

## [Joan Joslin, née Glover](#)

*Bletchley Park, Hollerith Operator. Interviewed May 2014*

### The Recruitment Process

I left school in 1939, having hoped to go to university, but then the war came along. Instead, I successfully passed the Civil Service exam and went on to work in accountancy, until, one day, I received a letter from the Foreign Office, inviting me to Mayfair House, Park Lane, for an interview.

I recall my interviewer, Miss [Moore](#), sitting behind a huge desk in a very grand office and proceeding to ask me a number of questions about my favourite subjects, hobbies and general topics. I remember telling her that I'd loved mathematics and English. At the end of the interview she gave me a travel warrant and told me to go home, pack a case immediately and travel to Euston Station the following morning, where I would catch a train to Bletchley. I could tell my mother about my plans, but no-one else. She could accompany me as far as Euston Station, but no further.

### Arriving at Bletchley Park - Hollerith School and Block C

And so I arrived at Bletchley Park on Christmas Eve 1942! I was taken straight to Block C and I recall it as the most awful building! The walls were a yard thick, with no windows or heating. Windows were put in later on. I have to say though that we didn't really think about it, as the work was so interesting and the machines generated heat anyway.

From Block C I was taken straight to the Hollerith School, which was a separate building in the grounds of Bletchley Park. I spent the next six weeks there, learning how to adapt Hollerith accounting machines, into code breaking machines. At the end of this time, I returned to Block C, with its very noisy machinery. First I worked in the punch room and then the machine room. In the punch room you would use the punch machine, to record the messages on the cards.

Then the whole pile of cards would go down to the machine room and be processed through the numerous machines in there – the sorter, the reproducer, the verifier, the collator and finally the huge tabulating machine. The sorter was 6ft long and sorted the punch cards, reading the little holes to put them in order. A little needle pierced the holes. The reproducers, verifiers, and collators were the size of an armchair and we had to learn how to take them apart and then put them back together again, so we understood exactly what we were doing. I could still do it now!

We used to feed reams of paper into the tabulating machine and out would come groups of five figures offset across the page – every second the machine would move up and the figures would gradually move across the page. We would do this sometimes for a day or two, sometimes for weeks, until we found what we told to look for. Some of the results came back in English, some as verses of Shakespeare. Some came back as swear words! I learnt all my swear words there! It was very interesting work, it really was.

It is difficult to explain how you got the answers from the machines, which were the equivalent of computers – I felt we really were on the ‘ground floor’ of the computer age.

After this, I was given the job of instructing groups of 10 Wrens at a time, on the workings of these machines. This would take around three weeks each time, following which these groups would go to Alexandria and carry on the good work there. I really enjoyed that too, it was great working with different people like the Wrens.

After a couple of years of doing that, I was given a little area in Block C, which became known as ‘Floradora Bay’. Although the workplace was open plan when I first arrived, it had gradually been turned into offices, with the stacking of boxes of information as walls. So I had my own little office here, in which I used an Eins machine. This consisted of eight wheels, four at the bottom and four at the top, the bottom set being offset from the top four. I would sit and take readings every so often and I was told to look for a full-stop. If I found one, the message could be deciphered by the relevant section. I loved that work and continued doing it until 1945.

### The importance of our work

We were first port of call for information coming into Bletchley Park. It arrived by motorbike from outlying stations – and it always came to us first. We did the indexing and then it went to the various sections. We were privileged in Block C, because we gained a lot of information other huts didn’t.

We were given plenty of information from which to work and what to look for. I was told I was working on German naval and Japanese air signs and was working on Tetra. The jobs were named after fish. My work usually went off to the Naval Section, after I’d done my bit. We used a similar pulley system to what was used in drapery stores in the 1930s, to transfer information!

Some of our work was Enigma work. The other machine I used, the Eins machine, was totally different and very important and I was terribly disappointed not to see it at Bletchley Park later on. I couldn’t find any

reference to it until I read a book on Bletchley Park. I understand most of them have been destroyed.

We knew the work we were doing was important and were told straight away if there was a good result. One such incident was when the U-559 U-Boat was captured and sunk – with the loss of two of our sailors. An Enigma and its code-books were captured on that boat, which we understood helped in reducing the loss of merchant ships.

Another episode was when we'd been working until late in the evening and suddenly news came through that, because of our efforts, the Scharnhorst had been located in the Norwegian fjord. We were thrilled to be part of that but thought no more about it. A week or so later, Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser came to Bletchley Park and asked to see the people involved in deciphering the message. So over we went to the mansion, to hear the whole story, which of course was very moving as it was a hard fought battle. The next morning, I was in my billet and heard the news on the radio, about the capture and sinking of the Scharnhorst, with the loss of so few men, which of course was totally different to what Sir Bruce Fraser had told us. It was marvellous to know we were doing a useful job. When Germany gave in and war was effectively over in Europe, we heard straight away and were given 48 hour leave immediately. We had the pleasure of knowing when we had done well, which was lovely.

Periodically, a group of us were sent out to Drayton Parslow to do exactly the same work out there. I'm not sure why we were sent out there!

All I remember about Japanese work at Bletchley Park, is that they were very lax in their coding (they kept changing their coding system) – it was easier to solve because of that. I recall German naval coders being more careful. We had a Japanese interpreter on site, Miss [Yeo](#), who worked in Block C.

### Security & Secrecy

One night, whilst on duty around midnight, we were aware of a group of army officers in the Park. After they had left we were told that they were going on a special mission. On their return next morning, we were told they'd captured an Enigma. A lot of interesting things happened like that, but it was all done very discretely.

Even though we worked in close proximity, my future husband [Ken](#) never knew what I did. I never thought about discussing my work, even between ourselves when we were married. It simply didn't occur to us. Even when we were able to, it didn't feel right. We have friends we had then and still know now,

whom we've never discussed anything with. Both sets of parents died not knowing what we did. I think it's marvellous that we didn't talk about it, it never occurred to us and I think most people feel the same.

The only night I'd love to have said something, was the night Germany gave in and we went to Euston Station. It was full of mainly American military personnel milling about and I wanted to shout 'the war's over', but I couldn't. Next day, it was announced publicly and we travelled down to my parents' house on the first tube. I got a dressing down from my mother, for being out all night with Ken and she wondered why we were home, it was all very strange!

Another funny thing happened the first time Ken took me home to meet his family. His mother had asked 'What does your young lady do?' He had to think quickly and could only tell her that I worked with a machine. 40 years later, she came into the kitchen during our anniversary party and said 'I'm very pleased you made my son happy but I have to tell you I did not want him to marry a factory girl! And we still didn't' tell her!

I do give talks now, of course.

### Worklife

We worked a five week shift: two weeks, 9am-4pm; one week, 4pm-midnight; one week, 9am-4pm; and one week, midnight till 7am.

We had four weeks leave total per year. We didn't get leave very often, only if anything special happened, other than that we worked more or less seven days a week and never seemed to have time off.

I knew all the people on our shift – about 100 of them. They were mainly civilians, naval personnel, some army and couple of air force men.

I was employed by the Foreign Office and my salary was £2 7s 6d per week. £1 per week was deducted for my billet. About half way through my time there, we were asked to donate some of our salary to help with the war effort, so I think most people did. We were told we would get it back after the war. 13 years later I got £13 back!

We ate at Bletchley Park and I remember the food being quite good.

### Famous People

[Freddie Freeborn](#) was a lovely man and a good boss, as were the twins, [Ron](#) and [Norman](#) Whelan. They kept us in check! Mr Freeborn was quite strict but

very nice. When he discovered that Ken and I were going out (which really wasn't allowed) he called us in and said that 'as we had behaved ourselves, we could continue!' His daughter, [Paddy](#), also worked in the Block.

Winston Churchill came to visit, as did Queen Elizabeth and King George, and Louis Mountbatten. My favourite was General Doolittle, an American General, a very nice man. It was all so very interesting.

We knew [Alan Turing](#), as he was so eccentric, he'd have his mug on a piece of string around his wrist and I recall him eating his lunch sitting by the lake. He seemed very remote. I remember him going missing for a while and we would hear that he'd been taken into a home as he was ill. A nice, quiet, man, I never saw him ever come into Block C.

### Social Life

Security and confidentiality was drummed into us. I recall an Auntie trying to visit me and being sent away immediately from Bletchley Station!

We weren't allowed to mix with any Polish people, which were a surprise, given how much work they did for us in the War. We were told we would be imprisoned, if we did.

Our movements were restricted to a 6 mile radius of the Park and we were bussed in and out of the Park, rather than using public transport.

We didn't mix much with people from other huts and buildings, only in the evenings and never discussed work. It was a good social life and we had the science and arts club. A nice lady called Mrs Tinkler, head of the local WVS, who was like a mother hen, organised dances and so on in the very good WVS club at Wolverton. Ken used to play table tennis and I used to get invited to all the parties as I played the piano!

We also went to see the amateur dramatics in Bletchley Park.

### My accommodation

I was billeted in New Bradwell, a little village not far away and Ken was billeted at Wolverton, about a mile from New Bradwell. I was billeted with a very nice couple, not very well off, who already had a daughter and who had another whilst I was there. They named her Joan and I thought that was a real honour. They were so very kind to me. Of course they had to have me as they had a room spare and because they had no furnishings for that room, the government supplied everything I needed, desk, bed, curtains, carpet, wardrobe. They were allowed to keep it all at the end of the war – it

was nice furniture. As he was a baker, I never went short of bread and cakes! They were paid £1 per week for my keep, which was not a lot of money. I stayed there until I left in 1945. And I'm sure I had some of their food as well as my ration. I'm still in touch with the daughters to this day. They still live in the village; it's a close knit community. I don't think everyone was as lucky as me.

They had funny ideas about what we did at Bletchley Park. Once they said 'We know what you do, you carry guns'!

### My family during the War

All my family was involved in the war. My father was a marine commando in Burma, my brother in the Fleet Air Arm in Ceylon and my sister was in the Wrens in Scotland. My mother was at home with two young children and had to patrol the streets at night for incendiary bombs. My brother served on the Ark Royal, and I was relieved to hear that when it was sunk, he was already safely in Ceylon.

### After the War

We married in August 1945, after I'd finished at Bletchley Park and had been transferred to work in the War Office in London. I was working on the repatriation of Japanese prisoners of war, which was very harrowing. My boss was Major Bonham-Carter. I stayed there two years but of course did not have the same sense of achievement as at Bletchley, it was much sadder work. I then went into education in Havering for 26 years, before retiring. Nothing came up to what I did at Bletchley!