

U3A Visit to Bletchley Park

Following Dr. Mark Baldwin's presentation at last April's Monthly General Meeting entitled Codebreakers, we followed this up with a visit to the Home of the Codebreakers – Bletchley Park also known as Station X. Our entry ticket permitted a return to the Site as frequently as one pleased for twelve months from date of first entry. A free self-guided tour of the Park was available from Block C the visitor centre. The advised route took us past the Lake to the Mansion, which includes the recreated office of Commander Denniston, the head of GC&CS (Government Code & Cypher School), a library, theatre and various clerical offices associated with Heads of Departments. Hut 4 next to the Mansion is a well-appointed visitor restaurant. Then the Stable yard; the buildings where the first breaks into the daily changing German Enigma were made. Here we saw a typical Enigma Machine and alongside a block drawing showing the number of possibilities the Machine was able to assign to a particular letter of the alphabet and never the same one twice. The enormity of the task of the code breakers made codebreaking slow, until Alan Turing came along with his invention –the Bombe - an electro-mechanical device designed to discover the daily settings of the Enigma machines. The Yard also contains a Memorial to Polish Cryptographers who smuggled an example of an Enigma Machine into England in early 1939. By now our brains were pretty well saturated and after a nice cup of tea we returned to our coach for a pleasant and comfortable journey home.

