

Margaret Bullen, née Boulton

Bletchley Park January 1944 - August 1945. Civilian in Newmanry, wiring on equipment including Heath Robinson. Interviewed May 2014

I was at Bletchley Park from 1944 to the end of the war. Everyone, when they turned 18, had to do war work. I don't know how, but I was asked to go to the Foreign Office in Berkeley Square and was interviewed by someone whose name I've quite forgotten, a very 'headmistressy' lady. My mother came with me, I was 18, and living in the country. I answered the questions, the interviewer didn't say much, other than I would be receiving a travel warrant and instructions on where to go and while there I signed the Official Secrets Act.

I had an aunt in the ATS who had lived in Palestine where her husband was in the Palestine Police, and she happened to be home on holiday when war broke out. She became an ATS officer and was at Bletchley Park and Beaumanor. By the time I was at Bletchley Park she was in Egypt but I wonder if, when I was 18, she had put in a word about her niece.

About 10 days after the interview the warrant arrived and I took the train from Kings Lynn to Bletchley, having never travelled on my own before.

Bletchley station is on the mainline from Euston to Scotland, on the edge of the village, and I don't remember how I knew it was Bletchley as they didn't have any signs up. I had been told I was to be billeted with a family in the next village, which was Wolverton, and I think I must have gone there that first night.

My billet was a 3 bedroom council house with a lovely couple who had a son, about 11 or 12, so at 18 I felt very old. I stayed there for most of my time at Bletchley. I was their only lodger and they were very kind to me. I was in the small bedroom which they had not used until I arrived and I think they had been told they would have to take me. They were given utility furniture which had been creosoted and had a terrible smell. I was always hungry while at Bletchley! I recall my husband-to-be sending down shortbread supplies from Scotland. I used to put this in the drawer so it smelt of creosote and I couldn't eat it! I would often have cheese on toast for supper as we were heavily rationed.

I remember catching a little bus to Bletchley from Wolverton. It took about 20 people and stopped at various places.

Not long before the war ended, they built a hostel at Bletchley Park so that the girls didn't have to go into digs. I moved in there and I remember there being no heating in the bathroom and so your towel never dried! I used to take most of the water off with a flannel for years afterwards, even though I had a dry towel, it was a habit.

I had no idea prior to arrival, what work I would be doing. In the event, I was involved in wiring, although I'd never used a soldering iron before. I would wire different wires together to create what was called the Heath Robinson.

We were given a sheet of paper with letters and numbers. I'd never used a soldering iron before and we would have to put, say, 'three blue wire' to 'two red wire'. We would go to lunch in the canteen and do something similar in the afternoon. It didn't mean anything to me and the work was very repetitive. I was employed by the Foreign Office and paid £2 10 shillings.

[Wynn-Williams](#) ran the department and ultimately we had Colossus but for 18 months we had the Heath Robinson. I didn't operate the machines, the Wrens did that. If you look at the Colossus, we were around the back and the Wrens were at the front. People would come in and out watching what we were doing and I remember one evening there being a lot of gold-braided officers, waiting for the wiring to be done, so the Wrens could do the decoding around the front.

I usually worked from 9 am to 5 or 6 pm, and only worked shifts when there was urgent decoding to be done. On these occasions I finished after 9 pm, after the last bus had left so would take the train back to Wolverton. One such time I did this and, some time after I boarded, I asked the guard when to expect the stop for Wolverton. He looked at me oddly and told me that I was on the night express to Edinburgh, next stop Rugby! I was so worried – I'd only been in the digs for a short time and I was worried what they would think of me! It all turned out alright though.

I didn't really take part in any social activities, because we didn't meet anyone except in the hut where we were working. There were two other girls my age and we used to go for walks and to the cinema in Fenny Stratford, by bus. I can't remember mixing with anyone else.

I also recall seeing some very good tennis players on the courts, who always had a crowd watching them. I remember the American officers as they had very nice uniforms; they were spread around different huts.

We used to have leave. My husband-to-be was an RAF officer, a pilot based in Scotland and he would come down to London to meet me for the day, perhaps go to a show.

My parents never asked what I was doing – and I was an only child with all the focus on me. But in fact no one I ever knew, ever asked. I think my husband knew what happened at Bletchley Park but we never discussed it. I don't remember being primed on what to say to people, either.

I remember showing our passes to go out of the grounds into Bletchley, which was just one main street. There was a café where we would go and have a

cup of coffee, but no-one ever asked us what we were doing in there, with all those thousands of people, in a place with barbed wire around.

I may have met some of the famous Bletchley Park people. As well as Dr Wynn-Williams I recall George Biden and [Alan Bruce](#) from Dollis Hill who were seconded here and remember them not having to wear uniform.

As soon as the War ended we were told we could go – just like that. I gather they destroyed a lot of the Colossus.