

Alan Turing Research Activity – Information Cards

The Burglary That Led to His Arrest

On **January 23, 1952**, Alan Turing reported a burglary at his home in **Wilmslow, Cheshire**. He had invited **Arnold Murray**, a 19-year-old man, to stay with him, but later suspected that an acquaintance of Murray's was responsible for the break-in; Murray admitted that he did know the burglar. Although none of the stolen items were irreplaceable, Turing felt a sense of personal violation and reported the burglary to the police. However, what should have been a minor inconvenience quickly escalated into a life-altering event. Murray threatened to tell the police about their relationship – a dangerous thing to do at the time as homosexuality was a criminal offence in Britain.

When the police came to investigate, they suspected that there was a relationship between Turing and Murray. Turing was pressured into admitting his relationship with Murray and the police shifted their focus from investigating the burglary to charging Turing with **gross indecency**.

Alan Turing's house, Copper Folley, in Wilmslow, Cheshire



(Photo: Savills Wilmslow)

Quotation

"I have no intention of denying the truth."

Alan Turing, speaking to police about his relationship with Arnold Murray

The Trial & Conviction

Turing was charged under the **Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885**, which criminalized same-sex relationships. His trial took place on **March 31, 1952**, at **Knutsford Crown Court**.

On legal advice, Turing pleaded guilty to the charges, and the court sentenced him to **chemical castration**—a hormone treatment designed to suppress his libido. He was given **stilboestrol**, a synthetic oestrogen, which caused physical and emotional distress. His mother, Ethel, stood by her son, unlike his brother, John, who denounced Turing's "disgusting and disreputable" homosexuality, which he considered morally reprehensible. Unlike Turing, Murray was only 'bound over' with a suspended sentence and did not have to undergo chemical castration.

A court document listing Turing's charges and sentence.

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BEFORE :- His Honour Judge J. Fraser Harrison. 31st March, 1952.

COUNSEL	PRISONERS	PARTICULARS OF OFFENCE	PLEA	VERDICT	SENTENCE OR ORDER
Mr. S. Llewellyn Pros. Mr. R. David. Dfg.	Christopher Howard Newton.	On the 29th day of January, 1952 at Sale broke and entered the shop of Tom Roberts and stole 3 boxes of cigars, 1 box of cheroots, 12 boxes of Whiffs, 6 cigarette lighters, 30 packets of films, 3 pipes, 2 cigarette cases, 24,816 cigarettes, 17 boxes of chocolate, 34 bars of chocolate together of the value of £205.17.14d and £1.5.0. in money the property of the said Tom Roberts in the said shop.	Guilty	-	Sentence postponed for Twelve Months.
Mr. R. David. Pros. Mr. Lind Smith Dfg. Turing. Mr. E. Hosson. Dfg. Murray.	Alan Mathison Turing.	1. On the 17th day of December, 1951, at Wilmalaw, being a male person, committed an act of gross indecency with Arnold Murray, a male person. 2. On the 17th day of December, 1951, at Wilmalaw being a male person was party to the commission of an act of gross indecency with Arnold Murray, a male person. 3. On the 12th day of January, 1952 at Wilmalaw, being a male person committed an act of gross indecency with Arnold Murray, a male person. 4. On the 12th day of January, 1952, at Wilmalaw, being a male person, was party to the commission of an act of gross indecency with Arnold Murray, a male person. 5. On the 2nd day of February 1952 at Wilmalaw, being a male person committed an act of gross indecency with Arnold Murray, a male person. 6. On the 2nd day of February, 1952, at Wilmalaw, being a male person, was party to the commission of an act of gross indecency with Arnold Murray, a male person. 7. On the 17th day of December, 1951 at Wilmalaw being a male person, committed an act of gross indecency with Alan Mathison Turing, a male person. 8. On the 17th day of December, 1951, at Wilmalaw, being a male person, was party to the commission of an act of gross indecency with Alan Mathison Turing, a male person. 9. On the 12th day of January, 1952 at Wilmalaw, being a male person, committed an act of gross indecency with Alan Mathison Turing, a male person. 10. On the 12th day of January, 1952 at Wilmalaw, being a male person, was party to the commission of an act of gross indecency with Alan Mathison Turing, a male person. 11. On the 2nd day of February, 1952, at Wilmalaw, being a male person, committed an act of gross indecency with Alan Mathison Turing, a male person. 12. On the 2nd day of February, 1952, at Wilmalaw, being a male person, was party to the commission of an act of gross indecency with Alan Mathison Turing, a male person.	Guilty Guilty Guilty Guilty Guilty Guilty Guilty Guilty Guilty Guilty Guilty Guilty	- - - - - - - - - - - -	Turing:- Placed on Probation for a period of Twelve Months, to submit for treatment by a duly qualified medical practitioner at Manchester Royal Infirmary. Murray:- Bound over to be of good behaviour for Twelve Months. When passing sentence, the Court took into consideration at the request of the prisoner, one outstanding offense, which he admitted, as per the list attached to the Indictment.
	Arnold Murray.				

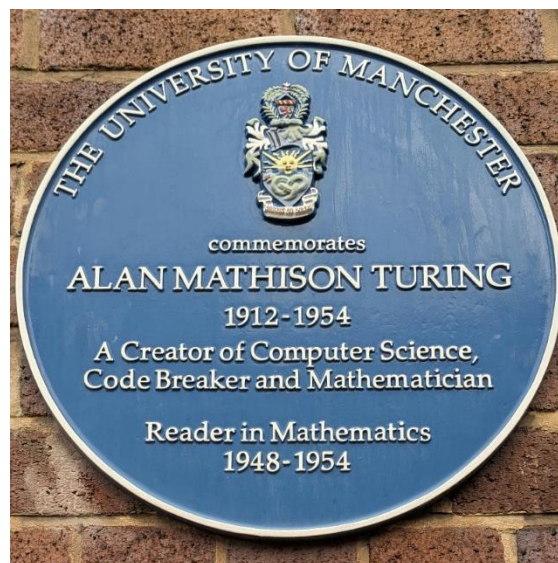
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The Consequences of His Conviction

Turing's conviction had severe consequences beyond the hormone treatment. He lost his security clearance, preventing him from continuing his work in cryptography at **GCHQ (Government Communications Headquarters)**.

His academic reputation suffered, and he was barred from working on classified projects. Despite this, he continued his research in mathematics and computing, but he was cut off from important scientific communities and mental health declined. Because his trial and conviction were publicly reported, this reinforced discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals. In addition, it led to Turing being ostracized by parts of the academic and scientific community. The stigma led to his increasing isolation.

The chemical castration treatment caused physical changes, including breast development, which deeply affected his self-image, and he experienced mood swings and depression, which worsened over time.



(Creative Commons)

The blue plaque at Manchester University, where Turing continued his work despite the restrictions caused by his trial and conviction.

Quotation:

"Turing was a genius, yet he was treated as a criminal." – Historian Michael Smith

The Debate Over His Death

On **June 7, 1954**, a cleaner found Turing dead in his home from cyanide poisoning. A half-eaten apple was discovered near his body, leading to speculation about suicide. The official inquest ruled his death as suicide, but some historians believe it may have been accidental poisoning from an experiment he was conducting.

His mother, Ethel, was sure that her son's death was accidental. Turing used cyanide in his home experiments, and Ethel had warned him about being careless in handling the poison in the past. It is possible he accidentally inhaled fumes or came into physical contact with the poison. Colleagues at Bletchley Park and elsewhere have talked about Turing being untidy.

There are one or two unanswered questions about his death. The apple was never tested for cyanide, so there is no certainty that it was linked to his death; he often ate an apple before bed. Turing had left notes on his desk about work he planned to continue, which suggests he was not in a suicidal state of mind. A number of historians, and others such as Professor Jack Copeland, the Director of the Turing Archive for the History of Computing, have argued that the suicide verdict was rushed and have re-examined the evidence for suicide, believing it to be weak.

The **Alan Turing Memorial** in Sackville Gardens, Manchester (pictured below) is between Canal Street, the centre of Manchester's gay village, and the University of Manchester.

The words, 'Alan Mathison Turing 1912–1954' are inscribed on the bench, and the motto 'Founder of Computer Science' written in an enigma code*. A plaque at his feet reads: 'Mathematician, Logician, Wartime Codebreaker, Victim of Prejudice'; on the pavement is a mosaic LGBTQ flag.

*Apparently, the code is inaccurate!

Quotation:

"Turing's death remains one of the great tragedies of British history." BBC News

(Image credit: Shutterstock)



An Apology and a Royal Pardon (2013)

In 2009, a petition calling for an official apology was launched on the UK Government website by computer scientist John Graham-Cumming. It got over 30,000 signatures and was a success. The same year, then Prime Minister **Gordon Brown** issued an official apology for Turing's treatment.

Turing's niece, Inagh Payne, was thankful for the apology, but said she had no idea about his wartime contributions at the time because he kept his work secret.

In **2013**, Queen Elizabeth II granted him a **posthumous royal pardon**, recognizing the injustice of his conviction. Interestingly, a pardon is normally only granted when the person is innocent of the offence, and after a request from someone such as a family member has been made. Turing's pardon was issued without those two requirements being met. Whilst this shows the exceptional nature of Alan Turing's achievements, there were arguments for and against the pardon.

Turing was convicted under laws which are now seen as unjust. The pardon acknowledges that his conviction was morally wrong. The pardon is also a symbolic recognition of his work during the war which saved thousands, perhaps millions, of lives. It also led to recognition for others convicted under similar laws: the introduction of **Turing's Law** in 2017, pardoned thousands of men who had been convicted under historical anti-gay laws.

However, critics believed that Turing was pardoned only because of his fame, while thousands of other men convicted under the same laws were not included until Turing's Law in 2017. Others questioned whether it was appropriate to rewrite history through pardons. Apologies would be more meaningful than pardons, as accepting a pardon implies guilt.

Quotations

"So on behalf of the British government, and all those who live freely thanks to Alan's work, I am very proud to say: we're sorry, you deserved so much better." Prime Minister, Gordon Brown MP

"Turing deserves to be remembered and recognised for his fantastic contribution to the war effort and his legacy to science. A pardon from the Queen is a fitting tribute to an exceptional man." Justice Minister, Chris Grayling MP

"I want an apology ... to accept a pardon means you accept that you were guilty." George Montague, convicted under similar laws.

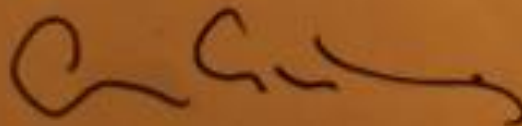
NOW KNOW YE that We, in consideration of circumstances humbly represented unto Us, are Graciously pleased to extend Our Grace and Mercy unto the said Alan Mathison Turing and to grant him Our Free Pardon posthumously in respect of the said convictions;

AND to pardon and remit unto him the sentence imposed upon him as aforesaid;

AND for so doing this shall be a sufficient Warrant.

GIVEN at Our Court at *Saint James's*
the *24th* day of *December* 2013;
In the sixty-second Year of Our Reign.

By Her Majesty's Command.



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The **official pardon document** issued by the UK government.

Further context for the 1950s

The Cambridge Five in the 1950s

Who Were They?

- A group of **British spies** secretly working for the **Soviet Union** during the **Cold War**.
- Key members: **Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, Kim Philby, Anthony Blunt, and John Cairncross**.

1951: The Spy Scandal

- **Burgess & Maclean** suddenly **fled to Moscow**, exposing the spy ring.
- British intelligence suspected **Philby**, but he denied involvement.

Homosexuality & Espionage

- **Burgess & Blunt** were **openly gay**, which was **illegal in Britain** at the time.
- Some believed **homosexuality made spies vulnerable to blackmail**, increasing suspicion.

Impact on Britain

- The scandal **shocked the public** and **damaged trust** in British intelligence.
- The government **tightened security**, fearing more spies were hidden in high places.