

The Paddock Information Collection – The most comprehensive source of information about Paddock

Paddock in the 20th Century (Bill Ridgeway)

Pre Paddock

In the early 1900s the land around Dollis Hill was agricultural. The establishment of a Post Office Research Station away from the centre of London was first mooted in 1914. The first German bomb (simply dropped overboard from a Zeppelin airship) exploded on London on 8 September 1915. This was a new experience and caused alarm amongst the civilian population.

An armistice (signed on 11 November 1918) brought fighting in the First World War to an end. The Treaty of Versailles (signed on 28 June 1919) officially brought the war to an end and obliged Germany to pay reparation set at 132 billion Marks (roughly equivalent to £284 billion). Adolf Hitler became leader of *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (abbreviated NSDAP and known as the National Socialist German Workers Party or the Nazi party) on 29 July 1921. When the German Government began printing more money to pay its debts it created astronomical hyperinflation and an economic crisis.

The British Government considered the situation in Germany and started to plan for another war. Land for the Post Office Research Station was purchased on 22 October 1922 and researchers moved into wooden huts of a former army camp.

Hitler unsuccessfully led the NSDAP in an attempt to overthrow the German Government on 8 November 1923. The population of Germany sought a Government which would stabilise the situation. The NSDAP won an election on 5 March 1933 and Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany.

Germany had started re-arming as soon as the Treaty of Versailles was signed and re-armament was massively expanded when the NSDAP came to power. This prompted the British Government to accelerate planning for another war. There was a requirement for protected accommodation for the War Cabinet (the heads of Government Departments and of the armed forces).

The Cabinet War Rooms acted as a command and control centre for the Government (Cabinet Office) to enable it to liaise with the armed forces. The primary function would have been political and policy matters rather than military matters. This required accommodation which would

- be secure from attack by bombing, toxic gas and land forces
- serve as a communications facility
- have a controlled internal temperature.

It was decided in May 1938 to provide protected accommodation in the Basement of the New Public Offices, Storeys Gate, Westminster which was conveniently close to 10 Downing Street, the Houses of Parliament and Government headquarter buildings (including the War Office). This became operational on 26 September 1938 (referred to as CWR1). It became apparent the site was not bomb-proof and on 22 October 1940 it was decided to install a thick concrete slab above the roof and an exterior apron wall at ground level.

Phase 1 – Cabinet War Rooms (CWR2)

Design and construction

The Cabinet agreed in February 1937 there should be an alternative location for the War Cabinet. The Rae Committee suggested that each of the armed forces and the Cabinet should have a bombproof underground bunker. The sites selected were

- Admiralty: Oxgate Lane, NW2 (codenamed Oxgate)
- Air Ministry: Harrow (& Wealdstone) (codenamed Station Z)
- Army: Kneller Hall, Twickenham (this was abandoned before work started)
- Cabinet Office: the north-eastern part of the Post Office Research Station estate, Brook Road, NW2. There is no available documentary source of information. However reasons may have included ease of planning (the land was already part of the Crown Estate which eliminated the need to locate and purchase land. ¹³⁸ (the land was owned by the Post Office (a Department of State of the Government), planning permission for development on Government owned land was not required, ease of access (the journey time from Downing Street is (presently) about 40 minutes which could be dramatically reduced with a police escort.

The bunkers were designed to resist a direct hit by a 500 lb S.A.P. (semi armour-piercing) bomb.

The bunkers were constructed to the same general design and fitted out similarly.

Item	Paddock	Oxgate	Station Z
Control cabinet (manufacturer)	Pawar Equipment	? manufacturer	?
Decontamination shower	no	yes	?
Emergency exit covered	yes	no	?
Inclined plane (for goods delivery)	no	?	yes
Lift	no	yes	yes
Loading bay	no	?	yes
Staircase / stairwell (centre)	helical / square	spiral / round	spiral / round
Standby generator (manufacturer)	Tangye	?	?
Standby generator bed	?	single	double
Ventilation plant (cross-section)	square	circular	circular
Water tank (cross-section)	square	?	circular

(For images see <https://www.subbrit.org.uk/sites/paddock-standby-cabinet-war-room/>, <https://www.subbrit.org.uk/sites/oxgate-admiralty-citadel/> and <https://www.subbrit.org.uk/sites/station-z-air-ministry-citadel/>).

The most striking and surprising difference is that a lift was installed in Oxgate and Station Z but not in Paddock – even though it was designated for use by their superior the Prime Minister (Neville Chamberlain when being designed and constructed as Winston Churchill became Prime Minister on 10 May 1940), the War Cabinet and the Joint Planning Committee. I wonder why this should be? Perhaps different design teams were responsible. We may never know!

The design included a two level surface building (the upper level of which was dropped at the planning stage) and two levels underground (Basement and Sub Basement). The ground level was to be used for storage and offices. The vestigial remains of the main doorway and southern emergency doorway may still be seen – although both are now clad in modern brick to match the surrounding houses.

Paddock was designed, constructed and fitted out to provide protected alternative accommodation for use if the Cabinet War Rooms at Storey’s Gate (CWR1) became either temporarily or permanently unusable. It included accommodation designated for the Prime Minister and Members of the War Cabinet, a nucleus of the Joint Planning Committee, the Secretary of State for War, the Chief of Imperial General Staff (CIGS), the Liaison Officer between the Dominions Office, the Commander in Chief (C-in-C) and Advanced Forces HQ – Home Forces and also for their respective Secretariats and support staff. It also had a Cabinet War Room, a Chiefs of Staff Committee Room and a Map Room. The intention was for it to work, as far as possible, in exactly the same way as CWR1.

Body heat from a complement of about 150 people would have provided more than sufficient heat in Paddock to the extent that air chilling was provided. The only other source of heat was a low power bar heater (still extant) in the BBC studio. At the beginning of 2016 a 250W electric heater was installed (and is live continuously) under the main electric control equipment near the main door. These were designed to reduce condensation in the electrical equipment.

It was envisaged that any lock-down period because of bombing or gas attack would be for a short time. There almost certainly would have been a plumbed in toilet in the surface building of Paddock but there was no plumbed in toilet in the Basement or Sub Basement (presumably because of the difficulty in disposing of effluent). A chemical toilet may have been provided similar to that at the Cabinet War Rooms (now the Churchill War Rooms Museum, Storey’s Gate).

Light refreshments were available in the Basement of Paddock for the convenience of staff who otherwise would have to use the canteen (not open 24 hours) in the Main Research Building (now Chartwell Court).

Construction of Paddock started in early 1939. A (very rough) estimate gives the volume of earth excavated to be in the order of 600,000 cubic feet (17,000 cubic metres) which would weigh in the order of 66,000 tons (56,000 tonnes) which is in the order of 3,300 journeys of 20 ton lorries. In addition (and to give a perspective of the amount to be transported) there would also be deliveries of construction material (sand, cement and bricks), plant (air conditioning and standby generator) amongst other things. The estimated cost was £0.25M – approximately £11.83M today.

Houses had been constructed in local roads by the time Paddock was being constructed. Local residents would, undoubtedly have been aware of a construction project the size of Paddock. The area had been partly developed. There was, however, a wartime spirit of “don’t ask questions” as you may come under suspicion of being a spy. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8]

Gas-tight doors were installed at the surface level and at the bottom of steps leading to the Basement to prevent toxic gas entering the Basement. Blast resistant / armoured doors were installed at the top of stairwells leading to the Sub Basement to prevent blast entering the Sub Basement.

The construction of Paddock was completed by 8 June 1940. Churchill visited Paddock on 8 September 1940 and again on 20 September 1940 (on his way to Chequers) to see the construction of the internal walls and final fitting out.

Operational

The complement of the military guard (at 31 January 1941) was 3 NCOs and 28 men at Paddock and 3 NCOs & 30 men at Neville's Court.^[9]

Churchill ordered "*a dress rehearsal, so that everybody should know what to do if it got hot*". He also suggested that Paddock should be "*broken in*" and instructed the Cabinet should meet there on 3 October 1940. This Cabinet meeting was chaired by Winston Churchill who later wrote "*We held a Cabinet meeting at Paddock far from the light of day, and each Minister was required to inspect and satisfy himself about his sleeping and working apartments. We celebrated this occasion by a vivacious luncheon and then returned to Whitehall*".

A second (and only other) Cabinet meeting was held at Paddock on 10 March 1941. Martin Gilbert (Churchill's Principle Private Secretary) wrote "*For the first time since he had become Prime Minister, Churchill was too ill to return to London [from Chequers] for the Monday War Cabinet. His persistent cold had turned into bronchitis*". However, in contrast John Colville (one of Churchill's Private Secretaries) wrote "*His capacity for work was totally unimpaired and his temper is scarcely ruffled*". It may be deduced that in view of Churchill's statement of 1 November 1940 (only a month after the first Cabinet meeting) "*Paddock is a piece of useless folly; it can be put to any use the Departments think fit. It is no good for H.M.G*"^[10] he had no intention of chairing the meeting. The second Cabinet meeting was chaired by Clement Atlee (Lord Privy Seal). Robert Menzies (The Australian Premier) also attended this Cabinet meeting to give the Australian perspective on the progress of the war. It is stated "He [Menzies] objected to the lack of a proper military appreciation of the expedition's chances, fought for promises of full equipment for the troops, and altogether proved a thorn in Churchill's side." and "Menzies further antagonized Churchill by visiting Ireland to confer confidentially with Eamon de Valera ('that wicked man', as Churchill called him) in the brave but naive hope of winning an end to Irish neutrality in the war." Churchill did not want Menzies to see the Irish Prime Minister (to try to persuade the neutral Republic of Ireland to enter the War). Menzies did not like Australian forces being sacrificed. The Cabinet meeting gave Menzies an opportunity to state his feelings. It is possible that for either (or both) scenarios outlined Churchill decided not to attend the Cabinet meeting to avoid fuelling the fire of mutual mistrust.^[11, 12, 13]

The equipment (notably air conditioning, stand-by generator the telephone system and the teleprinter system) at Paddock was checked regularly (even when Paddock was later occupied by the Post Office Research Station) and was available to be put into action at a few hours notice.

Paddock was operational between 1940 and the end of 1943 when all the best furniture and fittings were moved to the North Rotunda (a disused gas holder) in Great Peter Street, Westminster (codenamed Anson, CWR3).

Rupert Allason (aka author Nigel West) visited Paddock in 1981 accompanied by Robin Williams (Network Homes) who commented "They wanted to clear out any possible sensitive material. Ministry contractors took maps, files and numerous pieces of equipment."^[14]

Paddock was a waste of money (a 'white elephant')

Paddock became available for use in June 1940 and was decommissioned in Autumn 1943 when its function (and all the furniture) was moved to Anson was moved to Anson (CWR3) – at which not one Cabinet meeting was held. Only two Cabinet meetings were held at Paddock and at other times it was kept ready for occupation at very short notice.

It may be argued that all three bunkers were a waste of money and resource. This may be correct – but only with the benefit of hindsight. There was a possibility that whatever protection was given to CWR1 there was always a possibility that something may occur which would make it unusable. On this basis there was a real need to have standby accommodation (on warm start-up) to which the War Cabinet could move very quickly. This is a view with the benefit of hindsight. If they had not been constructed the ability to govern would have been very severely hampered. To quote Benjamin Franklin "*If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail*".

Phase 2 – Post Office

Paddock was used after the Second World War by the Post Office Research Station for product research and development. The Post Office Research Station Open Day on 1 July 1948 included in the Paddock Surface building a non reverberant room (effectively an anechoic chamber). The Basement and Sub Basement provided an environment free of vibration and electrical interference from the outside and a steady temperature. It is understood that work done in the Basement and Sub Basement included acoustical and optical measurement, direct sound recording, sound recording on glass, investigations and the design of special purpose optical measurements and research into growing artificial piezo-electric crystals. The room in the Basement containing a Faraday cage may have been part of this process.^[15] Paddock was also used by the Post Office Research Laboratories Sports and Social Club (RLSSC). This had sections for DIY tool hire, horticulture, model aircraft and music appreciation. There was also a bar / social club.

The Basement (only) of Paddock was also used by the General Post Office Research Laboratories Sports and Social Club (RLSSC) which merged with the Research Social Club (RSC) in 1961. The RSC included a Motor Club and a Tools Club (for the hire of do-it-yourself and gardening tools).^[16]

Paddock was finally vacated in late 1976 when the Post Office Research Station moved to Martlesham Heath, Suffolk.

Phase 3 – Industrial estate and abandonment

The estate was sold, in 1978, to Evans of Leeds which leased it out for commercial storage, light industrial use and offices (including Cadbury Schweppes). Paddock was undoubtedly included in the sale but there is no indication whether or not it was used at this time. Lack of maintenance and decay (which probably started when the Cabinet War Rooms vacated Paddock in 1944) was allowed to continue unchecked. Paddock was effectively abandoned until it was sold, together with most of the Estate to Network Homes in 1997.

The history of Paddock is continued in *The Paddock Information Collection – Object 342 Paddock in the 21st Century*.

Source

- ¹ Britain from above, EPW036571; Aerial view of St Andrews Hospital showing extent of residential properties <https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/en/search?keywords=EPW036571&country=global&year=all>
- ² Britain from above, EPW036572; Aerial view of St Andrews Hospital showing extent of residential properties <https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/en/search?keywords=EPW036572&country=global&year=all>
- ³ Britain from above, EPW036573; Aerial view of St Andrews Hospital showing extent of residential properties <https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/en/search?keywords=EPW036573&country=global&year=all>
- ⁴ Britain from above, EPW036574; Aerial view of St Andrews Hospital with Post Office Research Station, Dollis Hill in the background showing extent of neighbouring houses (<https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/en/search?keywords=EPW036574&country=global&year=all>)
- ⁵ Britain from above, EPW036575; Aerial view of St Andrews Hospital showing extent of residential properties <https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/en/search?keywords=EPW036575&country=global&year=all>
- ⁶ Britain from above, EPW036574; Aerial view of St Andrews Hospital with Post Office Research Station, Dollis Hill in the background showing extent of neighbouring houses) (<https://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/en/search?keywords=EPW036574&country=global&year=all>)
- ⁷ Cassini Publishing Ltd (*The Paddock Information Collection – Object 097 – Map of area 1920*)
- ⁸ Nick Catford (*The Paddock Information Collection - Object 004*) Map of area 1935)
- ⁹ National Archives, CAB 21/1068
- ¹⁰ National Archives, CAB21/1068 – Appended to a minute (dated 29 October 1940) from E.C.S. Winston Churchill to which Winston Churchill added the comment on 1 November 1940
- ¹¹ Australian dictionary of biography, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/menzies-sir-robert-gordon-bob-11111>
- ¹² Menzies Foundation, <http://menziesvirtualmuseum.org.au/the-1940s/1941>
- ¹³ Robert Menzies, <http://www.nla.gov.au/sites/default/files/darkandhurryingdays.pdf>
- ¹⁴ Evening Standard 15 April 2002 – an article by Keith Dovkants
- ¹⁵ Programme: Post Office Research Station open day 1 July 1948
- ¹⁶ Paul Sherlock

More information from *The Paddock Information Collection* is available at www.bunkers.org.uk/paddock.htm

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