unbelievably, the letter for the Prime Minister was addressed "Vincent Churchill."

He told his interrogators that "I wanted to stay in Hamburg until British opinion had quietened down; then I intended to give myself up and get a fair trial."

He was described by his captors as "extremely passive and not a bit truculent."

On October 18, 1945, Von Ribbentrop was one of 24 leading Nazi officials indicted on four charges related to the three crimes originally defined in the Nuremberg Charter.

1. Conspiracy to commit crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity
2. Crimes against peace
3. War crimes
4. Crimes against humanity



Von Ribbentrop at Nuremberg, delivering his defence

The trial hearings ended on September 1, 1946. On October 1, 1946, the judges delivered their verdict.

They convicted 19 of the defendants and acquitted three. Von Ribbentrop was sentenced to death by hanging.

October 16, 1946 was the day of the executions.

Von Ribbentrop was due to be the second to be hanged, but, because of Goering's suicide in his cell, he was the first to face his punishment.

It was eleven minutes past one in the morning, when he walked through the gymnasium door, his face white but set, his grey hair ruffled.

Von Ribbentrop was able to maintain his apparent stoicism to the last.

He walked steadily toward the scaffold between his two guards, but didn't answer at first when an officer standing at the foot of the gallows asked his name.

When the question was asked again, he almost shouted, 'Joachim von Ribbentrop!' and then mounted the steps without any sign of hesitation.

When he was turned around on the platform to face the witnesses, he seemed to clench his teeth and raise his head with his old arrogance.

When asked whether he had any final message, he said, 'God protect Germany,' in German, and then added, 'May I say something else?'

The interpreter nodded and Ribbentrop spoke his last words in a loud confident voice:

"My last wish is that Germany realise its entity and that an understanding be reached between the East and the West.

I wish peace to the world."

As the black hood was placed in position on his head, Von Ribbentrop looked straight ahead.

Then the hangman adjusted the rope, pulled the lever, and Von Ribbentrop slipped away to his fate.