



Before Joan Clarke worked at Bletchley Park's Hut 8, she already knew Alan Turing. He was a friend of Joan's brother.

A very intelligent young woman, Joan studied mathematics at Cambridge University's Newnham College. Gordon Welchman, who was working for the Government Code & Cypher School in the late 1930s, recruited Joan to work at Bletchley Park. He'd been her Geometry supervisor at Cambridge.

At the time, women did not typically fill important jobs at Bletchley Park (or anywhere else throughout Britain). So ... at the beginning of her work at Station X ... Joan filled a clerical slot.

It took very little time, however, for Joan to get her "own table" inside Hut 8. This promotion effectively placed her on Turing's code-breaking team.

Not only did Joan do great work at Bletchley, by 1944 she was deputy-head of the Hut-8 team.

During the early part of her work at Station X, Joan had been promoted to a "Linguist," even though she wasn't fluent in other languages. (It was just a way for her to receive better pay for her work.) She once answered a questionnaire with these words:

Grade: Linguist, Languages: None.

When she first became a Hut-8 code breaker, Joan worked with Alan Turing, Tony Kendrick and Peter Twinn. Their actual work focused on breaking Germany's Naval Enigma code (which the Station X workers had codenamed "Dolphin").

Joan and Alan Turing became very close friends and, in 1941, the head of Hut 8 asked his friend to become his wife. She accepted and, later in life, she talked about their engagement.

Lynsey Ann Lord, who wrote about Joan Clarke in her University of St Andrews honours project, tells us more about Turing and Clarke's engagement:

Clarke was formally introduced to Alan Turing's family and vice versa, he gave her an engagement ring, although she did not wear it when in the Hut, choosing to keep their engagement secret from their colleagues. They talked of the future and Turing told her of his desire to have children.

They shared many interests, both were keen chess players and, as Clarke had studied Botany at school, she could become involved with Turing's life long enthusiasm of the growth and form of plant life.

When Turing wrote his account of the Enigma Theory for the use of new recruits in Hut 6 and Hut 8, (known at Bletchley Park as "Prof's book") he used Joan Clarke as his 'guinea pig' - she had to read and trial it, checking that it was understandable for them.

Although Turing and Clarke remained very close friends, Turing broke-off their engagement later in 1941. Because of his sexual identity, Turing believed that a marriage between him and Joan would not last.

After the war, Joan remained with the Government Code & Cypher School (GCCS) - by then called Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) - and moved, with it, from Bletchley Park to Eastcote (located in the northwest area of Greater London).

In 1947, Clarke was honored as a Member of the British Empire (MBE) for her codebreaking expertise, although no one knew about her extremely important war work. The UK's "Official Secrets Act" covered the work of all

war-time code breakers - including individuals like Alan Turing who'd been employed at the highest levels of Station X.

While working at GCHQ in Eastcote, Joan met a retired Army officer named Lieutenant-Colonel John (Jock) Kenneth Ronald Murray. They married, in 1952, and Joan Clarke was thereafter known as Joan Murray.

Soon after their marriage, the Murrays moved to Scotland - to a town called Crail - where they lived for about a decade. When they moved back to England, around 1962, Joan rejoined the GCHQ. She worked there, at Cheltenham (the agency's headquarters) until she retired in 1977 (when she was 60 years old).

Restrictions imposed by the Official Secrets Act were lifted in 1974. It was only then when the brilliant work of Britain's code breakers - including Joan's - became widely known.

After her husband died, Joan moved to Headington, near Oxford, in 1986. She helped Sir Harry Hinsley to revise the official history of codebreaking Enigma:

After her retirement, Clarke also assisted Sir Harry Hinsley on what became Appendix 30 to Volume 3, Issue 2 of the 1988 British Intelligence in the Second World War [see pages 945 ff], a substantially revised assessment of the Polish, French and British contributions to breaking the Enigma. (See Lynsey Ann Lord's article.)

Joan also cooperated with Andrew Hodges (a Tutorial Fellow in mathematics, and Dean, at Wadham College, Oxford University) while he was researching and writing his biography Alan Turing: The Enigma.

"The Imitation Game" - a 2014 film about Station X and its code breakers, in which Keira Knightley portrays Joan Clarke - is loosely based on Hodges' book.



In 1992 - four years before she died at her home (at 7 Larkfields) in Headington Quarry, Oxford - Joan agreed to an on-camera interview for the "Horizon" program (broadcast by BBC Two). Entitled "The Strange Life and Death of Dr. Turing," the program is available to see online (via YouTube), thanks to the generosity of its director, Christopher Sykes. During that interview, Joan talked about her engagement to Alan Turing.

Joan and her husband did not have children. When she died - on the 4th of September, 1996, at the age of 79 - her obituary contained these words:

She is remembered as "one of the really good cryptanalysts" of GCHQ who was liked and admired by colleagues throughout her long and dedicated career.

To this day, however, the full extent of Joan's contributions during her years at Bletchley Park are not fully known. Among other reasons are Churchill's orders that all code-breaking evidence, at Station X, had to be destroyed when the war was over.

Credits:

Image of Joan Clarke, during her Bletchley Park days, cropped from a photo included in "The Strange Life and Death of Dr. Turing," online (via YouTube) thanks to the generosity of the program's director, Christopher Sykes.

For more information about Joan Clarke Murray, beyond the above-referenced sources, see Kerry Howard's articles at [Bletchely Park Research](#).

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)
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