

How Things Work' Group Visit To Bletchley Park 22nd June 2016

Six members of the Meopham U3A 'How Things Work Group' made the journey to Bletchley Park on Wednesday 22nd June 2016; three by rail & three by car. The group met up to discover that an added 'attraction' was a BBC unit filming an episode of its popular programme "Flog It" at Bletchley Park Mansion. As we did not visit this building until later in the day, filming did not cause us any problem.

It was quite a surprise to some of us to discover that in addition to the displays & exhibitions connected with the wartime code-breaking activities for which it is best known, Bletchley Park also houses the 'National Museum of Computing', plus the 'National Radio Centre', both of which were worth a visit in their own right; we were also pleased to discover that our visitor tickets are valid for a whole year should we wish to return.

The extensive buildings are packed with fascinating displays & information about the origins & development of activities at Bletchley Park, principally its vital role in decoding German military messages, which is estimated to have shortened WWII considerably, possibly by as much as two years. There was also a lot of interesting formation about the day-to-day life & experiences of the 'ordinary' personnel who worked there, whilst the more famous personalities such as Alan Turing were covered in more detail.

Although most famous for the breaking of the Enigma Machine codes using the Turing 'Bombe', arguably the world's first industrial scale computer, there were lots of other extremely important codebreaking activities which took place at Bletchley, such as the development of Colossus & other machines & the deciphering of naval messages with the help of captured code books, mathematical & intuitive methods & lateral thinking.

It was surprising to discover that 'Enigma' coding machines were originally developed shortly after WWI principally to keep banking & business information secure, & were commercially available for quite a long interwar period until taken over, exploited & further developed by the German Military. One of the weaknesses which Bletchley exploited was the exclusivity of different branches of German military services, which developed their own exclusive systems & did not share their knowledge well.

To view Bletchley Park's Website, click: <https://www.bletchleypark.org.uk/>



Bletchley Park



Colossus



Enigma Machine