

Mimi Gallilee

Bletchley Park May 1941 - 1946. Director's Secretariat, clerical and typing duties. Interviewed at September 2000 Bletchley Park reunion.

I started here at Bletchley Park on 5 May 1941 as a girl messenger. I had to know where every position was on the Park so I went everywhere. Who was in what Hut and what they were doing. I didn't wonder about that too much - I was too young. I was living at home, I was evacuated with my school and by rather devious means, because my [mother](#) was working in Bletchley, she managed to move me from Hemel Hempstead, where I was evacuated to Bletchley so I could be close to her. I was at the evacuated school in Bletchley until I was nearly fourteen and a half.

My mother decided I was too much of a nuisance to hang around the school and learning nothing, it wasn't their fault, it was just conditions at the time. It was just an old tin-hut and a church hall, that was all. Mother was working here, and she knew Captain [Bradshaw](#) as he was then, and mentioned to him, and he said ask her to come and see me. So an appointment was made through my mother for the following day, which was a Sunday. I was brought in through the gate by a security guard and he had with him the lady who was in charge of the registry, where if I was suitable they would put me. After meeting her and that I was offered the job on the spot, and I started work either the next day or a week later but I knew it was the 5 of May. I certainly must have signed the Official Secrets Act, and of course at the end of the war when we were packing up and leaving here, we had to sign it again.

I wasn't involved in any destruction of anything at the end of the war. We did lots of packing and everything that we had was, as far as I was aware was sent to Eastcote, because it was the Directorate. This was where I did the 'messengering' for approximately a year, I don't think I was even sixteen when I was put into this department, I was a junior clerk and a

messenger. In this room, the ballroom, when I first came here, I recollect Captain Bradshaw or Commander [Denniston](#). I didn't know then that this was the bosses' office or how important he was, you were never introduced to people around here unless it concerned the work. I spent the rest of the war in this Directorate working for Commander [Travis](#), these are the people who joined perhaps later, like [Nigel de Grey](#). Later when I moved up a step in the office, I was made Nigel de Grey's secretary's dogsbody, I taught myself to type, and afterwards got myself a job as a typist after the war.

We rented a little house in Fenny Stratford so we didn't have the bother of being billeted with landlords or that, and I used to walk into work each day — it was about a mile. I did have a bicycle later on, but first of all I used to walk. Of course I didn't do shift work, and when I joined I was only allowed to do a certain number of hours a week. But once I had turned sixteen, I did, I think it was 52 hours a week if you did day work, and you got a day off each week, different days that was, but you had to have it when it was convenient. I think one day in the week you could go home at 4 o'clock.

My [sister](#), who was in Hut 10, was a dancer — and led what you might call the gay life then. I was 18 at the end of the war and did have some social life as well. I wasn't mad myself on dancing, but I did go to hops in the assembly hall and would go to the Christmas pantomimes.

Believe it or not, it was a very exciting life, I didn't know how important things were. I really did not know that the people were as important as we later learnt. I thought of my own boss, Nigel de Grey, I didn't know till after the war that he was one of the back-room boys who broke the Zimmermann Telegram in the first World War. [Blair-Cunyinghame](#) had a lot to do with us. And [Telford Taylor](#) and Colonel [McKee](#), the Americans. We thought all the Americans had walked out of Hollywood, especially Telford Taylor — he was an absolute dream to look at and he was so nice. If he said 'Good morning' or whatever, you just melted at the knees — he

was absolutely lovely.

Of course we had a lot of well-known people here as well, A J Alan, the writer, was in Hut 8, he was known here as Mr [Lambert](#), and Mr [Harry Hinsley](#) as you know was in Hut 4. I think he came into the Directorate in about 1944 or so, he was the nicest, approachable and friendly person you could ever have met, I was about seventeen then I suppose. When you are at that age and people around you seem so callow they didn't want to talk to you, it was wonderful. I didn't meet [Roy Jenkins](#), he was only here for one year but I think he put rather a lot about the place in his book considering he was only here for one year, and I didn't really like what he wrote.

Somebody who was in charge of the Wrens in Hut 11, her name is [Ann Hill](#) now, she married and she was the senior Wren officer. I met her again for the first time when I was invited to the Imperial War Museum about two or three years ago — and we've stayed in contact ever since. She was one of the first people I met when I came here, she was friendly and talked to you, she wasn't famous, just very nice, very approachable.

If I had a list in front of me, I could reel some names off. All of the lives here were different and self-contained. Let's say the people in Huts 3 and 6, we all knew they hobnobbed, but that was just 3 and 6. Everything was so secret and people were told you must not discuss anything. Of course there were three shifts going on at the time, so social life was a bit compartmentalised all the way through. People could stay on after day work for different social clubs, there was a music club and a jazz club I once went to. A classical music club which I did enjoy and a library was here. There was nothing to do in Bletchley if you were just an ordinary person apart from going to the cinema or a pub. I wouldn't think of going out for a drink. There were no restaurants as there was no food. People made their own social life here, there was Scottish dancing, all sorts of odd and different things. They built the tennis courts and then there was

rounders, I didn't join a lot of those as I was very young, in those days if you were very young you were still a child. It was a bit different when I was eighteen but the war ended then, and off we went to Eastcote.

I went on to work at Eastcote at the end of the war. There were about 1000 people who if they wanted to, could stay on working and they chose to go and work at Eastcote — my sister who worked in the Air Section was made redundant. My mother packed me up and took me there to a place we were lodging in Bayswater — my mother had to come and inspect it to see what it was like.

The roads around the Park didn't have any names — things like that were blacked out. Everyone knew where the paths were in any case. The coaches and brakes would all find their way here and would all line up to take people home. Not many people had personal cars. The Park wasn't like a building site until late 1942 or early 1943, I'm not sure now but I think it was D Block that was the first one to be built. I didn't really have to go to the blocks, I never went to C Block where the card index was — D Block was the only one I went into and then only once or twice, I just went into the Huts. I could tell you where all the Huts were but I didn't know what was going on in them. With some of them you could only ring the outside bell. There were no security guards outside the huts, the only guards were on the gates and they were closed a lot, when I saw the film I thought it wasn't quite like that.

We had a pass that we were not allowed to show anyone else outside the Park, and if you lost it you got told off, and certainly weren't allowed in. The gate wasn't guarded as such, there were guards there about of course but not guarded — and I don't think that post-box was there either.

Behind Hut 4 which you never hear about, was Hut 5, the Military Section, that was where Colonel [Alexander](#) was in charge. It wasn't until just a few weeks ago that I found out that Colonel [Tiltman](#) was in charge of the

whole Military Section which went up the stairs and beyond his office. They were all military and I was in there for a short time, they needed another hand so they must have asked my department for help for a couple of weeks or so.

Commander Travis's wife used to help out in the coffee hut. We had a First Aid Post near where the tennis courts are, I think it was about half of Hut I. It was only one little room with a nurse, afterwards they got a sick bay as you came in the main gate, turn sharp right and they built a brick sick bay, I believe that was the only thing built over there, a proper sick bay, where they could keep people overnight. I remember seeing some fire drill near the fire section once, but I wasn't really interested in those sort of things in those days. Later on it became the Transport Office if you needed a car for something. I remember the Canada geese on the lake and being afraid of them. The big thing about the lake was being able to take the boat out and then getting stuck on the island, never fortunate to be stuck with anyone interesting, just a couple of girls from the office.

It was a lovely place to be, people who were not suitable just went and of course other people had breakdowns and they went. I think the writer Angus Wilson had a breakdown when he was here, I did hear that he tried to commit suicide in the lake and it was hushed up — but then you heard lots of things, true or not. But we were very young and we weren't told things like that — there was no reason to be told, we were only the juniors. I saw Winston Churchill only once here, to my knowledge he only came once after I joined this department. On the day he was coming, me being the junior I was told to make sure everything was clean — get rid of the milk bottles. I don't know about this secret tunnel, I remember his car going off — well he wouldn't have walked down there anyway. But he was living so close to the Park he wouldn't have to stay here. When I was taken by Peter Jarvis to the rooms where he was supposed to have stayed, I thought you couldn't get up here, in wartime they would never

have put him in a place like that, they would have used one of the cottages or something. Certainly in no place without an escape and only an iron staircase. Because I was working with the bosses, if he came again I would have known.