

Woodlands Park Cold War Bunker. 21st May 2019.

There were 17 in total that visited the bunker on a very sunny and warm morning. We were greeted by our main guide Sandra Soder and 3 of her colleagues who are all volunteers for the Thames Defence Heritage. Before taking us down the steps into the Bunker, she pointed out to us the different air vents sticking up out of the grass. Once we got inside it was good that most of the group had remembered to bring a jacket as the temperature difference down in the bunker was noticeably lower.

I was a bit surprised that the actual facility was not deeper underground but the guides explained in their introductory talk that essentially it was a just a reinforced concrete box 20m by 14m cut into the Park and earthed over. The main meeting room, where they gave the talk about the history of Civil Defence in this area and why this particular command post was moved from the site that is now occupied by the Civic Hall, would have been the 2nd operations room.

After this talk, we were split up into 3 groups of about 6, as some of the rooms are fairly small, each group was shown around by one of the volunteers. Each room has been faithfully refurnished with historical artefacts from all over the country, as little of the original items would have been left after the Bunker was finally closed in the late sixties. We were first shown the reception room where wardens would come in with messages concerning location of damage and where casualties might be. There was even an example of a push bike which could have been used for the unfortunate wardens, especially if they were checking for survivors after a nuclear blast! We were reminded though that the bike would have been outside but sadly nowadays it wouldn't survive vandals for long.

In the plant room that would have needed to have provided power if an attack had taken place, our guide turned on one of the 2 generators to show that it still works after all these year! He also pointed out the remains of one of the flimsy carbon filters that the 35 occupants would have had to rely on to filter out any radioactive dust/particles drawn from the air ducts on the surface.

We were shown the women's and the men's dormitories with the women's one suitably kitted out with knitting patterns and copies of the Women's weekly. Because of space limitations the dorms would have been operated as a hot bed system where several people would share a bed one after the other.

Although the women's toilets just used a chemical toilet, in the men's they actually had plumbed in urinals designed so both sexes could use them, apparently and not surprisingly (!) these are considered very rare.

On the assumption that any weapons attack would not take down the entire telecommunications network, the telephone message room was kitted out with lots of individual phone cubicles. It reminded me of a modern day call centre. In this room there were examples of field phones that looked similar size to the very early mobile phones.

The operators would receive messages about what was happening on the surface and once prioritised, these message were then passed through a hatch to the 2 main control operations rooms where available resources in terms of rescue teams etc. would be posted onto a large black board, the other board showing the locations of any casualties. These boards were donated from an old command post in Essex still showing the chalked up details from a real training event held there and therefore the reason why the Essex town names appear on it.

Because this bunker has been refurnished so authentically and as such is one of the best examples of what a civil defence bunker would have been like, it was chosen as the setting for the war film 'Age of Heroes' starring Sean Bean in 2010. We were shown photographs of the main actors standing in this same room. This room was connected to the 2nd operations room where we had started the tour. Here we were able to peruse at our leisure the interesting posters and charts etc that were on display. Their main exhibit being an actual Nuclear missile from WW1, thankfully this was only the casing.

For many of us who have lived in the area for a long time and would have passed or been in Woodlands Park and wondered what was below those air vents sticking in the grass, now we know.

Woodlands Park Cold War Bunker Photos.



How Thing Work Members greeted by our guide Sandra



Operations Room



Nuclear Bomb



Message Room



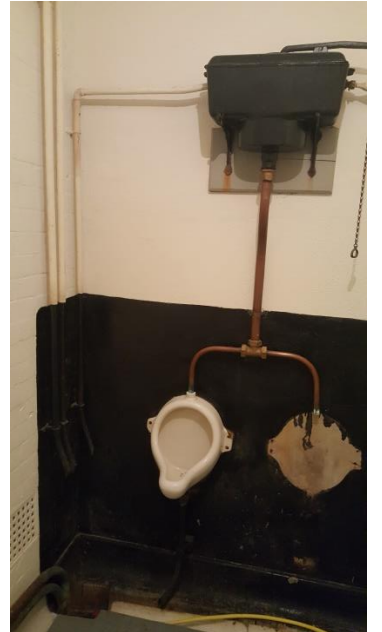
Operations Room



Switchboard



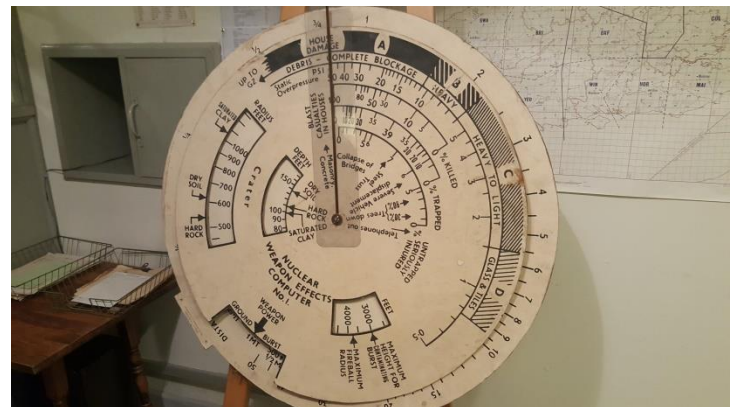
Walkie Talkie



Unisex Urinals



Bunk Beds



Nuclear Computer