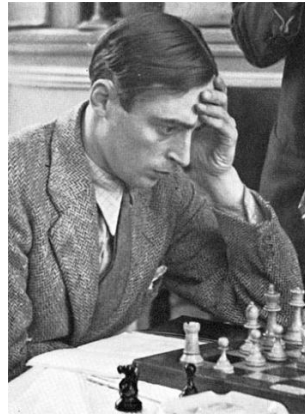




Hugh Alexander—whose full name was Conel Hugh O'Donel Alexander—was already famous by the time he came to Bletchley Park in 1940. He was Britain's charismatic chess champion before he arrived at Station X.

How did Hugh Alexander become part of the Hut-8 code-breaking team? He was recruited by his friend, Stuart Milner-Barry.

Gordon Welchman (who became head of Hut 6) recalls how that happened in his book, *The Hut Six Story: Breaking the Enigma Codes* (published, by M & M Baldwin in 1997):

For my part, I quite shamelessly recruited friends and former students. Stuart Milner-Barry had been in my year at Trinity College, Cambridge, studying classics while I studied mathematics. He was not enjoying being a stockbroker, and was persuaded to join me at Bletchley Park. He arrived around January 1940, when the Hut 6 organization was about thirty strong, bringing with him the largest pipes I have ever seen smoked.

Stuart in turn recruited his friend, Hugh Alexander [seen, hereafter, as he appeared in 1939], who had been a mathematician at Kings College, Cambridge, and was then Director of Research in the John Lewis Partnership, a large group of department stores.



They [Milner-Barry and Alexander] brought us unusual distinction in chess: Alexander was the British Chess Champion, while Milner-Barry had often played for England and was chess correspondent for the London Times.

After serving for a time at Hut 6 (the Military and Air Sections), Hugh was assigned to Hut 8 (in March of 1941) where he was Alan Turing's deputy.

An excellent administrator, with very good diplomacy skills, Hugh eventually became head of Hut 8, after Turing began working on other matters (such as research requiring abstract thinking) at Bletchley Park. (See *Alan Turing: The Enigma - The Centenary Edition*, by Andrew Hodges, at [page 227](#).)

Alexander also left Hut 8, around the end of 1943, to head-up "one of the Japanese Naval High-grade sections." (See "[In Memoriam: Conel Hugh O'Donel Alexander](#)," by Hugh Denham, a senior official at Government Communications Headquarters in 1975.)

The war caused Alexander to set-aside his competitive chess-playing days for many years. What was he like, as a chess player and as a person?

Conel Hugh O'Donel Alexander was one of the most charismatic players of his time, full of a positive nervous energy that galvanised all who came into contact with him. The war imposed a seven-year break in what would have been his prime years as a player, but his work at Bletchley Park in charge of Hut 8 was invaluable.

His post-war chess career is well documented; player, columnist, author, administrator, all alongside his day job at GCHQ [Government Communications Headquarters] in Cheltenham. He became champion again in 1956 (Blackpool), but soon after he retired from tournament play, as he felt he wasn't doing himself justice at the board, and his other roles took over.

He died in 1975 and his posthumous biography was a joint work by Milner-Barry, Golombek and Hartston. (See "[British Championships, Past and Present](#)," at Chess Base.)

In "The Imitation Game," a film featuring the work of Bletchley Park code breakers during WWII, the role of Hugh Alexander is played by Matthew Goode (seen, below, in a still-shot from the film). The real Hugh Alexander was born on the 19th of April, 1909, in the [Irish city of Cork](#). When he went to [King's College, Cambridge](#), he took a first in math.



People liked Hugh, and he liked people. In his Memorial piece about his friend and colleague, Hugh Denham uses these words:

...He had retained an almost boyish zest throughout life - was always totally absorbed in what he was telling you, or, more often than not, in what you were telling him.

Hugh Alexander died young, at the age of 64. [Stuart Milner-Barry](#), the friend who'd recruited Hugh to be part of Bletchley Park's code-breaking team, used these words in his eulogy:

One could have wished for nothing else but that vivid and vigorous presence, that quick, clear and energetic mind, the passion for intellectual argument, the practical kindness and spontaneous understanding with the young - all this will be sadly missed. To have been so close a friend for 50 years is indeed good fortune.

The image of Hugh Alexander, depicted at the top of this page, shows him at a chess tournament in 1938 (at Brighton). Hereafter, via Spartacus Educational, we see him and his friend Stuart Milner-Barry playing against each other, later in their lives.



Credits:

Image of Hugh Alexander, at a chess tournament in Brighton during 1938, is online via Chess Base.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Hugh-Alexander-The-Imitation-Game-0>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

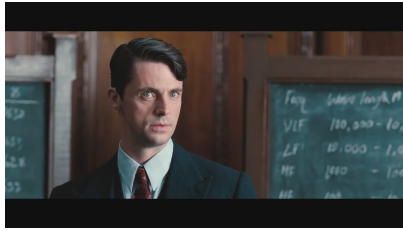
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Hugh-Alexander-The-Imitation-Game-0>

Media Stream



Hugh Alexander & Stuart Milner Barry at Chess

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Matt Goode as Hugh Alexander

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/>



Hugh Alexander in 1939

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/>