

## The Holley/Cornelius Collection at Bletchley Park

by Irene Cornelius

David (known to all as Mark) Cornelius met Irene Holley at Bath Academy of Art in 1957. They married in 1959, and their circumstances made buying household items at jumble sales a necessity. Such places were a seventh heaven of wonderful treasures, enabling them to buy furniture, books, needlework, clothes, fabrics, toys, cooking utensils etc. Irene's parents, Mary and Charles Holley, as well as their three children collected whatever appealed to them. They found Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian treasures as well as much from the 1930's through to the late 1950's. Mark and Irene did their best to re-collect their wartime childhood, which was the period of history which most appealed to them both. The number and range of items kept growing, and it is this wonderful mix of items from that period which now forms the Holley/Cornelius Collection.



Many of the pieces were used for study in the art-rooms in which Mark and Irene taught. During family visits to museums, and after discussions with the curators, they were encouraged to place certain pieces on temporary loan for exhibitions. They also used much of the material in reminiscence therapy sessions with groups of local elderly people.

Encouraged by the interest shown by the public, Mark and Irene looked at finding permanent exhibition space for the collection. During a visit to the official opening of Bletchley Park in 1994, Irene and Mark were invited to bring all of those pieces for display, which were relevant to life just before, during and immediately after WW2. These displays of civilian clothing, personal and domestic items helped visitors understand the domestic life of those people who worked at the park in



the Second World War, whether they were there as code-breakers or cleaners, translators or typists, WAAF personnel or kitchen staff. All would have had similar items in their homes and billets.

This large and growing permanent exhibition at Bletchley Park therefore shows everyday objects from that thirty year period. The delight expressed by those visiting the collection is very rewarding. A recurring cry of joy is: 'I had one of those!' usually followed by 'I wonder what happened to it?' Mark and Irene find great pleasure in hearing so very many personal memories from visitors recalling their lives during that wartime period.

The collection is also well used by school groups and students across the wider age range. Many visitors and groups make repeat visits, because although to some visitors the collection represents a trip down memory lane, to others it is a very valuable learning resource. The collection of artefacts is supported by a rich archive of ephemera, printed material and photographs.



Currently, Mark and Irene have a permanent Victorian nanny's parlour and a permanent Second World War toy-shop display at the Royal Gunpowder Mills Museum at Waltham Abbey in Essex, and several pieces at 'Stitch for Victory', at the Redoubt Military Museum, Eastbourne.

Mark and Irene hope that you will come and visit the collection at Bletchley Park, and discover much to give you great pleasure.

**All photos:  Holley Cornelius Collection**