



SPIES: Above, The two German canoeists who arrived on Orford Ness in the 1930s, claiming to be on a round Britain paddle and were later found drowned off Scotland, fuelling rumours that they had been murdered and, inset, the cover of Charlie Underwood's revealing book *The Great Light*

Photographs:
CONTRIBUTED

The day two German spies camped out at Orford Ness

By Craig Robinson

IT COULD almost be a storyline from the BBC's iconic sitcom *Dad's Army* – two German spies pose as canoeists on an around Britain paddle and set up camp at a top secret military base.

But recent revelations about the comings and goings at Orford Ness before the outbreak of the Second World War prove that truth is once again often stranger than fiction.

The pair arrived off the Suffolk coast in 1934 – waving a German flag and claiming to be on an around Britain paddle.

They asked the lighthouse keeper at Orford Ness – at that time a top secret military base – for permission to stay on the island for a couple of nights and pitched their tent accordingly.

After they left they were suspected of being spies and were later discovered drowned off Scotland – fuelling speculation that they may well have been murdered.

At that time Orford Ness was used as a military base for a variety of top secret procedures, including experiments with radar and a new piece of equipment called a parachute.

It is also believed the Germans may have been scoping out nearby Shingle Street as a possible fleet landing point – a stretch of coastline which some claim was the site of a secret Nazi invasion in 1940.

The revelation has come to light after previously secret MI5 files revealed how the chief of police in Suffolk was ordered to keep an eye

on a group of Hitler Youth teenagers cycling through Britain.

The story of the Orfordness “spies” is retold in a book by former lighthouse keeper Charlie Underwood, who received an MBE in 1993 and passed away in 1997.

The book, entitled *The Great Light*, is an authoritative history on Orford Ness and its lighthouses and was published by Stuart Bacon, of the Suffolk Underwater Exhibition.

He said: “Around 1934 was when it was really buzzing on the spit. There were a lot of tests and experiments going on. When you think about these men arriving and having access to that – it must have been a dream come true if they were spies. It would have been heaven to them.

“I think there’s probably a good chance they were spies and the more I think about it, the more I think they may well have been bumped off in Scotland. If you were going on an around Britain paddle, the last place you would want to camp is Orford Ness. You would travel a bit further north where it is a little more accessible. It’s very suspicious.”

News of the “spies” arrival has come to no surprise to Aldeburgh resident Ronald Ashford – who believes British forces defeated a secret Nazi landing at nearby Shingle Street in 1940.

“I would not be surprised in the least,” the 89-year-old said. “The Germans were very interested in that area. It was so important, so open, that if there was no resistance they could march on inland.”



REVEALING: Author Charlie Underwood who wrote the tale of the spies in his book *The Great Light*



ON WATCH: Principal lighthouse keeper George Eynon and his son Donald

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