

A speech therapist at Bletchley Park?

My search started from a throw-away comment by second world war code-breaker Mavis Batey (née Lever)¹ that there was a speech therapist working at Bletchley Park (BP) when she was there:

‘There was one actress, one who’d been to a drama school and, *of all things*, a speech therapist.’²



Bletchley Park in 2002

My initial hypothesis was that this might have been Winifred Kingdon Ward (remembering a photograph of her in uniform³) but a search of wartime speech therapy professional body minutes showed that she was attending weekly meetings in 1944 in London, so was unlikely to have been working at Bletchley Park then at least. Following discussion with retired speech and language therapy colleagues about who this speech therapist might be, cross-referencing of lists of the early UK speech therapists with the Bletchley Park roll of honour produced three possible names: Mary Harris, Elizabeth Lowe and Joyce Mitchell. Joyce Mitchell was the only match for first name and surname: <https://bletchleypark.org.uk/roll-of-honour/6346> (accessed 20 January 2021).

In ‘The Debs of Bletchley Park’⁴, Joyce Mitchell is named as the speech therapist in a section about Dilly’s girls (elsewhere ‘Dilly’s Fillies’), ie those who were selected to work with Dilly Knox⁵ on unbroken machine codes:

‘Dilly had very clear ideas on what girls he needed in his research section. ...mathematician....at least one German linguist. He certainly didn’t want any debs whose daddies had persuaded a friend at the Foreign Office to find them a place at Bletchley. He wanted women with ability whatever their background.’ (p. 170)

Claire Harding, Margaret Rock and Mavis Lever were ‘... joined by speech therapist Joyce Mitchell, and three actresses, all of whom were selected by Dilly because their training would give them an

¹ Mavis Batey’s obituary: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/military-obituaries/special-forces-obituaries/10447712/Mavis-Batey-obituary.html> (accessed 20 January 2021)

² ‘The Secrets of Her Majesty’s Secret Service’ (2014) about 15 minutes in: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3821142/> (accessed 20 January 2021), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOC1rDc6e_o (accessed 20 January 2021)

³ Robertson, S., Kersner, M. and Davis, S. (eds) (1995) *History of the College 1945-1995*, p. 14. London: RCSLT. This may have been an air raid warden’s uniform (appreciation in *Bulletin* 325).

⁴ Smith, M. (2015) *The Debs of Bletchley Park*. London: Aurum Press Ltd.

⁵ Batey, M. (2017) *Dilly: the Man who Broke Enigmas*. London: Biteback Publishing Ltd. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dilly_Knox (accessed 20 January 2021)

understanding of the rhythms of the messages' (p. 173). Mavis Lever records that she 'was given a railway ticket to Bletchley ... At least I knew where I was going and could tell my family, but I met up with a new recruit, Joyce Mitchell, who had merely been told to be at Euston at a certain time, where she would be met and given a ticket, but when she left home she did not know whether her destination was Watford or Scotland.'⁶

The Bletchley Park roll of honour indicates that Joyce Mitchell was there from April to August 1940 (at about 25 years old) as a Foreign Office Civilian and 'assisted the cryptanalyst, filling in sheets': <https://bletchleypark.org.uk/roll-of-honour/6346> (accessed 20 January 2021). Joyce Mitchell's obituary in the Royal College of Speech Therapists magazine⁷ confirmed that she had worked in Bletchley Park, having joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service. It also revealed that another speech therapist had worked there too - Ann Irwin (who had worked with Joyce many years later as speech therapists in Royal Victoria Infirmary, Newcastle!): <https://bletchleypark.org.uk/roll-of-honour/8903> (accessed 20 January 2021). Joyce and Ann did not apparently overlap at Bletchley Park. Contact with the Oral History officers there, who manage the Roll of Honour, revealed on 11 November 2019 that they hold no further information about Joyce or Ann nor does the National Archives. Records were destroyed at BP after the second world war ended.

Ann worked from August 1942 to May 1945 as one of the women from the WRNS who operated a Bombe⁸ before qualifying after the war as a speech therapist (1949). The roll of honour lists her work-places as Stanmore, Gayhurst Manor and Wavendon and Bletchley Park Hut 11. Dunlop's (2015) oral history⁹ provides descriptions of the experience of this work as does Payne (1993)¹⁰. She notes that in the summer of 1944 there were 1676 Wrens 'dutifully tending 211 Bombe machines' (p. 113). Hill's account of life at BP¹¹ also describes work with the Bombe machines and also more widely the working conditions at BP.

Thus, at least two speech therapists worked at Bletchley Park during the second world war. This represents about 2% of the total number of speech therapists in the UK in the 1940s! There may be others.

- Joyce Mitchell and her speech therapy career

Miss Mitchell qualified with a Certificate in Proficiency in Speech Therapy from the Central School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art in 1938. In the 1940s she worked in (Northern) Ireland¹². By 1960 she has moved to the Royal Infirmary Sunderland, having worked in Oxford in the 1950s. She finished her career in Newcastle. Her 2009 obituary and a follow-up letter in *Bulletin*¹³ give further information about her life and career.

⁶ Batey (2017), p. 110.

⁷ C. McConnell (2009) Remembering Joyce Mitchell 1915-2009. *Bulletin* 690.

⁸ <https://bletchleypark.org.uk/whats-on/hut-11a-the-bombe-breakthrough> (accessed 20 January 2021)

⁹ Dunlop, T. (2015) *The Bletchley Girls*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

¹⁰ Payne, D. (1993) The bombes. In F.H. Hinsley & A. Stripp (eds) *Code breakers: the Inside Story of Bletchley Park* pp. 132-137. Oxford University Press.

¹¹ Hill, M. (2004) *Bletchley Park People: Churchill's Geese that Never Cracked*. Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd. (esp. pp. 37-8 and chapter 6)

¹² Mitchell, J. (1947) Notes on Speech Therapy in Ireland. *Bulletin* 9. Mitchell, J. (1949) Speech therapy in Northern Ireland. *Bulletin* 16.

¹³ C. McConnell (2009) Remembering Joyce Mitchell 1915-2009. *Bulletin* 690. Kelly-Atherton, L. (2009) Memories of Joyce. *Bulletin* 692.

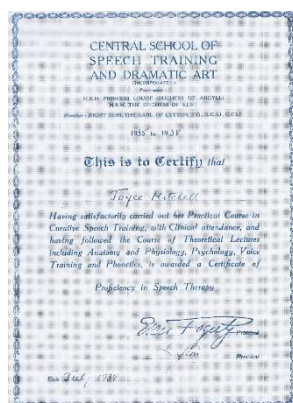


Photo in Robertson et al (1995), p. 22.

Miss Mitchell was awarded Fellowship of the College of Speech Therapists (by thesis) in 1962. Her thesis was entitled 'The speech therapist in the geriatric unit' (copy in RCSLT historical collection). She undertook several roles for the professional body, including: Member of College Council 1964-5, 1966-7; one of the assistant editors on the College journal 1965-6, on the Editorial Board 1966-7; College delegate on the International Affairs Committee of the Central Council for the Care of the Disabled 1965-6, 1966-7; College working party on after-care 1967-8¹⁴.

She had five articles published in the professional body's journal and many more in *Bulletin* on a wide range of topics (see Appendix). She produced the leaflet 'Without words' in 1968 under the auspices of College's Publicity and Publications Panel, intended for the relatives of clients with aphasia, where speech therapy was unobtainable. She was awarded Honours of the College of Speech Therapists in 1981 'for her work with the elderly, through which she has maintained high standards of speech therapy in geriatric medicine.'¹⁵



Joyce Mitchell in the 1960s(?), from her obituary in *Bulletin*

Linda Armstrong, January 2021

¹⁴ <https://bjgp.org/content/bjgp/10/1/88.full.pdf> (accessed 20 January 2021)

¹⁵ *Bulletin* 357, p. 5 (includes photo of the occasion).

Appendix Joyce Mitchell's publications in College of Speech Therapists journal and magazine

1955 The speech therapist in the geriatric unit. *Speech* 19/1, 4-13.

1957 (with C Renfrew and A Wallace) Listening. *Speech* 21/1, 34-36.

1960 (with E Butfield and J Pollitt) What is a speech therapist? *Speech Pathology and Therapy* 3/2 84-87.

1961 Some findings on patients referred to a speech therapist in a geriatric unit. *Speech Pathology and Therapy* 4/1, 26-32.

1963 Communication disorders following cerebral lesions: the team approach in rehabilitation. *Speech Pathology and Therapy* 6/2, 64-72.

1951 Lateral sigmatism. *Bulletin* 25.

1951 The speech therapist in a child guidance clinic. *Bulletin* 26.

1954 Outward bound. *Bulletin* 47.

1955 Art therapy. *Bulletin* 51.

1955 The stammerer's point of view. *Bulletin* 55.

1956 The tape recorder. *Bulletin* 61.

1956 Towards rehabilitation. *Bulletin* 68.

1957 Whither speech therapy? *Bulletin* 75.

1958 Report from international congress for the modern educational treatment of deafness. *Bulletin* 89.

1959 Geriatrics (conference report). *Bulletin* 94.

1959 Tidying up. *Bulletin* 100.

1960 With CE Renfrew and Patricia McGuire, Poor speakers. *Bulletin* 108.

1966 Report on 10th world congress of the International Society for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled. *Bulletin* 178.

1969 Rehabilitation and resettlement. *Bulletin* 208.

1969 Report on Stroke and the Family conference. *Bulletin* 212.