

# Victor Rothschild, 3rd Baron Rothschild

**Nathaniel Mayer Victor Rothschild, 3rd Baron Rothschild**, GBE, GM, FRS<sup>[1]</sup> (31 October 1910 – 20 March 1990) was a senior executive with *Royal Dutch Shell* and N M Rothschild & Sons, an advisor to the Edward Heath and Margaret Thatcher governments of the UK, as well as a member of the prominent *Rothschild family*.

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## Biography

### Early life

Rothschild was the only son of *Charles Rothschild* and *Róz­sika Rothschild* (*née* Baroness Edle von Wertheimstein). Both parents were Jewish, his father a member of the Rothschild banking family and his mother the daughter of the first titled Jew in Austria. He grew up in *Waddesdon Manor* and *Tring Park Mansion*, among other family homes. He had three sisters, including *Pannonica de Koenigswarter* (who would become known as the "Jazz Baroness") and *Dame Miriam Louisa Rothschild*. Rothschild suffered the suicide of his father when he was 13 years old. He was educated at *Harrow School*.

### Cambridge and London

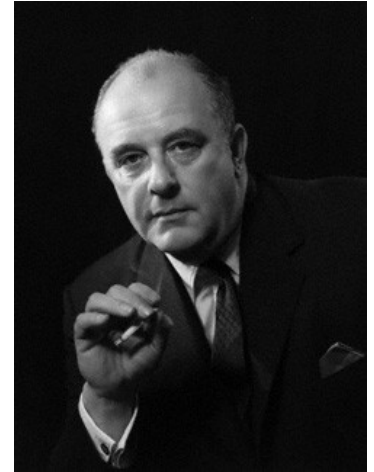
At Trinity College, Cambridge, he read *physiology*, French, and English. He played first-class cricket for the University and Northamptonshire. At Cambridge he was known for his playboy lifestyle, driving a *Bugatti* and collecting art and rare books.

Rothschild joined the *Cambridge Apostles*, a secret society, which at that time was predominantly Marxist, though he stated himself that he "was mildly left-wing but never a Marxist".<sup>[2]</sup> He became friends with *Guy Burgess*, *Anthony Blunt* and *Kim Philby*; members of the *Cambridge Spy Ring*.

In 1933, Rothschild gave Blunt £100 to purchase "Eliezer and Rebecca" by *Nicolas Poussin*.<sup>[3]</sup> The painting was sold by Blunt's executors in 1985 for £100,000<sup>[4]</sup> and is now in the *Fitzwilliam Museum*.<sup>[5]</sup>

His flat in London was shared with Burgess and Blunt. This later aroused suspicion that he was the so-called Fifth Man in the Cambridge Spy Ring.

The Right Honourable  
**The Lord Rothschild**  
 GBE GM FRS



<b>Born</b>	Nathaniel Mayer Victor Rothschild 31 October 1910
<b>Died</b>	20 March 1990 (aged 79)
<b>Nationality</b>	British
<b>Alma mater</b>	Trinity College, Cambridge
<b>Occupation</b>	Biologist
<b>Spouse(s)</b>	Barbara Judith Hutchinson Teresa Georgina Mayor
<b>Children</b>	6, including: Jacob Rothschild, 4th Baron Rothschild Emma Georgina Rothschild Amschel Rothschild
<b>Parent(s)</b>	Charles Rothschild Róz­sika Rothschild ( <i>née</i> Edle von Wertheimstein)
<b>Relatives</b>	Amartya Sen (son-in-law) Serena Dunn Rothschild (daughter-in-law)

Rothschild inherited his title at the age of 26 following the death of his uncle Walter Rothschild, 2nd Baron Rothschild on 27 August 1937. He sat as a Labour Party peer in the House of Lords, but spoke only twice there during his life (both speeches were in 1946, one about the pasteurization of milk, and another about the situation in Palestine).<sup>[6]</sup>

## World War II

Rothschild was recruited to work for MI5 during World War II in roles including bomb disposal, disinformation and espionage, winning the George Medal for "dangerous work in hazardous circumstances".<sup>[7]</sup> He was the head of B1C, the "explosives and sabotage section", and worked on identifying where Britain's war effort was vulnerable to sabotage and counter German sabotage attempts. This included personally dismantling examples of German booby traps and disguised explosives.<sup>[8]</sup>

With his assistant Theresa Clay, he ran the "Fifth Column" operation, that saw MI5 officer Eric Roberts masquerade as the Gestapo's man in London in order to identify hundreds of Nazi sympathizers.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Cold War, Shell and Think Tank

In *Who Paid the Piper?* (1999), an account of CIA propaganda during the Cold War, author Frances Stonor Saunders alleges that Rothschild channelled funds to *Encounter*, an intellectual magazine founded in 1953 to support the "non-Stalinist left" in advance of US foreign policy goals.

After the war, he joined the zoology department at Cambridge University from 1950 to 1970. He served as chairman of the Agricultural Research Council from 1948 to 1958 and as worldwide head of research at Royal Dutch/Shell from 1963 to 1970.

Flora Solomon claims in her autobiography that in August 1962, during a reception at the Weizmann Institute, she told Rothschild that she thought that Tomás Harris and Kim Philby were Soviet spies.<sup>[10]</sup>

When Anthony Blunt was unmasked as a member of the Cambridge Spy ring in 1964, Rothschild was questioned by Special Branch (though Blunt was not publicly identified as a Soviet agent until 1979 in the House of Commons by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher). Rothschild was cleared, and continued working on projects for the British government.<sup>[11]</sup>

Rothschild was head of the Central Policy Review Staff from 1971 to 1974 (known popularly as "The Think Tank")<sup>[12]</sup> a staff which researched policy specifically for the Government until Margaret Thatcher abolished it.

In 1971 Rothschild was awarded an honorary degree from Tel Aviv University for "the advancement of science, education and the economy of Israel". It was followed in 1975 by an honorary degree from Jerusalem's Hebrew University.<sup>[13]</sup> The annual "Victor Rothschild Memorial Symposia" is named after Rothschild.

## Thatcher years and Spycatcher

In the 1980s, Rothschild joined the family bank as chairman in an effort to quell the feuding between factions led by Evelyn Rothschild and Victor's son, Jacob Rothschild. In this he was unsuccessful as Jacob resigned from the bank to found J. Rothschild Assurance Group (a separate entity, now St. James's Place plc).

In 1982 he published *An Enquiry into the Social Science Research Council* at the behest of Sir Keith Joseph, a Conservative minister and mentor of Margaret Thatcher.

He continued to work in security as an adviser to Margaret Thatcher.

He appears several times in the book *Spycatcher*, which he hoped would clear the air over suspicions about his wartime role and the possibility he was involved in the Cambridge spy ring. In early 1987 Tam Dalyell MP used parliamentary privilege to suggest Rothschild should be prosecuted for a chain of events he had "set in train, with Peter Wright and Harry Chapman Pincher" which had led to a "breach of confidence in relation to information on matters of state security given to authors".<sup>[14]</sup>

He was still able to enter the premises of MI5 as a former employee and was aware of suspicions there was a "mole" in MI5, but felt himself above suspicion. While Edward Heath was Prime Minister, Rothschild was a frequent visitor to Chequers, the Prime Minister's country residence. Throughout Rothschild's life, he was a valued adviser on intelligence and science to both Conservative and Labour Governments.

In 1993, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, six retired KGB colonels, including Yuri Modin, the spy ring's handler, alleged Rothschild was the "Fifth Man". Modin claimed, "Rothschild was the key to most of the Cambridge ring's penetration of British intelligence. 'He had the contacts,' Modin noted. 'He was able to introduce Burgess, Blunt and others to important figures in

Intelligence such as Stewart Menzies, Dick White and Robert Vansittart in the Foreign Office...who controlled MI6."<sup>[15]</sup> Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, in *The Mitrokhin Archives*, make no mention of Rothschild as a Soviet agent and instead identify John Cairncross as the Fifth Man.

Rothschild published an autobiography, *Random Variables* in 1984.

Despite being an opposition Labour party peer, in 1987, during the Thatcher Government, Victor played a role in the sacking of BBC Director General Alasdair Milne, who had backed the programmes *Secret Society*, *Real Lives*,<sup>[16]</sup> and *Panorama: 'Maggie's Militant Tendency'* which had angered the Thatcher government. Marmaduke Hussey, who was Chairman of the BBC Board of Governors at the time, implied Rothschild initiated the Milne sacking in his autobiography *Chance Governs All*.<sup>[17]</sup>

Rothschild took the step of publishing a letter in British newspapers on 3 December 1986 to state "... I am not, and never have been, a Soviet agent".

He was an advisor to William Waldegrave during the design of the Community Charge,<sup>[18]</sup> which led to the Poll Tax Riots.

## Family

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In 1933, he married Barbara Judith Hutchinson (born 1911). They had three children.<sup>[19]</sup>

- Sarah Rothschild (born 1934)<sup>[19]</sup>
- Nathaniel Charles Jacob Rothschild (born 1936) (later Jacob Rothschild) 4th Baron Rothschild<sup>[19]</sup>
- Miranda Rothschild (born 1940)<sup>[19]</sup>

In 1946, he married Teresa Georgina Mayor (1915–1996), who had worked as his assistant at MI5<sup>[9]</sup>. Mayor's maternal grandfather was Robert John Grote Mayor, the brother of English novelist F. M. Mayor and a greatnephew of philosopher and clergyman John Grote. Her maternal grandmother, Katherine Beatrice Meinertzhagen, was the sister of soldier Richard Meinertzhagen and the niece of author Beatrice Webb.<sup>[20][21]</sup> They had four children:<sup>[19]</sup>

- Emma Georgina Rothschild (born 1948), married the Bengali Hindu economist Amartya Kumar Sen (b. 1933) in 1991.<sup>[19]</sup>
- Benjamin Mayer Rothschild (born and died 1952).<sup>[19]</sup>
- Victoria Katherine Rothschild (born 1953) is an academic lecturer at Queen Mary, University of London and the second wife and widow of English writer Simon Gray (1936–2008).<sup>[19]</sup>
- Amschel Mayor James Rothschild (1955–1996), married to Anita Patience Guinness of the Anglo-Irish Protestant Guinness family. Amschel committed suicide in 1996.<sup>[22]</sup> They had three children; Kate Emma Rothschild Goldsmith (b. 1982), Alice Miranda Rothschild (b. 1983) and James Amschel Victor Rothschild (b. 1985)<sup>[19]</sup>

Born into a nominally Jewish family, in adult life Rothschild declared himself to be an atheist.<sup>[23]</sup> His sister Miriam Louisa Rothschild was a distinguished entomologist, and his sister Nica de Koenigswarter was a bebop jazz enthusiast and patron of Thelonious Monk and Charlie Parker.

## Honours and awards

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### Titles

- 3rd Baron Rothschild, of Tring, co. Hertford [U.K., 1885], 27 August 1937.
- 4th Baronet Rothschild [U.K., 1847], 27 August 1937.
- Knight Grand Cross, Order of the British Empire (G.B.E.), 1975.
- Knight, Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem (K.St.J.).
- Fellow, Royal Society (F.R.S.), 1953.
- Major, Intelligence Corps.

### Decorations

- George Medal (G.M.) (United Kingdom), 1944.
- Legion of Merit (United States), 1946.
- Bronze Star Medal (United States), 1948.

## Notes

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3. Rose (2003), pp. 47–48.
4. "Eliezer and Rebecca by Nicolas Poussin" (<http://www.artfund.org/artwork/2250/eliezer-and-rebecca>). *Art Fund*. Retrieved 28 October 2015.
5. "Eliezer and Rebecca" (<http://webapps.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/explorer/index.php?oid=2874>). *Fitzwilliam Museum Collections*. 2015. Retrieved 28 October 2015.
6. "Mr Nathaniel Rothschild (Hansard)" (<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/people/mr-nathaniel-rothschild/>). *hansard.millbanksystems.com*. Retrieved 28 March 2016.
7. "No. 36452" (<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/36452/supplement/1548>). *The London Gazette* (Supplement). 4 April 1944. p. 1548.
8. Macintyre, Ben (2007). *Agent Zigzag : the true wartime story of Eddie Chapman*. London: Bloomsbury. pp. 172–173. ISBN 9780747587941.
9. Hutton, Robert (2018). *Agent Jack : the true story of MI5's secret Nazi hunter*. London: W&N. ISBN 978-1474605113. OCLC 958098293 (<https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/958098293>).
10. Solomon, Flora (1984). *Baku to Baker Street*. London: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd. p. 226.
11. The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* concludes: "The carefree friendships of Rothschild's early Cambridge years that had continued throughout the war cast a shadow over the last decade of his life. The defection of Burgess to Russia and the uncovering of Blunt as a Soviet agent exposed Rothschild to innuendo and vilification in press and parliament. Rather than let his name record of public service speak for themselves, he sought unwisely to clear himself through the testimony of Peter Wright, an investigator employed by MI5 had every reason to know of his innocence. Clandestine association with so volatile a character aroused further suspicions that Rothschild had broken the Official Secrets Act. Only after voluntarily submitting himself to a long interrogation by Scotland Yard did he emerge with honour and patriotism intact."
12. Wright, Peter (1987). *Spycatcher*. Toronto: Stoddart. p. 347. ISBN 978-0-7737-2168-5.
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14. "Official Secrets Act (Prosecution Policy) (Hansard, 6 February 1987)" (<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1987/feb/06/official-secrets-act-prosecution-policy>). *hansard.millbanksystems.com*. Retrieved 4 January 2016.
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22. Ibrahim, Youssef M. (12 July 1996). "Rothschild Bank Confirms Death of Heir, 41, as Suicide" (<https://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/12/business/international-business-rothschild-bank-confirms-death-of-heir-41-as-suicide.html>). *The New York Times*. New York, NY: NYTC. Retrieved 28 October 2015.
23. Wilson (1994), p. 466.

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- Rose, Kenneth (2003). *Elusive Rothschild: The Life of Victor, Third Baron*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson. ISBN 978-0-297-81229-6.
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- See also the list of references at [Rothschild banking family of England](#)

<b>Peerage of the United Kingdom</b>		
Preceded by <b>Walter Rothschild</b>	<b>Baron Rothschild</b> 1937–1990	Succeeded by <b>Jacob Rothschild</b>
<b>Baronetage of the United Kingdom</b>		
Preceded by <b>Walter Rothschild</b>	<b>Baronet</b> <i>(of Tring Park)</i> 1937–1990	Succeeded by <b>Jacob Rothschild</b>

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