

John Blair and Joan Blair, née Lill

Bletchley Park, Hut 3 and Communications Centre.

An account by Jim Blair of his parents' life at Bletchley Park. Submitted to the Bletchley Park Roll of Honour, May 2014.

Growing up in the 50s and 60s, I knew that my parents had worked and met at "The Park" during the war but apart from things that I found odd, such as my mother knowing Morse code, I didn't think much about it until my late teens. When asked about what he had done in the war, my father replied that he was told off for his bad writing, and then went on to some scant details of what he had done in the army of occupation in Hamburg. Mother was a little more forthcoming, explaining that she had typed stuff from pen recorded Morse tapes.

Coincidentally, I applied to and was interviewed at GCHQ when I graduated in 1972 (of which a little more later), and at that point my parents explained that that was what they had been involved in during the war.

John Livingston Blair

My father was the son of an Edinburgh fruiterer but was brought up in a family extended by four maiden aunts who were florists. Even in the late 1920s, they were well off and father read economics at the University after schooling at Watsons, one of the Merchant Company schools. After University, he took what we would now call a gap year in Germany, staying in Munich and witnessing the burning of the books. On his return, he joined W&R Chambers as a book editor. The family took holidays in Germany subsequently and there are photos of brownshirts marching in central Berlin a mere 6 weeks after the Night of the Long Knives, and of them in front of the Reichstag "Gebäude".

He joined up in the Royal Artillery, and from there transferred when a general call for German speakers went out. I believe, but am not certain, that he was sent for a refresher course at Cambridge before transferring to The Park. I believe that he may have been billeted in Stony Stratford, as he definitely met my mother on the bus that they used to commute, and she was definitely billeted there.

He worked under [Ralph Bennett](#), I believe, as we received Christmas cards from Ralph and Marjorie all through the 50s and into the 60s, and I have a vague memory of them visiting in the mid 50s.

He never explained what he did, beyond saying that he translated documents from German; however, as a 10-year-old, I was fascinated to discover a number of books of photographs of German weaponry. Other clues came from such stuff as the sheepskin lined leather waistcoat, which he explained that he had acquired because the office where he worked was so cold.

Very occasionally, he would let slip small bits of information; for example, when Olivia Newton-John became famous in the 70s, he remarked that he thought that he might have worked alongside her father in the war.

The photo of my parents' wedding includes their best man, my godfather [Irvine Hughes](#), who he had clearly met at Bletchley. He is behind father's right shoulder. The person on the extreme left is father's younger brother, and the rest are mother's relations, parents, brother and two aunts.

In 1945, after VE Day, he formed part of the army of occupation in Hamburg (I believe), where he was editor of a German language newspaper—presumably because of his background in publishing. He recounted how he stopped the presses so that the newspaper could be the first in Germany to report the execution of Quisling. He seems to have paid for everything in cigarettes. Otherwise, I think he found Hamburg extremely depressing and applied for and was granted early demob in 1946.

Joan Lill

My mother was the daughter of a foreman timber merchant from the Cotswolds. The family hailed from Lincolnshire. She was fairly bright, coming top of the school certificate in Burford Girls Grammar School and might presumably have followed her mother, who had been a teacher before her marriage. However, childhood illness had left her severely (though not profoundly) deaf. So, she had become a typist in the office of the building firm that employed my Grandfather.

She was recruited to Bletchley under a drive to expand operations in 1942 and left some time in 1944. The record indicates March but that seems unlikely, as she told of friends who were involved over D-Day being held in the Park when it was delayed. Certainly, as a married couple, they were billeted in Deanshanger.

I visited the Park with her soon after the Trust took over, and she recounted several tales: the visits of Churchill and Mountbatten; how, being billeted in a house without a bath, she was allowed to have one a month in the big house. Her work sounded boring in the extreme: consisting of typing, on a

Typex, British code groups from a Morse pen recorder tape that contained encrypted German intercepts, and more code groups that had been sent from Egypt - Cairo Roads as she always referred to it.

She left the Park when she was married, and when she became pregnant, she moved to Edinburgh to live with my father's maiden aunts.

When various histories started appearing in the 90s, she did remark on a number of characters that she was aware of while at the Park.

Later connections

My father left W&R Chambers in the late 50s and became a Minister in the Church of Scotland. He arrived in his first parish in Banff, where he and my mother discovered that the organist's wife had also been at the Park. She was a Wren, [Martha Miller](#) (née Dalling).

In 1972, graduating in Maths from Aberdeen, I was interviewed by [Sean Wylie](#) (much impressing my maths professor who was an algebraic topologist), for a job at GCHQ. Many years later, I took a job as director of IT at Hills Road Sixth Form College, where I discovered that not merely had Sean Wylie taught there very soon after I had met him, but that [Brin Newton-John](#) had been Headmaster of the Boys' County Grammar School, both before and after the war.