

Bletchley Park

Bletchley Park, a country house in Buckinghamshire, was bought by the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) in 1938 as a site to which the Government Code & Cypher School and MI6 could be evacuated when war came. It was widely expected that London would be the target of a massive aerial assault at the very start of any war.



Codebreaking at Bletchley Park first took place in August 1938

A small group of people moved into the Mansion under the cover story that they were 'Captain Ridley's Shooting Party'. They had an air of friends enjoying a relaxed weekend together at a country house. They even brought with them one of the best chefs from the Savoy Hotel to cook their food. But the small group of people were actually members of MI6, and the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS), a secret team including a number of scholars and academics turned Codebreakers. Their job; to see whether Bletchley Park would work as a wartime location, safe from the risk of bombing in London, for intelligence activity by GC&CS as well as elements of MI6. Satisfied with the suitability of Bletchley Park, they returned to London to await the impending conflict.

Cottage Industry

Work began in the Mansion and its outbuildings, with a staff of around 150 people. As more and more people arrived to join the codebreaking operations, the various sections began to move into large pre-fabricated wooden huts set up on the lawns of the Park. For security reasons, the various sections were known only by their hut numbers. The first operational break into Enigma came around the 23 January 1940, when the team working under Dilly Knox, with the mathematicians John Jeffreys, Peter Twinn and Alan Turing, unravelled the German Army administrative key that became known at Bletchley Park as 'The Green'. Encouraged by this success, the Codebreakers managed to crack the 'Red' key used by the Luftwaffe (German air force). In addition to German codes, Italian and later Japanese systems were also broken.

Despite ever increasing numbers of staff, work in the 'Huts' continued

In October 1941 after receiving a letter from some of the senior codebreakers decrying the lack of resources being afforded them, Prime Minister Winston Churchill directed:

'Make sure they have all they want extreme priority and report to me that this has been done.'

From that moment on Bletchley Park began receiving a huge influx of resources and a major building programme ensued to create the space to house the ever increasing workforce. Brick and concrete blocks were built for staff, and Outstations created to house the growing number of 'Bombe' machines in use finding Enigma 'Keys'. The Bombes were operated by Wrens, many of whom lived in requisitioned country houses such as Woburn Abbey. Codebreaking had been turned into an 'industrial' process.