



Andrew Hodges, who wrote a biography of Alan Turing (called *Alan Turing: The Enigma*, published in 1983), also authored a short biography of his subject for the *British Dictionary of National Biography* (published in 1995).

The following excerpts, from Hodges' *National Biography* entry, help us to understand Alan Turing's early life.

PART 1 — THE ORIGINS OF ALAN TURING

Alan Mathison Turing was born on 23 June 1912, the second and last child (after his brother John) of Julius Mathison and Ethel Sara Turing.

The unusual name of Turing placed him in a distinctive family tree of English gentry, far from rich but determinedly upper-middle-class in the peculiar sense of the English class system.

His father Julius had entered the Indian Civil Service, serving in the Madras Presidency, and had there met and married Ethel Sara Stoney. She was the daughter of the chief engineer of the Madras railways, who came from an Anglo-Irish family of somewhat similar social status.

Although conceived in British India, most likely in the town of Chatrapur, Alan Turing was born in a nursing home in Paddington, London.

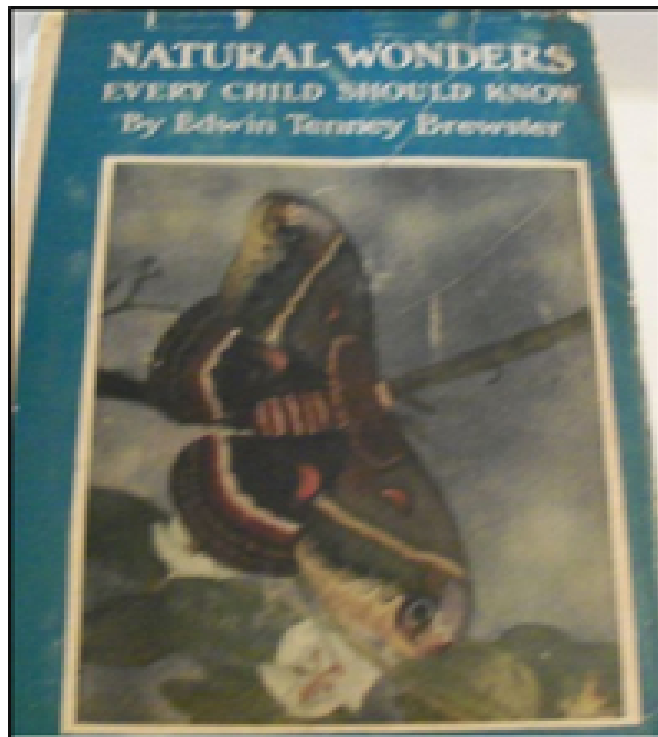
...

Alan Turing's story was not one of family or tradition but of an isolated and autonomous mind.

Alan Turing shared with his brother a childhood rigidly determined by the demands of class and the exile in India of his parents. Until his father's retirement from India in 1926, Alan Turing and his elder brother John were fostered in various English homes where nothing encouraged expression, originality, or discovery.



Science for him was an extra-curricular passion, first shown in primitive chemistry experiments. But he was given, and read, later commenting on its seminal influence, a popular book called "Natural Wonders Every Child Should Know."



His boyhood scientific interests were a trial to his mother whose perpetual terror was that he would not be acceptable to the English Public School. ["Public schools," in Britain, are called "private schools" in America. [Eton](#) and [Harrow](#) are examples of British public schools.] At twelve he expressed his conscious fascination with using "the thing that is commonest in nature and with the least waste of energy," presentiment of a life seeking freshly minted answers to fundamental questions.

Despite this, he was successfully entered for Sherborne School. The headmaster soon reported: "If he is to be solely a Scientific Specialist, he is wasting his time at a Public School." The assessment of his establishment was almost correct.

Despite these restrictions in his life, Alan still pursued his personal interests. One of those interests was

Einstein's theory of relativity.

Making private notes about Einstein's theory, while still a school boy, Turing was beginning his own intellectual journey. That journey would ultimately put him in contention for "Person of the Century" as the 20th century came to a close.

Credits:

Image of Alan Turing, as a young boy, online via Andrew Hodges' website called "[The Alan Turing Internet Scrapbook](#)."

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Alan-Turing-Early-Years-0>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Alan-Turing-Early-Years-0>

Media Stream



[John and Alan Turing - Young](#)

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



[Natural Wonders Every Child Should Know](#)

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