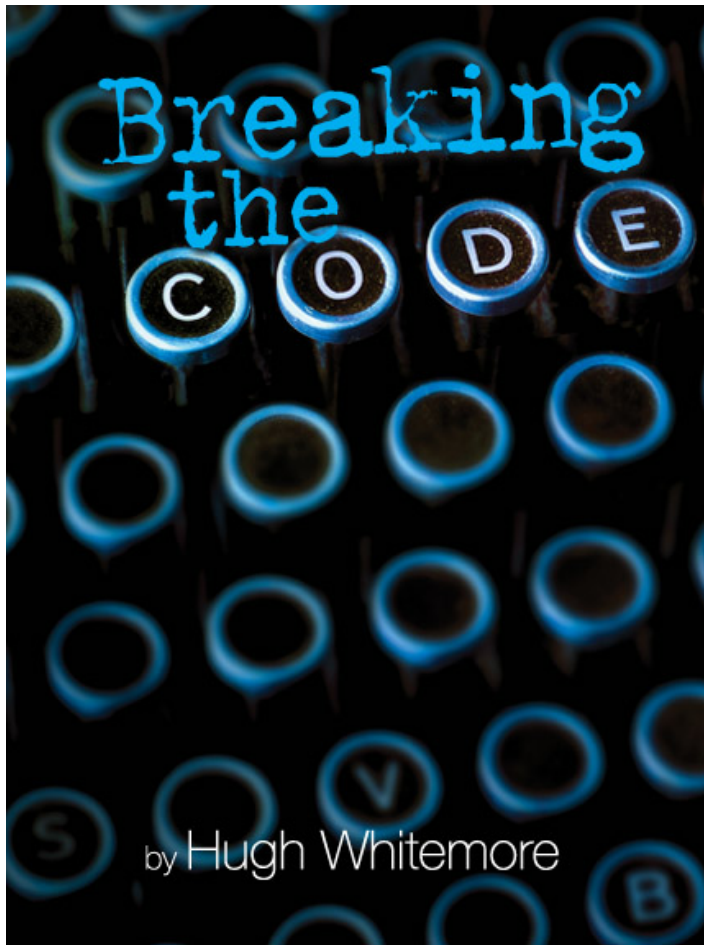


Jewel Theatre Audience Guide

Addendum: John Smith Biography



directed by Kirsten Brandt
by Susan Myer Siltan, Dramaturg
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JOHN SMITH

A fictional character who appears both in Act I, Scene 4 and Act II, Scene 6, the playwright describes him in the stage directions as an “authoritative man” and does not identify his profession further in the text. He is Ross’ superior; Ross addresses him as “sir” in Act I, Scene 4. He’s obviously high-placed: he refers to Winston Churchill by his first name and the reference to his upper-class accent in the stage directions could also place him in the same circles as Churchill, either growing up, presently or both. When Alan asks him who he is in Act II, Scene 6, he dances around his answer. It’s clear to Alan that he can talk freely with Smith about Bletchley Park, as Smith doesn’t hesitate to reveal that he is privy to information about it.

My research did not find an actual person named John Smith who fits the character in the play. The solicitor for Alan’s defense in his trial was Mr. G. Lind-Smith, and the headmaster of Sherborne School the first year Alan attended was Nowell Charles Smith (1871-1961). Using the name “John Smith” could be another of Whitemore’s inside jokes.

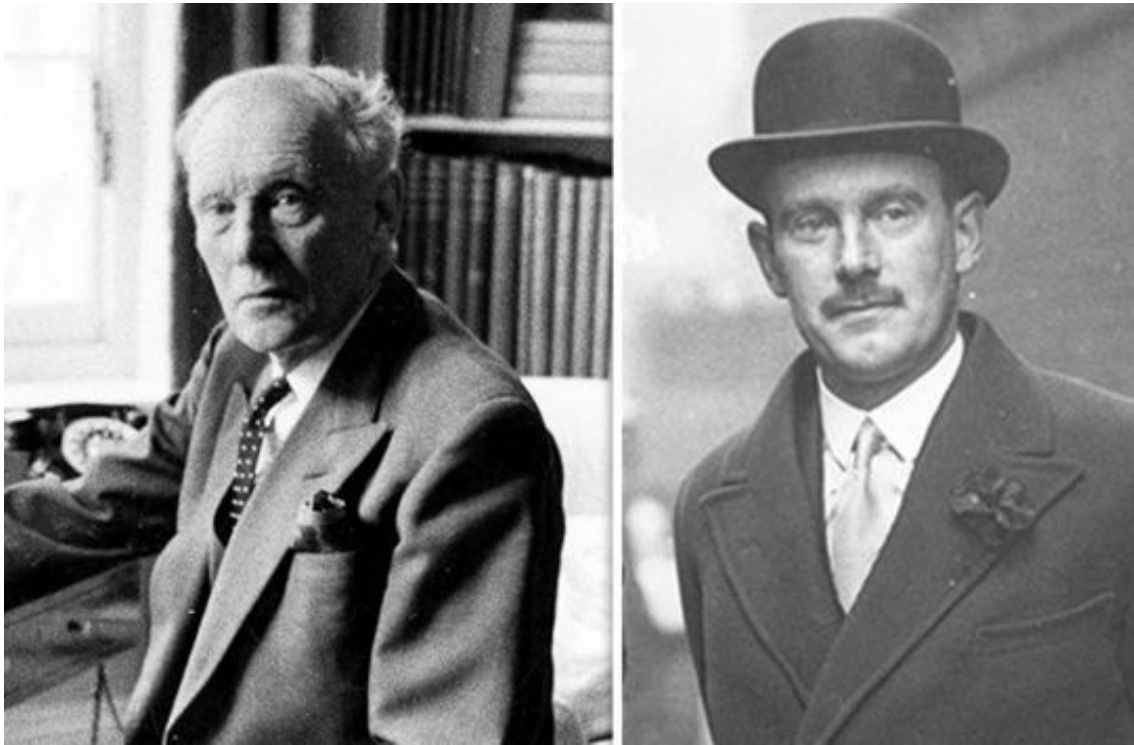


Nowell Charles Smith, Headmaster of Sherborne School 1909-1927

Headmaster Smith’s nickname for Alan was “The Alchemist”, and he regarded Alan with “patience, discernment, and a liberal attitude”, as described by Sara Turing in her book, *Alan M. Turing* (1956). His wife was also very complimentary of Alan. She told Sara, “He will do something great in science, I am convinced.

Every time I have come across him ... I had a feeling of his power."

These Smiths aside, my vote for John Smith's counterpart is Major General Sir Stewart Graham Menzies (January 30, 1890–May 29, 1968), who was Chief of MI6, the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), from 1939 to 1952, during and after WWII.



Major General Sir Stewart Menzies in his later years (left) and in earlier times (right)

He hits all the marks for Smith: he was very well-born, so he'd have the posh accent. He went to Eton as did Prime Minister Winston Churchill, which would give him proximity to Churchill's inner circle. In fact, according to Anthony Cave Brown, whose 1987 book about Sir Stewart, *C: The Secret Life of Sir Stewart Graham Menzies, Spymaster to Winston Churchill*, "All but one of the leading figures on the foreign affairs side of the government were old Etonians". He worked closely with Winston Churchill, having met with him a purportedly 1,500 times over the course of WWII, making him privy to his opinions and his confidences; he was appointed Chief, or C, of MI6, also known as the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), in 1939 and served in that position until mid-1952. He would therefore have a vested interest in what was going on with Alan Turing, given that the cloak of secrecy around the Enigma codebreakers was still strongly in effect, and would be until it was broken in 1974. In fact, he would

know exactly who Alan Turing was: as C during WWII, he expanded wartime intelligence and counterintelligence departments and supervised codebreaking efforts at Bletchley Park. Menzies kept Prime Minister Winston Churchill supplied daily with important Ultra decrypts and worked together with him to ensure that financial resources were directed to research and upgrading the technology at Bletchley Park, which was essential in keeping pace with Nazi coding refinements and hiring the best possible talent for the work.

There are two possible arguments against Sir Stewart being Smith. One is that Smith insisted on wartime control of codebreaking and was very involved with what went on at Bletchley Park, yet Alan asks him who he is in Act II, Scene 6. Wouldn't Alan know him? Very likely not, as 1) Alan worked off-hours: he was known to come in at midday or later and work until midnight or later the next day. Given that the problem would then be basically solved, he'd go home, rest up and not return for a day or so. He couldn't be depended on to be there during "regular" hours, and when there, he couldn't be bothered with anything or anyone outside of the problems he was attempting to solve; 2) it was well known that Alan bristled against authority, didn't like bureaucrats, and went his own way and made his own rules, so a visit by a big mucky-muck would neither impress him nor take him away from his work; and, 3) when Menzies spent time at Bletchley Park, he would very likely have done so under cover. A recognizable high-ranking official would not want to draw attention to himself there, because it would create curiosity about the operation. Although the Nazis had suspicions, they believed Enigma was unbreakable. They never knew that the Allies were reading a high proportion of their war-related communiques, and C's tight grip on secrecy kept it that way.

The other reason John Smith might not be Sir Stewart is that when he is speaking to Alan in Act II, Scene 6, it is following Alan's trip to Norway, which occurred in the summer of 1952. Menzies retired from M16 in mid-1952. I'm not convinced that this would rule out Menzies, as it would not be the first time Whitemore has used literary license to mildly tweak time sequence.

More information about Sir Stewart can be found in this article from the New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/12/27/books/the-oldest-boy-of-british-intelligence.html>, including how he almost brought down the SIS when his mode of hiring backfired. He followed the traditional recruitment system, only selecting men for the British secret service who were upper class ex-officers of independent incomes recommended to him by a government

department, or known to him personally. After all, that's how he was made C. Whether it was his limited vetting process or just bad luck, two upper crust Englishman he hired to work with the Foreign office—Guy Burgess and his friend Donald Maclean from Cambridge student days—turned out to have been spies during WWII. The men evaded arrest by fleeing to the USSR in 1950.

RESOURCES

Please see separate resources document provided as an addendum to this Guide.