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Police spy tricked lover with activist 'cover story'

Bob Lambert used false identity in 1980s to infiltrate protest movements while working for Metropolitan police special branch



📷 Bob Lambert issued an unreserved apology to the woman he had an 18-month relationship with while working undercover. Photograph: guardian.co.uk

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A former police spymaster who spent years living deep undercover in the protest movement has confessed he tricked an innocent woman into having a long-term relationship with him, as part of an elaborate attempt to lend "credibility" to his alter ego.

Bob Lambert, who adopted a false identity to infiltrate leftwing and animal rights groups, said he had the 18-month relationship with the woman, who was not herself involved in political activism, as part of his cover story.

The Guardian has detailed the cases of seven undercover police officers known to have infiltrated protest movements, mostly in the past decade. Of those, five have had sexual relationships with women who were oblivious to their real identities.

Lambert, who became an academic after a 26-year career in the special branch of the [Metropolitan police](#), made the admission after the Guardian contacted him about their relationship.

In a statement, he offered an "unreserved apology" to the woman, who does not want her identity to be revealed, and said he was also sorry for deceiving "law-abiding members of London [Greenpeace](#)," a peaceful protest group.

His former partner, who recently discovered the long-haired political activist she had the relationship with in the 1980s was actually an undercover police officer, said she felt "violated" by the experience.

"I was cruelly tricked and it has made me very angry," the woman said. "I am actually quite damaged by the whole thing. I am still not over it."

Police chiefs have claimed that officers who spy on protesters are not permitted "under any circumstances" to sleep with activists. But police spies are known to have been having relationships with activists as recently as last year, as part of a secret police operation to monitor political activists that has been in place since the late 1960s.

In most cases, the police officers developed long-term relationships and their subsequent disappearance left women feeling traumatised and angry.

They include [Mark Kennedy](#), who spent seven years living undercover in Nottingham as environmental campaigner "Mark Stone".

Another undercover police officer, Peter Black, said sex was a widely used "tool" to gain the trust of activists when he was deployed in the 1990s.

The woman duped by Lambert said their relationship came to an end more than 20 years ago after the man she knew as "Bob Robinson" vanished from her life, claiming to be in hiding from special branch. Lambert was, in fact, a special branch detective and would go on to rise through the ranks of the covert unit to a position in which he managed the deployments of several other spies.

Lambert is currently subject to a Metropolitan police review into whether he was prosecuted in a court using his false identity. The force is considering whether to refer his case to the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC).

On Friday, the Met referred the case of another undercover officer, Jim Boyling, to the IPCC, after evidence emerged that he posed as a defendant using his false identity in another court case.

After living undercover himself, Lambert went on to manage Boyling, who infiltrated environmental campaign groups and ended up marrying an activist he was sent to spy on and fathering two children with her.

Lambert and Boyling later worked for the Met's Muslim contact unit, which was created to improve relations with Muslims after the 11 September 2001 attacks.

Now an outspoken critic of the government's counter-terrorism strategy, Lambert has strongly denied the suggestion that the unit he set up was involved in surveillance of the Muslim community.

Lambert said his undercover role in the 1980s was part of a secret infiltration of the Animal Liberation Front, which was involved in a fire-bombing campaign at the time.

"As part of my cover story, so as to gain the necessary credibility to become involved in serious crime, I first built a reputation as a committed member of [London Greenpeace](#), a peaceful campaigning group," he said in a statement to fellow anti-Islamophobia campaigners at the Spinwatch transparency campaign.

"I apologise unreservedly for the deception I therefore practiced on law abiding members of London Greenpeace.

"I also apologise unreservedly for forming false friendships with law abiding citizens and in particular forming a long-term relationship with [the woman] who had every reason to think I was a committed animal rights activist and a genuine London Greenpeace campaigner."

It is not clear why Lambert chose the woman as part of his cover story.

He added: "I should point out here that the vast majority of Met special branch undercover officers never made the mistakes I made, have no need to apologise for anything, and I deeply regret having tarnished their illustrious, professional reputation."

Lambert could be questioned by officials from HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, which is conducting a review into undercover policing of protest.

The review - one of nine disciplinary and judicial inquiries into the controversy in undercover policing - was initially conducted by Bernard Hogan-Howe before he took his post as Met commissioner.

The planned publication of his report, which had been expected to reject calls for more robust oversight of the use of undercover police officers, was abandoned on Wednesday, hours after the Guardian and BBC Newsnight revealed evidence undercover officers may have been lying in court.

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