

# MI5 fears over Enigma leak and an Agatha Christie mystery

By Nell Tweedie

AGATHA CHRISTIE almost unwittingly gave away the fact that Britain's Second World War codebreakers at Bletchley Park had cracked the German codes in a 1941 novel.

Christie was a close friend of Alfred Dilwyn "Dilly" Knox, a leading British codebreaker, so MI5 was very concerned when the character Major Bletchley appeared in *N or M?*

The novel featured Christie's detective duo Tommy and Tuppence – married couple Thomas and Prudence Beresford – who are engaged in tracking down German spies in Britain. Major Bletchley was



**MI5 believed that Agatha Christie had access to information on the code breaking work at Bletchley Park**

an old Indian Army major they met during their investigation who claimed to know everything about what was really going on in the war. MI5 believed that the character's inside knowledge of the progress of the war was based on the Bletchley codebreakers' knowledge of German plans and began an investigation.

The team at Bletchley Park, Bucks, had broken the German Enigma machine ciphers, allowing British commanders to know what the Germans planned.

But the Germans believed that the Enigma code was completely unbreakable, so it was vital to ensure that only a very few people knew what was going on

at Bletchley. To make matters worse, Knox had just broken the Enigma cipher used by the German secret service officers running spies into Britain.

MI5 was anxious to find out what Christie might know and questioned Knox, who insisted that she could not possibly know what was going on at Bletchley.

Investigators were afraid that if they questioned Christie it was bound to get out, so Knox agreed to ask her himself. He had to be careful what he said to avoid giving anything away, but he invited her to his home at Courn's Wood, Naphill, Bucks, and – over tea and scones – asked her why she had chosen to name the major Bletchley.

She replied: "Bletchley? My dear, I was stuck there on my way by train from Oxford to London and took revenge by giving the name to one of my least lovable characters."

MI5 had panicked over nothing. The story of Christie's inadvertent "security breach" and Knox's work on Enigma, in December 1941, is told in a new book, *The Codebreakers of Station X*.

Station X was one of several cover names used during the war for the facility at Bletchley Park and was a secret radio intercept and message sending station.

Cracking Enigma was one of Bletchley Park's finest hours, vital to the Double Cross deception operation that ensured the success of the 1944 D-Day landings.

But Knox was already dying of cancer when he made the breakthrough and did not live to see how his work ensured the success of the D-Day deception.

*The Codebreakers of Station X* also contains a large number of wartime photographs from inside Bletchley Park that have never been published before.