

## Northstar on Ebury Street

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Before Northstar made Studio D on 22 Ebury Street its home, a heady mix of religion, fascism and espionage contrived to make it one of the more unique properties in London.

Built in 1830 as a Baptist Chapel, the property, with its stucco frontage and two Doric pillars was the home of Oswald Mosley, the leader of the British Union of Fascists. After he moved out, the property became a number of things; a school, nightclub and furniture store.

However, it's the blue plaque above the door, which reveals the buildings most revered tenant.

Ian Fleming, creator of James Bond lived at 22 Ebury Street between the years of 1936 – 1945.

Fleming's time in Ebury Street represented a key episode in his life. He created a particular environment, where he could entertain his girlfriends, friends and members of *Le Cercle gastronomique et des jeux de hazard*. And of course, he entered into naval intelligence in 1939, as war broke, which was to be pivotal in shaping the character the world now knows as James Bond.

He employed an interior decorator from Berlin to help with the details. He kept the chapel intact. There were no windows and he had the walls painted grey; indirect lighting was installed and the skylight fitted with dark-blue glass. A lavatory was fitted into the alcove where the altar once stood. A large black sofa was placed in the centre of room and he kept a fire burning throughout the year, even in summer.

*Le Cercle* was essentially an informal club of old-Etonians about-town, which occasionally met at 22 Ebury Street to eat well, play bridge and spend their weekends playing golf. Fleming's favourite week-end was to stay at the Guildford Hotel at Sandwich Bay and play the Royal St. George's which, under the name of Royal St. Mark's, would one day become the scene of James Bond's battle with Goldfinger.

One of its members, John Fox-Strangways gave the second-half of his name to the head of the Caribbean branch of the Secret Service in *Live and Let Die* and *Dr No*. In another Bond novel, *Moonraker*, the wealthy industrialist Sir Hugo Drax's London residence was on Ebury Street.

It was just as he moved into Ebury Street that Fleming began to establish a rare-book collection. Fleming stumbled upon a gap in the collector's market and set about procuring first-edition medical and scientific books, such as Marie Curie's historic doctorate thesis of 1903 on isolated radium, Darwin's *Origin of the Species* and Freud's book on the interpretation of dreams.

Four years later, having spent a little over £2,000, Fleming gave an arbitrary figure of £100,000 when asked by an American rare-book dealer to value his collection. When he was bombed out of Ebury Street during the war (1940), he ensured it was sent to the Bodleian Library at Oxford for safe keeping. He never officially returned to Ebury following the war. He moved to Marylebone, then to Mayfair. It was in 1942 when he first set visited Jamaica for a U-boat conference with the Navy, and then purchased the land four years later to build Goldeneye – where he wrote all the Bond novels.

Coincidentally, it is not just through Ebury Street that Northstar has been affiliated with the murky world of espionage. In his book, *The Big Breach*, ex-MI6 officer Richard Tomlinson revealed that Northstar was the codename for Mikhael Butkov, a former KGB officer who had defected to MI6.