

# Pillow talk could be fatal at the Berlin brothel bugged by Nazis

## Germany

David Crossland Berlin

Microphones were hidden in lampshades, under tables and behind paintings, all cunningly placed to capture the pillow talk of leading Nazis and visiting diplomats who frequented a Berlin brothel seized by Hitler's spy network.

Kitty's Salon had nine plush boudoirs, all of them bugged by SS officers who were listening in the cellar.

A book published next week sheds new light on Kitty Schmidt, the Berlin madam with red hair and green eyes.

It cites testimony by Walter Schellenberg, the SS counter-intelligence chief, who claimed that the idea for a spy brothel came from Reinhard Heydrich, Hitler's head of security, who had an insatiable appetite for Berlin's fleshpots.

Heydrich was known to admire Britain's Secret Service and read British spy novels, which may have inspired the idea to keep tabs on the diplomats and rival members of the Nazi party's top brass who frequented Kitty's brothel in the upmarket district of Charlottenburg. According to *Kitty's Salon*, written

by Urs Brunner and Julia Schrammel, 48 microphones were installed across the grand apartment, and cameras were trained on the beds to root out dissenters, discover state secrets and gather material for use in blackmail.

SS agents listened in as Kitty's ladies entertained illustrious visitors, including Joachim von Ribbentrop, the foreign minister, and Galeazzo Ciano, his Italian counterpart and the son-in-law of Benito Mussolini. The drawing room is said to have had a grand piano and crystal chandeliers, and champagne was served. Kitty's Salon opened in 1939 and was Schmidt's third brothel. The prostitutes were vetted to make sure they were loyal to the regime.

"If Walter Schellenberg is to be believed, Kitty's Salon delivered excellent information," Brunner said. "To our knowledge it never supplied really valuable material. The true motivation was in all probability a mixture of voyeurism and power obsession."

One of the most prominent people caught was Heydrich himself. The sounds of one of his sojourns were recorded despite explicit instructions

that the equipment be turned off for him. Alfred Naujocks, the intelligence officer involved, was within a few months posted to the Russian front.

Kitty's Salon was one of the few privately run brothels allowed to remain open by the Nazis, who brought an end to the liberal morals of the 1920s.

Schmidt was born in Hamburg in 1882 and worked as a governess in Wales before moving to Berlin and entering into its nightlife. She was in her late fifties when the SS took over her brothel in 1939. Her true loyalties seem destined to remain a mystery, the authors admit. They cite contemporaries describing her as

motherly towards her staff and charming to friends and neighbours. It is claimed that she helped

Jews to escape. "Howling with the wolves was Kitty Schmidt's form of survival," Brunner said. "She was an apolitical businesswoman and socialite." The publisher Wieland Giebel, who accepted the manuscript minutes after reading it, said: "I see her as an ice-cold opportunist."

The bugging is believed to have stopped after Heydrich's death in 1942 at the hands of British-trained Czech agents — or at the very latest in 1943, when Kitty's Salon was bombed in an

RAF air raid. Undaunted, she moved her business to the ground floor of the building. She ran her salon until her death in 1954, aged 71. Two years earlier she hinted at the wealth of secrets she had gleaned over the decades, telling a journalist: "We could write a book . . . we wouldn't even have to have it printed. It would earn more money unpublished."



**Kitty Schmidt ran the Charlottenburg brothel until her death in 1954**