

Mrs Anne Sykes, née Fisher

Bletchley Park 1943 – 1945. Naval Section, Spanish naval codes and ciphers.

Mrs Sykes' son, Keith Sykes, has provided a short account of his parents' time at Bletchley Park.

My parents met at Bletchley Park, but I suspect that they knew little about what each other did. My father was [Captain Gordon Sykes](#) who worked in the Japanese Armed Forces Section and who died in 1996.

My sister and I only discovered the background on the publication of Winterbotham's book¹, when for the first time my parents began to talk about their experience. However, like most veterans, they were guarded even then in what they said and, in the case of my father; I have little to what is shown on the Bletchley Park Roll of Honour.

My mother was recruited to Bletchley Park on graduating in languages from Edinburgh University. Her Professor of Spanish seems to have recommended her. She was interviewed at the Citadel, behind the Admiralty building at the entrance to St James's Park. Provided with a rail warrant and telephone number to call on arrival at Bletchley Station, but with no information as to the nature of work, she was told that someone would come to fetch her. Sadly they forgot. You can imagine the effect on an impressionable young girl far from home. When a subsequent train arrived and a newcomer descended, looked around for the phone box, and then made a call, my mother plucked up her courage and asked them (against the rules as she knew) whether they might be going to the same place, even though they did not know anything more than its name.

The first night (or maybe longer) she spent in accommodation near the gatehouse², while a billet was organised.

She was to work in an all female section of seven on Spanish codes. The section was run by [Janet Milne](#), and included [Elspeth Downie](#) and [Nora Millward](#) (married to [Bill Millward](#)). Most of the time it was a comparatively quiet section. But every so often a major panic would break out. Typically this would be because a damaged U boat had put into a port, such as Cadiz, for repairs. Then simultaneous signals would go from Cadiz to Madrid in Spanish cipher and from Spain to Berlin from the German Naval Attaché. The German Enigma codebreakers would want a break into the Spanish message as early as possible to provide

¹ *The Ultra Secret*, by [Frederick Winterbotham](#), published in 1974.

² Probably the women's' hostel in Wilton Avenue, part of which survives as a driving test centre.

a crib. The situation was worsened by Janet Milne's habit of allowing leave often on request, so that my mother found herself, I think, once on her own at such a moment of panic.

Among the messages deciphered, apparently, was one concerning the shooting down of the aircraft carrying the actor, Leslie Howard.

The team was proud of the fact that when, later, the Americans took over responsibility for their operations the British seven were replaced by a dozen Americans.

My parents, most likely, met on the daily commute from Bedford to BP, since they were in different sections. They became engaged and asked [Kenneth Mackenzie](#) to be their best man. In the event his leave was cancelled because of the proximity of D-day, whereas the Japanese and Spanish sections were not affected.