

## I-spy in Harry Lime's Vienna

To mark the centenary of Graham Greene's birth, Paul Gogarty takes a trip through the locations of *The Third Man*.

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The Vienna Philharmonic was in town and the Opera House had already clocked up half its 300-plus annual performances.



**City secrets: Graham Greene's spy novel was set in the Austrian capital**

I, however, was in Austria not to applaud the achievements of the Habsburgs but to explore the shadowy underworld of Graham Greene's *The Third Man*, that masterpiece of atmosphere and espionage that started life as a film treatment before being turned into a novel. The film that Carol Reed made from Greene's script happens to be my all-time favourite movie.

In 1948, when the novelist first arrived in bomb-blasted Vienna to research the script, he found every fourth home in ruins and sierras of rubble in the streets. All he had by way of a storyline was the kernel of an idea about a dead man walking.

Over the next three weeks, however, through his network of intelligence contacts, Greene found the other two essential ingredients for his story: a deadly black market in watered-down penicillin, and a network of sewers.

The sewers that "the worst racketeer who ever made a dirty living in this city" vanished into are still there. The city's special Wega police department - Greene calls them the Sewer Police - continues to patrol the labyrinth whenever world leaders are in town. And the film continues to resonate throughout this imperial city.

In the crypt beneath Michaelerkirche I found coffins with their lids left off and their 200-year-old occupants on gruesome display.

As I looked at the remains of a 15-year-old pregnant girl - her legs bloated, her stomach deflated like an old football - I gave an involuntary gasp. It was like that moment in *The Third Man* when those exhuming Harry Lime's body discover the corpse of murdered military orderly, Joseph Harbin, in his place.

On the west façade of St Stephen's Cathedral, just below the tombstone to Wolfgang Lindtner ("A very brave man. 1556"), the symbol O5 is gouged in the wall, a reminder of the Austrian wartime resistance. If you keep your eyes peeled

you'll see it on a wall in the film too, a clue to the part real-life espionage played in the creation of Greene's story.

After his defection in 1963, the spy Kim Philby was referred to as "the third man", following the earlier defections of Burgess and Maclean. In the early 1940s Philby had been Greene's boss at the Secret Intelligence Service and almost certainly served as the model for Harry Lime.

The young and idealistic Philby had spent 1933 and '34 in Vienna helping those resisting the fascist government to escape through Vienna's sewers. Like Harry Lime, he also provided a passport for his lover to escape from the city (in his case, however, Philby subsequently married the woman instead of abandoning her).

Philby's first name was actually Harold, or Harry; Lime, of course, is another shade of Green. As a spy himself, Greene loved to pepper his stories with such allusions.

Visiting the vast Central Cemetery on the outskirts of town, I discovered that Harry Lime's plot had been requisitioned by the Familie Grün after the film-shoot was over.

Greene would no doubt be delighted to learn that his German namesakes were now in residence. Harry's grave may have been taken but many of the iconic gravestones in the cemetery, as well as the long, tree-lined lane down which Harry's girlfriend Anna makes her lonely walk, remain as the film and the novel captured them.

Back in town, I found Harry's home in the Palais Pallavicini still guarded by four female caryatids scanning the courtyard across to the Spanish Riding School as they keep an eye out for the elusive third man.

Café Mozart, Greene's favourite watering hole, was doing better business than ever; and the Hotel Sacher, where both Greene and his protagonist, Rollo Martins, lodged, was having a makeover but due to re-open soon with a brand new Graham Greene Suite. (Rollo, incidentally, was re-christened Holly in the film because the actor Joseph Cotten didn't like the original name.)

Today the 19th-century ferris wheel on the vast open space of the Prater rises above a far happier resident funfair than the bomb-scarred landscape of 1948.

Its gondolas still lift and turn with disdainful slowness but eventually, above the blinding neon of the amusements, the city lights and its green spaces revealed themselves to me as a soft dusk deepened into darkness.

It was during a ride on this wheel that Orson Welles, as Harry, chided Holly Martin about his concern for the "ants" below.

When they returned to terra firma he justified his murderous trade in the new wonder drug, penicillin: "In Italy for 30 years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, bloodshed - they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and

the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love, 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did they produce? The cuckoo clock."

From the Prater I walked back to the Inner City, crossing the Ringstrasse then, like Harry, raising my collar as I burrowed through clammy medieval alleys en route to the Opera House. At any moment I expected a child's rolling ball or a balloon seller to appear round the corner and The Harry Lime Theme - the zither music written and performed for the movie by Anton Karas - to cascade from an upstairs open window.

Inevitably I lost my way. In these alleys Holly turned his head at every padding step behind, fearful that the third man may be "following him like an executioner". Fear was eventually replaced by confusion when Holly spotted Harry skulking in the shadows just 36 hours after he had attended his funeral.

Eventually, by luck more than anything, I found my way to the Opera House just a few minutes before the curtain went up on Beethoven's Fidelio. The story, appropriately, involves subterfuge, espionage and disguise. The elderly man to my right, dressed in a pinstripe suit, whispered German in my ear. Eventually noting my incomprehension, he translated in the mangled English of an expat Londoner who'd disappeared in Vienna 40 years ago.

"I used to be English once," he confided. "Did you know Beethoven had more than 20 different addresses in the city? No one cared a jot for his music then, but 10,000 turned up for his funeral."

They like a good funeral in Vienna. Harry, of course, had two. In the old days in the Imperial Crypt stillborn babies were placed (once baptised) alongside mighty emperors so that they could rise as angels. In those days, too, bodies floated into the streets when rivers and sewers rose up after heavy rain.

On my second morning in town, due to join a Third Man tour and running late, I jumped into a taxi. The garrulous driver, Gustav Sipka, spoke excellent English. "I am typical Viennese," he informed me. "My grandfather was Hungarian, my grandmother Czech, I myself was born in Vienna as a German ruled by Russians."

Dr Brigitte Timmermann has been running Third Man tours for 17 years and is the author of a scholarly work in German on the subject. She took us to the recently opened Third Man Private Collection museum where we were introduced to Gerhard Strassgswandtner.

Over the years, Gerhard has collected everything from Japanese Third Man posters and first editions of the novel, Third Man board games and wine racks that play The Harry Lime Theme when a bottle is removed. He has also assembled 30 different versions of the theme tune ("There are 212 in all") including a dirge he played us by The Beatles.

Not far from the museum, Brigitte led us to a kiosk similar to the one Harry Lime disappears into. We followed his ghost down a spiral staircase, occasionally brushing cobwebs out of the way and trying to ignore the lingering stench of the sewer (fortunately it is only used as an overflow during heavy rains). Finally we

emerged into a broad tunnel that was instantly recognisable as the one Harry splashed his way through fleeing the Sewer Police.

At first I thought I must be imagining things as I heard the familiar, plaintive chords echoing through the tunnel. In my mind's eye I watched Harry fleeing through the water, heard the gunfire and saw Harry's fingers groping through the sewer grate, desperate to escape the River Styx and return to the upper world of the living.

As suddenly as it had started, The Harry Lime Theme ended and silence returned. Candles picked out the smiling face of a musician sitting at a table beside the underwater stream, 20ft from the decomposing body of a rat. The zither player was 32-year-old Barbara Laister-Ebner, who started playing the 40-stringed instrument at the age of six and now teaches it at the conservatory as her mother did before her.

As we shuffled out of the sewer, we could hear Barbara launching into the Café Mozart Waltz (also from the film). Once back in daylight, the group broke up and I persuaded Brigitte to join me for lunch. Naturally we headed for the Café Mozart and as we tucked into pancakes and coffee, I asked her if any of the actors in the film were still alive. Initially I thought she was ignoring me as she distractedly flipped open her mobile phone.

"You're in luck," she announced after a protracted conversation in German. "Herbert Halbik, who's now 58 and who played the little boy in short trousers, is on his way to a hospital appointment and has agreed to pop in for five minutes but you'll have to chat with him in his car."

Speedily we finished lunch and paid the bill just as Herbert's wife was parking their Citroën outside the cafe. The innocent moon-face of the boy who bore an uncanny resemblance to Orson Welles is leonine these days and heavily lined. Instead of short trousers, he was dressed in beige slacks topped by a matching beige shirt; he had a salt and pepper moustache and closely cropped hair. He was three when the film was made.

"My mother took me to the set one day to visit my father who was working there," he explained. "I was rather precocious and sat on Carol Reed's knee. He decided then and there to put me in the film and rewrote several scenes around me. The problem was I was very active, always on the go, and so he put a coin under my shoe and said I could keep it if I stayed still during the scene where I accuse Holly of murdering the porter.

"If you watch carefully you'll see where they had to cut as I bent down to pick up the coin before chasing after Holly."

Herbert's movie career started and ended before he was four. Following filming, he returned to a normal childhood until the age of 18 when, diving into the Danube, he broke his neck and was paralysed. This had been the reason Brigitte had told me we would have to talk in the car.

I thanked Brigitte and Herbert for their time and, in sombre mood, walked back along the Ringstrasse before slipping, like Holly and Anna, into a cinema - in my case the Burg-Kino, which shows *The Third Man* several times a week. I waited

patiently for the scene where the small boy accuses Holly of being a murderer. Just as Hubert promised, there was a cut to disguise him pocketing his fee before setting off in pursuit of Holly.

Vienna is the city of Sigmund Freud, the waltz, the equestrian perfection of the Lipizzaners and the sumptuous palaces of the Habsburgs. It is also where Hubert lost his mobility, where Harry plied his wicked trade and where Hieronymus Bosch's Last Judgement found a home.

The scene that best sums up the confusion the city wreaks is when Holly first arrives at Harry's flat and the porter, thumbing upwards, announces that his friend is "Already in hell," before pointing down the stairwell: "Or in heaven."

'The Third Man' is serialised in 10 episodes in 'Book at Bedtime' on BBC Radio 4, starting at 10.45pm on Monday and finishing on Friday, October 8. 'Book of the Week' on Radio 4 is 'The Life of Graham Greene' (9.45am and half past midnight every day next week).

### **Vienna basics**

Austrian Airlines (0870 1242 625, [www.aua.com](http://www.aua.com)) has return flights from Heathrow to Vienna from £92. Double rooms at the central, mid-range Hotel Amadeus (0043 1 533 8738, [www.hotel-amadeus.at](http://www.hotel-amadeus.at)) cost from £95, including breakfast. The Hotel Sacher has partially re-opened (in UK on 00800 1010 1111, [www.sacher.com](http://www.sacher.com)) with doubles from £235 per room.

Further information from the Austrian National Tourist Office (0845 101 1818, [www.austria.info/uk](http://www.austria.info/uk)) or the Vienna Tourist Board ([www.wien.info](http://www.wien.info)).

Dr Brigitte Timmerman's Graham Greene and Third Man tours (0043 1 774 8901, [www.viennawalks.com](http://www.viennawalks.com)) last 2hrs 30mins and cost €16 (£12). The Third Man Private Collection museum (0043 1 5864 872, [www.3mpc.net](http://www.3mpc.net)) is currently only open to the public on Mondays 6pm-8pm (though you can visit on Brigitte's tours): entrance €5. The Burg-Kino (0043 1 587 8406) is at Opernring 19.

Dr Brigitte Timmermann and British film maker Frederick Baker are bringing their exhibition, 'The Third Man: Tracing the Tracks of a Movie Classic', to a number of UK venues to celebrate the centenary of Greene's birth: Sept 27-Oct 2 Graham Greene Birthplace Trust, Berkhamsted (01442 865158, [www.grahamgreenebt.org](http://www.grahamgreenebt.org)); Oct 9-Nov 21 Museum of Oxford (01865 252761, [www.oxford.gov.uk/museum](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/museum)); Nov 26-Dec 12 Brighton Fringe Basement (01273 699733, email [greeninbrighton@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:greeninbrighton@tiscali.co.uk)); Jan 7-30 2005 Riverside Studios Cinema, London (020 8237 1111, [www.riversidestudios.co.uk](http://www.riversidestudios.co.uk)).