Sefton Delmer

The transmitter station at King’s Standing came into being as a consequence of the discussion which took place in the various security departments within the British government about the methods by which propaganda should be broadcast to the enemy.

The BBC had its own agenda, sending out what were largely factual messages, as ‘white propaganda’. The Germans were using the service of William Joyce, also known as ‘Lord Haw-Haw’, with the object of influencing the listeners to his way of thinking. The British response to Joyce’s broadcasts was to set up a network of short-wave transmissions based at Woburn Abbey in Bedfordshire under the control of the Political Warfare Executive (PWE) with the object of countering the enemy propaganda. Most of this material was of a comparatively innocuous nature, and was really preaching to the converted.

Sefton Delmer was born in Germany in 1904, the son of a professor of English at Berlin University. The family was interned in 1914 and repatriated in 1917, when Sefton continued his education at St Paul’s School and later at Lincoln College, Oxford. After the war he became a journalist and with his German connections was able to associate with the top ranks of the Nazi hierachy. He returned to England in May 1940 and spent some time trying to find suitable employment in the security services, eventually being recruited by Dick Crossman, who later became a Labour MP as head of PWE in late 1940 or early 1941. He set up a short-wave radio station called Gustav Siegfried Elns l(GSI) ostensibly a branch of the German Army Signals, using a German announcer known as Der Chef. Much of the material transmitted was of a lascivious nature and included anti-British statements with the object of attracting listeners who found the station accidentally by ‘knob twiddling’. Subversive propaganda could then be slipped in unobtrusively.