

## Unique wartime footage of Bletchley Park's secret MI6 communications staff discovered

The only known wartime film footage of a secret site connected to Bletchley Park has been donated to Bletchley Park Trust.

The incredibly rare 11-minute silent film, believed to be a compilation of footage recorded between 1939 – 1945, shows members of MI6 Section VIII at Whaddon Hall, Buckinghamshire. During World War Two, this was a most secret site where *Ultra* intelligence produced by the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS) at Bletchley Park would be sent, and then passed on to Allied commanders in the field.

### **Dr. David Kenyon, Research Historian at Bletchley Park highlights the rarity of this find:**

*"No other film footage of a site intimately connected with Bletchley Park exists. We don't know who filmed it and the footage doesn't give away any state secrets or any clues about the work the people in it are doing. If it fell into the wrong hands, it would have given little away, but for us today, it is an astonishing discovery and important record of one of the most secret and valuable aspects of Bletchley Park's work."*

The reel of wartime footage, preserved in its original canister, has been donated to Bletchley Park by a donor who wishes to remain anonymous.

To help authenticate the film, Bletchley Park showed the footage to World War Two Veteran Geoffrey Pidgeon, who started working for MI6 Section VIII aged 17. The film movingly includes the only known film footage of Geoffrey's father Horace 'Pidge' Pidgeon, who also worked at Whaddon Hall from July 1940 - December 1945 managing MI6 wireless stores, providing radio equipment for agents in the field.

*'I'd never seen my father on a cinefilm before,' said Mr Pidgeon. "I was very surprised and moved to watch it for the first time. It's a remarkable find."*

The film, shot mostly in black and white with some colour footage, shows men and women off duty at Whaddon Hall and at Whaddon Chase, where some staff were billeted. There is also footage of the Whaddon hunt, a football game, and a cricket match in beautiful summer sunshine. Identified figures in the film include [Brigadier Richard Gambier-Parry](#), Head of SIS Section VIII, based at Whaddon Hall 1939-1945, as well as [Bob Hornby](#), first Engineer, in charge of workshops and [Ewart Holden](#), Stores officer. Several figures in the film have not been identified and Bletchley Park Trust is appealing for anyone who recognises someone in the film to get in touch via [enquiries@bletchleypark.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@bletchleypark.org.uk)

The silent film has been analysed by a forensic lip reader, enabling subtitles to be added where possible to help bring it to life. The film will be preserved as part of Bletchley Park's collections, and made accessible for research, when the museum and heritage attraction reopens.

### **Peronel Craddock, Head of Collections and Exhibitions at Bletchley Park said:**

*"The Whaddon Hall film is a really significant addition to our collection. Not only does it show us the place and the people in wartime but it's the first piece of film footage*

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*we're aware of that shows any of the activity associated with Bletchley Park at all. We're delighted it has been donated to Bletchley Park Trust where it can be cared for and help tell the story of the huge team effort that underpinned Bletchley Park's successes during World War Two."*

An edit of the silent film and a supporting documentary is available to view online on the Bletchley Park website and YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/bletchleyparktrust>

ENDS

### **Notes to editors**

- Due to the intense secrecy of their work, photography and film was banned at Bletchley Park and associated sites. Very few photos of Bletchley Park during wartime exist.
- This film is only known wartime footage of any site linked to Bletchley Park.
- *Ultra* was a classification given to intelligence produced by Bletchley Park from complex ciphers such as Enigma. To prevent the enemy finding out their ciphers had been broken, BP's reports were often made to look as if they had come from spies working abroad. Material was passed to MI6 but also direct to the Admiralty, the War Office or the Air Ministry, and to some commands depending on the content of the reports.

B-Roll footage of the Whaddon Hall film, and pre-recorded interviews with Geoffrey Pidgeon, Bletchley Park Trust Research Historian Dr David Kenyon, and Bletchley Park Trust Head of Collections and Exhibitions Peronel Craddock, are available.

**For further information and all image, film and interview requests, please contact Kat Harper on [kharper@bletchleypark.org.uk](mailto:kharper@bletchleypark.org.uk) or +44(0) 7495 427587**

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### **About Bletchley Park**

Bletchley Park is a vibrant heritage attraction and museum, open daily to visitors.

It was the home of British World War Two codebreaking; a place where technological innovation and human endeavour came together to made groundbreaking achievements that have helped shape the world we live in today.

This unique site was previously a vast Victorian estate, where parts including the Mansion still survive, expanding during wartime to accommodate Codebreakers Huts and Blocks.

During World War Two, the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS), now known as the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), was based at Bletchley Park. It grew from a small team of specialists to a vast intelligence factory of thousands of dedicated women and men. This extraordinary combination of brilliant and determined people and cutting-edge technology contributed significantly to Allied victory. In tough conditions, they provided vital intelligence and developed pioneering technological innovation that had a direct and profound influence on the outcome of the war.

The site continues to reveal secrets and tell fascinating stories of our national legacy.

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### **About Whaddon Hall and MI6 Section VIII**

After a brief spell at Bletchley Park, from November 1939 – summer 1945, Whaddon Hall was the wartime base of MI6 Section VIII (Communications).

Located just six miles west of Bletchley Park in the Buckinghamshire countryside, Whaddon Hall had a range of responsibilities: producing radio sets for clandestine SIS communications from agents and embassies abroad; fitting wireless gear into aircraft and ships; and monitoring and maintaining communications to and from these agents.

Section VIII also took over a crucial aspect of the work of the Government Code and Cypher School that was stationed at Bletchley Park; the distribution of *Ultra* intelligence. Once enemy messages started to be broken in substantial numbers, a requirement arose to deliver the results to Bletchley Park's "customers". Material for government departments in the UK could be sent via teleprinter, but there was also a need to deliver urgent intelligence to Allied commanders on the battlefield. To this end a system of Special Communications and Special Liaison Units (SCUs and SLUs) was established which would travel with headquarters overseas and receive *Ultra* messages. Section VIII at Whaddon was the conduit for this traffic. Messages were passed to Whaddon where they would be broadcast to the SCUs abroad, who would receive the messages in specially equipped vehicles, also fitted-out at Whaddon. Thus Section VIII gave Bletchley Park the ability to connect directly with the fighting fronts, and deliver SIGINT to where it could be most effective.

The success of the SCU/SLU system and of Section VIII more widely can be largely attributed to the influence of its most senior commander, Brigadier Sir Richard Gambier-Parry. Impeccably turned out in his RWF uniform he brought a balance of significant expertise but also kindness to his role, signing himself "Pop" in his letters to the Whaddon staff magazine.

Today Whaddon Hall is private housing and is not open to the public.