

June 23rd 2012 is the centenary of the birth of Alan Turing, famous code-breaker of the Nazi enigma codes of World War 2. He is acknowledged as a brilliant mathematician and credited with fathering modern computing.

Conceived in India as a child of the Empire, he was born in London. Both his parents were from a line of interesting ancestors. His father had a Baronetcy among his and his mother's family contained a Fellow of the Royal Society. He had an older brother, John, and as was often the case at the time, their father returned to India, followed by their mother, leaving the boys in the care of another family.

Alan therefore had a childhood during the First World War and showed intellectual promise and broad interests, almost accidentally discovering 'science', but thrilled and fascinated by it.

He was due to start at Sherborne public school just as the general strike of 1926 started. As there was no transport available, he cycled 60 miles to get there on time. He didn't agree with the way his books taught mathematics and did it his own way. But he wasn't a one-topic student. He did English, French, Physics Chemistry and Latin – and understood Einstein's work.

In 1930 a close school friend died, affecting him greatly.

At Kings College, Cambridge he did well at his studies and was noted for finding solutions to logic and mathematical problems or simplifying solutions already known. He became a Don at the age of 22.

In 1936 he wrote a paper on Computable Numbers, having previously imagined a universal machine and worked out its logic of operation. Meantime he had spent time in the America, at Princeton. He indulged variously in sailing, rowing and canoeing. After the war he became a serious long-distance runner.

Within 24 hours of the onset of World War II, Alan Turing reported to Bletchley Park. He played a major role in cracking the enigma codes.

Cracking the codes was hard enough; time was critical if the information was still to be useful. Turing's design for the logic required and machines to use it made the difference. He was not alone, but his input was vital. He contributed much to the development of computers after the war.

He devised the Turing Test for artificial intelligence that says that if you are unable to tell if you are communicating with a machine or a person, then there is intelligence at the other end of the conversation.

You can sign a petition on-line to have him honoured with his portrait on the next £10 note. Go to <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/> Enter Alan Turing and click View next to the petition and follow instructions. Allan Turing shortened the war and saved countless lives. He richly deserves the recognition.

