

Trip to Bletchley Park and Oxford, Saturday 10 October – Sunday 11 October 2015



The 16 members and friends gathered at 9am to join a dozen or so fellow travelers. After another pick up in Salisbury we arrived in Oxford for shopping, museums and college visiting,. Two of our party then departed for Blenheim Palace where a tour of the state rooms was a highlight. The Oxford party was collected at 5pm to take us all to a comfortable hotel in Milton Keynes. Our morning destination was the secretive Bletchley park, the enemy message collection and transcription station. The Germans used their Enigma machines to encrypt and send messages using a system of wheels and letters. Prior to the war, information about the German system had been researched by the Poles and shared with the allies. The system was unbreakable manually but with the Bombe machines built at Bletchley the team were eventually able to translate messages in hours allowing the Allied generals to prepare for assaults and raids. Everything at Bletchley was compartmentalised and people did not talk about their jobs to anyone. The activities that took place in the huts were shown where they took place with individual tablets and head phones and guided tours of the layout of the site. One tour was taken by a lady who had worked on site during the war and gave a real inside slant on life there in the war. It was agreed that the trip was a great success and thanks were extended to Sylvia Page

9am on Saturday 10th October was a great time to start our weekend coach trip from Verwood to Bletchley Park, although we did feel sorry for the people from Bridport who had been picked up at 6am! Everyone had positive comments on their Saturday afternoon either in Oxford, or at Blenheim Palace. The highlight of the trip on Sunday was Bletchley Park. I knew very little about this top secret wartime installation and I was fascinated to discover how important the work there was to the war effort. One of the builders of a replica "Bombe" machine explained to us exactly how it enabled operators to crack the German, Italian and Japanese messages encrypted by the Enigma machine. It takes a special mathematical mind to fully grasp the principles guiding the search for the solution to the constantly changing codes, and occasionally I felt I had "got it", then lost it again. No matter, the delicious afternoon tea in the Mansion (including cucumber sandwiches and cream-tea scones) restored things nicely in the brain department! I feel I have learned so much about the dedicated and top secret activities of 9,000 people whose efforts probably served to shorten the war by two years and saved countless lives. A very rewarding trip, and home in time on Sunday for a little relax before bedtime. Thank you Sylvia for organising this trip, we all appreciate your efforts. — Stephanie Cox

