

The secret codebreakers of Ascot's Nyrambla House

On Drive with Steve Austin

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A Queensland manor that housed Australia's largest codebreaking operation during WWII should be bought as a museum to honour the men and women who served there, a historian insists.

Nyrambla House in Ascot, Brisbane, was requisitioned to house the Central Intelligence Bureau Headquarters - the codebreakers for the Pacific - during World War II and is now up for sale.

Author David Dufty spent years researching the subject and interviewing the surviving codebreakers who worked there for his book, *The Secret Code-Breakers of Central Bureau*.

"It's the biggest codebreaking operation in Australia; by the end of the war they had 4000 people working for them, it was so big they spilled out onto the Ascot racecourse," he said.

The Central Intelligence Bureau was the nucleus of the Australian Signals Directorate but, despite its history, it is not on the Queensland Heritage Register.

Mr Dufty said not only should it be on the register but that the Queensland or Federal Government should take the "once in a lifetime opportunity" to buy the site and turn it into a museum.

He said, just like Bletchley Park, the British codebreaking centre where Alan Turing worked, it could become a world-class attraction.

"It would be a fantastic way to honour the men and women who worked so secretly," he said.

"They never got the acknowledgement they deserved, before, during or after the war. It was decades before they were allowed to march on ANZAC Day.

"I met one woman who was married to a man who went to his deathbed thinking she was a cleaner or a secretary - and she was a codebreaker."

Mr Dufty said Nyrambla House codebreakers decrypted the Japanese messages that took down the man who ordered the Pearl Harbor attacks: Yamamoto Isoroku.

"They passed that onto the Americans and he was shot out of the sky," he said.

It was also the scene of a made-for-the-movies wartime romance.

"There was a woman, Coral, she was at Central Bureau and she met a young man called Sandy," Mr Dufty said.

"He got posted to the Philippines and they were communicating to each other using the top secret messages.

"They had these machines called Typex machines that deciphered messages, and they had to put all this whitespace at the start to hide how long they (the messages) were.

"(Coral and Sandy) were using that whitespace to type love letters to each other and cutting off the tape and giving that to the generals.

"They got married and lived happily ever after."

A spokesman from the Queensland Department of Environment and Science said it did not buy properties or turn them into museums.

He said the public could make an application to have Nyrambla House listed on the Queensland Heritage Register, which would be considered by the Queensland Heritage Council.

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