



Alan Turing: Devastated by his friend's death

Video transcript: Clip from *Horizon: The Strange Life and Death of Dr Turing* – produced by Christopher Sykes Productions.

DR ANDREW HODGES:

Well, when he was 16 Alan Turing fell in love with another boy at Sherborne – a boy called Christopher Morcom. It was hopeless, unrequited love. It must have been very, very painful and difficult to deal with anyway, but it did have some importance for Turing immediately because he became more communicative. He seemed to realise there was more point to other people, to doing things, to getting on in the world, making more of a success in his academic work. And, in fact, the point of his life became really to be a student with Christopher at Cambridge.

Now Christopher did in fact win a scholarship to Cambridge in 1929. And then, it happened that Christopher suddenly died in February 1930. And Turing was really quite shattered by this:

A LETTER WRITTEN BY ALAN TURING, VOICED BY ROGER MILLS:

Dear Mrs Morcom. I want to say how sorry I am about Chris. My most vivid recollections of him are almost entirely of the kind things he said to me sometimes. Of course I simply worship the ground he trod on – a thing which I did not make much attempt to disguise I'm sorry to say. I should be grateful if you could find me sometime a little snapshot of Chris to remind me of his example and of his efforts to make me careful and neat. I shall miss his face and the way he used to smile at me sideways.

DR ANDREW HODGES:

Mrs Morcom invited him to stay at their house and they shared something of what they wanted to see in the meaning of happened. That it wasn't just that Christopher had died, that somehow he lived on. Now, Alan Turing wanted to believe that Christopher Morcom's mind somehow still survives. He wrote to Mrs Morcom frequently saying he felt Christopher was helping him. But you see he didn't just want to think of this as a comforting thought, a happy convenient belief. He had to have a scientific reason for believing this was actually true. Christopher's death inspired him to look very seriously at what modern science was saying about the nature of the mind – how the mind can be embodied in the physical world.