The Codebreakers [C1]

Lo storico Thomas Cheetham spiega le trasformazioni di Bletchley Park, dalle curiosità architettoniche ai particolari della segretezza impiegata per tenere nascoste le operazioni di decodificazione durante la Seconda guerra mondiale.

Bletchley Park may look like an idyllic English estate complete with **cottages rolling green lawns** and **ponds**, but towards the end of the World War Two, life there was far from bucolic. Hundreds of people were involved in the activities at Bletchley and they often worked long, **gruelling** days with short breaks, in uncomfortable conditions. However, they continued the difficult work because they saw what was being done at Bletchley as part of a **call to duty**. The codebreaking operations were understood to be essential. To find out more, Speak Up met with Bletchley historian Thomas Cheetham. He began with a brief history of Bletchley Park. **Thomas Cheetham (English accent):**Bletchley Park, originally it's a mediaeval estate. In the period before World War Two, it's the home of the Leon family. Herbert Leon is the local MP and a wealthy **stockbroker**, his wife Fanny Leon does local charity work. They are a very prominent and very prosperous local family. And they have this very large estate which **encompassed** farms. It's got a **market garden**. It's a very important part of the local economy. They host the local **hunt**. Fox **hunt**ing was a very prominent sport in the area back then, and they would host these **hunt** meetings at Bletchley Park. So it's a very important **hub** of the local community in many ways before the war. But by the late 1930s, both of the Leons have died and their descendants are not interested in keeping possession of the property, so they sell it on to a local property developer. And he then sells it on again to the head of what is known as the Secret Intelligence Service, or MI 6. A man called the Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair, who selects it as a base for his organization, including codebreakers.

ARCHITECTURE

Cheetham then talked more about the peculiar architectural style of the estate. **Thomas Cheetham:** It's not as old as it looks. It only goes back to the 1880s, the current house. The Leons have a habit of going away on holiday to foreign countries, seeing a bit of architecture they like the look of, and taking a photo and getting their builders to sort of **graft** it onto the mansion when they get back home. And so it has this very **hodgepodge** appearance, with lots of different classy architectural styles. Which means that many of the people who work at Bletchley during the war actually find it very, very unfashionable. Because it's a Victorian building trying to look a lot older than it really is. Nowadays, our visitors, they admire the architecture a bit more than they did back in the 40s. It's come back into fashion, really.

RESTORATION

Many of the original buildings that the codebreakers and staff lived in have since been **restored**. So when you visit today, you get a **hands-on** idea of what life was like, says Cheetham. **Thomas Cheetham:** The advantage we have at Bletchley is we are working out the original wartime buildings. So [in] many museums you are learning about history not in the place where it actually happened. But here we have the mansion. It still survives. Many of the wartime code breaking buildings, the original **huts** where the Enigma **cypher** was being worked on, still survive and have been **restored**. And we've used furniture, we've **restored** the paintwork as we know it was during wartime. And we've added all this back into the building to give the atmosphere of what it was like to work in there.

DON'T SPEAK

As operations at Bletchley grew, it became more of a challenge to keep things secret. The British intelligence agency MI6 made sure everyone who was **hired** at Bletchley worked on a need-to-know basis. The division of the **huts** also helped maintain secrecy, because it was easier to keep information separate. Cheetham talked more about day to day life at Bletchley. **Thomas**

Cheetham: It's not just about breaking codes and **cypher**s, there's a lot more that goes into this process. If you read an enemy message, it's not necessarily obvious what that tells you. You have **to tie small pieces of information together** into a larger picture. So the intelligence analysis side of the story is a part which doesn't receive enough attention, I think, but it's a very, very important element. Later on, the organisation really changes in character... far larger numbers of staff. They are predominantly women, about 75 per cent women. This is because they moved to a different way of working. It's kind of run like a factory. You **chop**the codebreaking tasks and the intelligence analysis tasks into different components. You have a production line of intelligence, and this means you can use more normal people. You don't have to be especially intelligent or especially **knowledgeable**. All the staff, essentially they're working on the need-to-know basis. So you only know your tiny part of the **jigsaw**, your little **bubble** of knowledge about what you do, but you're not told any of the wider picture. So you don't know what's going on necessarily in the next office, certainly not in the other buildings. So that's how secrecy is maintained, it's just by not telling people as much as possible. But they are also very, very carefully **briefed**. You must not mention to anyone that you're working here, and you must not describe your work. It doesn't matter whether they're your family or your friends or anybody else.You mustn't speak of it.

ALAN TURING

Alan Turing played a vital role in the museum project. **Thomas Cheetham:** We don't tell the story of Alan Turing's life per se, or his **wider achievements**. But we do include him as we need to because he is such an important figure. We display some of his personal papers and personal possessions, like his **teddy bear** that he used to practise his lectures in front of. And we also have the apology letter issued by Gordon Brown, the Prime Minister, in 2009. So we do include him in the story. Not in the sense of trying to rectify past **wrongs**, I don't think. Just try and highlight the contribution that he made here.

Glossary

- **cottages** = casette, villette
- **rolling green lawns** = prati verdi ondulati
- **hub** = centro, fulcro
- **huts** = capanna, baracca
- **to tie small pieces of information together** = legare insieme
- **wrongs** = ingiustizie, torti
- **stockbroker** = intermediario finanziario
- **graft** = innestare
- **hodgepodge** = miscuglio
- **restored** = ripristinare
- **hands-on** = pratica
- **briefed** = informare
- **wider achievements** = risultati più importanti
- **gruelling** = arduo, estenuante
- **call to duty** = chiamata al dovere
- **encompassed** = comprendere
- **market garden** = orto
- **hunt** = caccia
- **cypher** = codice
- **teddy bear** = orsacchiotto
- **ponds** = stagni, laghetti
- **hired** = assumere
- **chop** = tagliare a pezzi
- **knowledgeable** = esperto
- **jigsaw** = puzzle
- **bubble** = bolla