

## Margaret Bodley

*Bletchley Park. Hut 3, Air and Naval Sections. Messenger, compiler and indexer. Interviewed May 2014.*

I was recruited through Gordon Welchman who was a tenant in a house owned by my father, who was a farmer in Loughton, not far from Bletchley Park. I left school at 17 and was approached just before my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday by Gordon Welchman who offered me a job at Bletchley Park. He also offered a job to my sister who was 18 months younger than me. We thought about it and we decided that we would give it a go, of course not really knowing anything about what we were letting ourselves in for.

As part of the vetting process there was a lot of research into our family, the dates of birth of our great grandparents and where they were born and so on. It was quite a performance even before we were interviewed. Eventually I was sent for an interview and I remember walking through the gates of Bletchley Park which were flanked by two armed sentries, and going into a small hut where I was interviewed. As you can imagine, being a young girl with not a lot of knowledge of the world it was quite an experience. I did know two girls who were working at Bletchley Park at the time although I didn't know what they were doing and I asked if I could work in their section as I knew them. However, I was told, no, they wanted me to work in another section which they said I would find very interesting.

They did not actually tell me what I was going to do but said that it was important work and very secret and I must never talk about it. Anyway, I was accepted and started in Hut 3 at first, as a messenger, delivering documents to different buildings in the park, including to the main building, where Commander Travis worked. I didn't know much about what was in the documents at that time other than the different degrees of urgency,

Messages were given degrees of urgency - 2Z meant a message was reasonably urgent, 3Z it was quite urgent and 4Z meant it was very urgent. I remember being given a message to take to the main building which was marked 4Z and told to run like hell. There were four of us working as messengers on the different shifts 9 am to 4 pm, 4 pm to midnight and then midnight to 9 am.

After my first six months I worked my way onto other things when it was decided to use service personnel as messengers and train us as compilers, which meant that we knew a lot more about what we were doing. We had to sort the messages out when they came through

from the code breakers, in German, Italian, and so on, and then we delivered them into the various in trays within the section to the relevant people.

Teleprinters sent the work up to London to the Air Ministry, the Admiralty, the War Office and always a copy to Churchill. Eventually they decided that we could do something better and we were put onto the Index Section. I was put onto the Naval Section which involved ship movements, speed, destination, port of departure, cargo, anything like that relating to cargo ships. I worked with Commander [Richard Bright](#). I think that before the War he had been a BBC Announcer but at this time he was in naval uniform. This would have been around 1945, the last year of the war.

When I first started at Bletchley Park they supplied transport which was driven by ATS personnel who picked us up and then brought us home, but eventually they had a bus service.

When I left I received a letter of reference. This was dated 3 October 1945 and stated that Miss M Bodley has been

*employed in this Department from 28 October 1941 to the present time when her services were no longer required owing to termination of work for which she had been engaged. At the conclusion of her employment her grade was Temporary Assistant at a salary of £3 8s 0d a week, exclusive of war bonus. During her service with this department she performed her duties in very a satisfactory manner. During her service she was employed on important and highly specialised work of a secret nature but the Official Secrets Acts preclude giving any information in connection with these duties.*

We had to have a reference as we could not talk to a future employer about what we had been doing, and although wages were low I think this was the normal Civil Service salary.

I worked with some very nice people, quite a few society people. One of the ladies, an Air Force Officer, was Lady Lettice Ashley-Cooper, the Earl of Shaftesbury's daughter. You were never looked down on, but I do feel that the supporting services, of which I considered myself one, were very important because we kept a balance, as some of the very clever people were a bit on the edge. I worked with four Professors in my Section. One was Professor Lucas who always worked in his own room with a black sheet over his head. If you had occasion to go into his room to put something in his in tray he would have this black sheet over his head because he could apparently concentrate better. There

was also Professor Saltmarsh, and Professor Norman who was also quite a character. He always wore a trilby hat with a greasy band round it and he wore leggings. He looked rather like a farmer; he was very pleasant but rather eccentric. I recall that we started off working in wooden huts which were very primitive but in their wisdom they decided we needed better buildings; I think they were brick based buildings. We had been there at least six months and I met Professor Norman in the corridor and he asked me where this new section was going to be. I said we had been working in it for several months but he had not even been aware of it!

When I first went to Bletchley Park, being a farmer's daughter living in a very rural area, I knew very little about the ways of the world, but I soon learned quite a lot and considered it part of my education. There were always the little scandals that popped up but I can't tell you about those! Looking back at those four years they were certainly extremely interesting. I made quite a few long standing friends whilst I was there.

Elizabeth Burberry who was a member of the Burberry family, who made the expensive clothing, was an Air Force Officer who worked in my Section. Six of us were invited to her wedding in London. She was Catholic and the wedding was held at the Brompton Oratory. We saved up our clothing coupons so that we could all get dressed up. Richard Bright, the naval officer, went with us. He said he was really proud of 'his girls' and said I looked liked a flower garden. After the wedding we went on to the Rembrandt Hotel which was next door to the Brompton Oratory and I remember the doodlebugs going over whilst we were there so it must have been sometime in 1944. She married one of the American Officers, Bob Slusser, and eventually they went to America.

I didn't see a lot of Gordon Welchman at work as he was in another hut but my father knew him better as he was a tenant in his house. My father always said he was a nice chap. He moved on to a larger house eventually but his mother-in-law, Mrs Hodgson, was billeted with another resident in Loughton and she stayed there until the war ended. I think that she had been bombed out of London. Also his wife's aunt lived in Loughton during the war.

There was a very good drama group at Bletchley Park; I was not involved in it but always went to the shows and still have some of the programmes for them. Shows were put on in Wilton Hall just outside the main gates. I remember seeing 'They Came to a City' by J B Priestley, and some other strange but quite interesting plays. Looking back, my impressions of those four years were of it being a very interesting part of my life.

Obviously, I worked in great secrecy and when I left, because of the Official Secrets Act, it remained a secret for more than 30 years. Even when the story came out 30 years later it didn't really come home to me although I was aware that it had been extremely important work that I had been doing and it had, like they say, shortened the war by two years. We had been aware of what was going on as we had huge maps all over the walls which the powers that be used to mark up with red and blue pins as Rommel was advancing in the Desert Campaign. They would move the pins back if they were retreating and forward if they were advancing.

We were not aware of what was going on in other parts of Bletchley Park; however I do know that Bletchley Park was definitely responsible for the sinking of one of the pocket battleships of which Germany had four. They were lethal and sinking our cargo ships all the time. I think it was the Scharnhorst that was sunk because a huge cheer went up when it was announced in the section.

When I left Bletchley Park, after the War, I had the opportunity to go to Eastcote but I didn't want to go because I would have had to study for and sit the Civil Service examination. So I worked at home on the farm as my father needed help for a while and after he died I went into dental nursing. I trained and sat the examinations in London and worked for the Community Dental Service going round schools. They don't do it now. I have been retired for over 30 years.

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