

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

## **Paddock in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Bill Ridgeway)**

### **Background**

This article continues the history of Paddock from *The Paddock Information Collection – Object 110 Paddock in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*.

The latest phase in the history of Paddock started in May 1997 when Network Homes acquired part of the site from Evans of Leeds for social housing development. Planning consent was granted (subject to outline conditions) by Brent Council on 11 November 1997.<sup>[1]</sup>

Brent Council consulted with Network Homes on the proposed conditions and Network Homes argued (25 June 1999) the proposed conditions could not be imposed as the property boundary between Network Homes and Evans of Leeds bisected Paddock. (There is a legal concept that land ownership extends beneath the surface level of the land.) The challenge was overcome and planning consent was granted by Brent Council on 22 December 1999. Schedule 'B' detailed conditions imposed on Network Homes. The principle condition was a requirement to open Paddock for public open days at least twice a year "*to celebrate the history of this locally listed building and its site and ensure satisfactory public access*".<sup>[2]</sup>

Members of Subterranea Britannica (SubBrit) – referred to as SubBriters – visited Paddock on 19 April 2001 (their first visit) and again on 17 May 2001. They entered through what is now referred to as the south emergency exit. There was no lighting other than torchlight. On descending the stairs to the Sub Basement they encountered water to the depth of about 41cm (16 inches). It was appreciated that wading through such water may be hazardous as it was impossible to know what trip hazards or voids lay beneath the surface of the water or indeed what hazards were in the water. Not to be daunted and having taken reasonable precautions they proceeded to investigate probing for trip hazards and voids as they progressed. One member avoided getting his trousers wet by the simple expedient of taking them off. Network Homes installed electricity and pumped water from the Sub Basement (at a cost of £15,000) later that year. Up to this point only limited research of the design, construction and uses of Paddock could be done (without the present-day availability of the Internet) but now hands-on research could start.

Some walls in the Basement and the Sub Basement had a thick covering of mould which remained for several years of public open days. We were told that if undisturbed the mould was not a hazard to humans and visitors were asked not to touch it.

The responsibility for organising public and private open days was shared. SubBrit was responsible for providing Tour Guides and Marshalls whose role was to ensure visitors did not enter rooms closed to the public, to ensure stragglers did not get too far from the tour group, to accompany visitors not wanting to use the spiral (hexagonal) stairs to the next level via fixed stairs; to accompany visitors not wishing to continue with a tour to the surface and to answer visitors' questions. Network Homes was responsible for administrative matters (principally maintaining and preparing Paddock and taking bookings for most open days).

The whole of the area described as "Former Post Office Research Station, Gates & Bunker, Brook Road" is on a list of locally listed buildings by 1984 and afforded a measure of protection.<sup>[3]</sup>

### **Public open days**

A public open day could not be arranged in September 2001 because Paddock was deemed unsafe. The first public open day was 17 April 2002 which was attended by a Vera Lynn look-alike. Much publicity was generated that day and TV and film crews turned up from all over the world – including Reuters – which publicised Paddock worldwide. Enquiries for bookings for subsequent public open days came from abroad (in particular from America and Germany) with some people planning their holiday around a public open day.<sup>[4]</sup>

The two public open days a year were different from each other.

Tour	Day and times (typical)	Frequency	Length	Tours in a day	Visitors per year (estimate)	Visitors over 17 years (estimate)
May / June	Thursday 09:00 to 17:00	Every hour but with some additional tours on the half-hour	About 45 minutes	13 (typical estimated)	325	5,525
September	Saturday 08:30 to 17:00	Every half-hour	About 45 minutes	17 (typical)	425	7,225
<b>Total</b>					<b>750</b>	<b>12,750</b>

The public tours in May / June were aimed primarily at school children (World War 2 was on their curriculum). It was noted that children from a local Jewish faith school in particular were very attentive and asked reasonable questions.

The first job of the day for SubBriters was to prepare Paddock for visitors. This included checking all the lights were on (not that they could do anything to rectify faulty lights), checking the pumps were working (and effecting temporary repairs where necessary). It also included sweeping the water in the Sub Basement into one of the two sump pumps – which could take two SubBriters as much as 45 minutes. On one occasion light fittings and conduits in one room had collapsed. The obstruction was moved elsewhere. On another occasion a fluorescent light fitting had collapsed to the floor but was (rather bizarrely) in a more-or-less vertical position.

The meet-and-greet team (armed with a list of visitors with pre-booked tickets for specific tours) organised visitors into tour groups of about 25 visitors for each tour. Real-time management was made more interesting by a number of variables. The Jubilees Line service was suspended on a number of September public open days and visitors who could not use the closest station (Dollis Hill) had to make alternative journey plans. Visitors arriving early or late were shoe-horned into vacancies. There were also the inevitable no-shows. In addition there were people asking “*I don’t have a ticket but can I go in?*” who were accommodated wherever possible.

The narrow pavement became quite busy (especially on September public open days) with visitors arriving, being issued with a hard hat and a wrist band, being introduced to the Tour Guide and descending into Paddock. The tour started with a mandatory Health and Safety briefing at the bottom of the stairs (having already passed the main doorway – the lowest head-banging point). At more-or-less the same time visitors who had ended their tour were ascending from Paddock giving up their hard hat and wrist band and departing. There were also visitors who had arrived early, visitors reading the information display boards, and SubBriters answering visitors’ questions. The scene could be perhaps best described as organised chaos. A number of vehicles (including Police) regularly passed by slowly curious as to why there were so many people on the pavement. There were a number of regular passers-by on a number of public open and private open days. These included a person who having lived close-by for all her life knew the Dollis Hill Estate very well. There was also a character whom we dubbed ‘Irish’.

With two tour groups in Paddock simultaneously it was not unknown for visitors on both tours to slow down and become mixed and needed to be disentangled.

Winstan (Stan Streather – a professional Winston Churchill look-alike <sup>[5]</sup>) put in his first of two appearances at Paddock on 9 June 2016. He arrived already in character accompanied with his driver (Michael Gill) who was in the attire of a vicar. My first reaction after greeting them was confusion. It was obvious Winstan was impersonating Churchill but was Michael a real vicar? He was in fact Winstan’s local vicar. The presence of ‘Winston Churchill’ enhanced the open day and was greatly appreciated by visitors and SubBriters alike. Winstan had obviously studied the life and times of his alter ego and visitors and SubBriters asked a stream of questions. Winstan’s answer was sometimes to the effect “*I am over 100 years old. I can’t be expected to remember everything.*”

Most visitors had an interest in Paddock and were attentive to the words of the Tour Guide. It was always very pleasing when visitors on public open days expressed (without being prompted) their thanks and that they had enjoyed their visit. This always puzzled me given much of the retrievable metal has been removed and much of the woodwork has succumbed over the years by dry rot, wet rot and fungi leaving Paddock a dilapidated and decaying shell of its former self. I can only attribute their enjoyment to the depth of knowledge and descriptive skills of the Tour Guides. The visitor’s appreciation was shared amongst and gratefully received by SubBriters. Indeed a number of visitors came more than once. On one public tour there were two blind visitors (with their guide dogs) who were apprehensive at first but were each assigned a personal Tour Guide.

There was one particular tour on which more than one Marshall observed two visitors in particular who seemed to be taking more notice than usual of what was there rather than listening to the talk being given by the Tour Guide. There was a suspicion they had some nefarious intention and were followed closely for the rest of the tour.

One unexpected feature of Paddock was it maintained a steady ambient temperature. On cold days it was good to volunteer to accompany a tour in the relatively 'warm' Paddock. Conversely on warm days it was pleasant to emerge from a 'cold' Paddock. The weather was mainly kind to us – although there were some drizzly and damp days and one day on which the gazebo was blown down.

Tour Guides had off-script moments which added a bit of humour into the 'history lesson' for the visitors and for SubBriters who had heard the 'story' so many times.

Some added to the mandatory Health and Safety briefing something to the effect that "*There are no mice, rats or other nasty things in Paddock except [insert name of a SubBriter]*".

One Tour Guide well known for having a voice akin to a market trader started tours with something like "*I hope you can all hear me. I'm feeling a little hoarse today*".

Another (particularly tall) Tour Guide usually indicated the air conditioning ducting by *accidentally* touching it and sending a shower of water onto unsuspecting visitors. Immediately after the mandatory scripted Health and Safety briefing the Tour Guide asked for a volunteer who was typically female, blonde and in her 20's. (Another Tour Guide also used this ploy). The volunteer did not know what they were volunteering for. The volunteer's first duty occurred in the Standby Generator Room. Having delivered information on the room the Tour Guide would then position the volunteer by the Control Cabinet where they were asked to throw a switch when the generator had been hand-cranked to get it going. There was of course consternation that the generator did not fire up – but it was OK given it had not worked for many years. The volunteer's third duty was to stand at the place occupied by Winston Churchill in the Cabinet Room. The volunteer's third duty occurred in the Telephone Exchange Room. The volunteer was asked to assume the pose of a telephonist seated at an imaginary switchboard and connecting important calls between Paddock and Whitehall. The role-play was always taken in good humour – at least on the tours I accompanied.

I once turned the tables on the particularly tall Tour Guide. In the wall between the Standby Generator Room and the adjacent area there is a hole left from a now removed pipe. I placed a small torch on flashing mode in the hole before the Tour Guide and visitors arrived and then went to the rear of the tour group and (to assert my presence) announced (as was my instruction) everyone had arrived and he could start the talk. All went well until a visitor noticed the flashing light and interrupted the Tour Guide in mid-flow to ask "*What is that?*" The Tour Guide was taken aback searching for a possible answer and blamed me which of course was met with a plea total ignorance.

Another SubBriter recalls one afternoon with most SubBriters already on tours there were only two SubBriters available for a tour. They duly accompanied the tour group of 30 visitors to the bottom of the stairs for the Health and Safety briefing at which point they acted as though the safety briefing from the Tour Guide (a retired member of the Metropolitan Police) had sent them to sleep. Retribution was promised.<sup>161</sup>

The last duty of the day for SubBriters was to walk around all parts of Paddock to ensure a visitor had not been left behind before locking-up at about 18:00 for what may be several months before the next time Paddock was entered. For those SubBriters especially who had arrived at 08:00 to prepare Paddock for the first visit of the day this marked the end of a very long day going up-and-down and round-and round and they went home tired but content knowing they had entertained, educated and satisfied the curiosity of up to about 425 visitors.

### **Private open days**

The responsibility for organising private open days was the same as for public open days. However, detailed arrangements for visitors were done by the organising group and there were not so many tours or visitors so they were somewhat less hectic than public open days. Most tours were the same as public tours but with the addition of entering the grounds of Chartwell Court and viewing the exterior of what was formerly Building 1 of the Post Office Research Station.

### **Subterranea Britannica (19 April 2001 and 17 May 2001)**

Members of Subterranea Britannica (SubBrit) visited for the first time.

### **London Fire Brigade (26 April 2013 and March 2016)**

A watch from the Wembley Station of the London Fire Brigade visited.

### **English Heritage (23 November 2013 to 28 April 2018)**

Members of English Heritage visited Paddock on 9 occasions. There were 2 tours a day for about 25 members each.

### **Danish school (18 May 2017)**

This was part of a whistle-stop tour of England by Danish school children who showed little interest in Paddock despite the best efforts of the Tour Guide.

### **Discover Paddock Special Tour (21 April 2018)**

This Tour was aimed at members of SubBrit who had an interest in the minutiae of design and construction of Paddock and took about 2½ hours. It was envisaged there would be several Tours but it occurred only once before all visits were stopped.

There have undoubtedly been other private open days.

### **Films and documentaries**

Films and documentaries made (wholly or partially) in Paddock include

- Churchill's secret bunker, Codename Paddock (2008) (IKS Production) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CiU7KQ-6r6g>
- Disappearing London (with Suggs) (ITV) (featuring Nick Catford) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0EoZy3dK18&list=PL1vazjYo0VNnIL3G4uQLZ8NHOLUikDhY5&index=13&t=0s>
- Durtty Goodz, 'Oi Wot you Lookin At' A rap video made partly in Paddock <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-XwyP2fjj-8>
- Humanity (Martyn Lomax) (March 2009) – A nuclear holocaust survival story <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=N3pHK3djkMU>
- Humanity (Martyn Lomax) (March 2009) – Video log <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHoPIId5M8Dg&feature=relmfu>
- Open House London promotional film (2016) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKE5UXXx--Q> (starts at 7 minutes)
- Paddock secret underground bunker (BBC) (Part 1) (featuring Mark Russell) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CK2Ds\\_gBsOE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CK2Ds_gBsOE)
- Paddock secret underground bunker (BBC) (Part 2) (featuring Mark Russell) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tC4VKt\\_Mr0o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tC4VKt_Mr0o)
- Paddock, WW2 Standby Cabinet War Room (2018) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVCsFGzoNBs>
- Secrets & mysteries (October 2014) 5 places to explore underground London (featuring Rob Bell) Episode 2: Churchill's secret war rooms (not available on Youtube)
- Secrets of underground London (featuring Andrew Smith) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8iLrVKQ8VA> (starts at 39 minutes)
- The fades (BBC3) (June 2011) – A supernatural drama horror series in 6 parts. Episode 4 was made partly in Paddock <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b015v0nh/the-fades-episode-4> Identifying some of the locations in Paddock is challenging.

### **Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) <sup>[7]</sup>**

LIDAR is a surveying method which measures the distance between the 'camera' and the target by illuminating the target with laser light and measuring the reflected light. The output of the scans together with conventional images are then 'stitched together' to form a 3D representation of the target which with the appropriate software enables the viewer to 'float' within and between rooms – even apparently going through walls, floors and ceilings. Paddock was scanned (internally and externally) over five long days in the period 31 January 2016 to 24 March 2018. Corridors and some rooms required multiple scans to record the hard-to-get-at places. Preliminary output of the LIDAR scan is encouraging but the final output is not yet available.

## **Epilogue**

Network Homes decided in May 2018 to stop public and private open days. The reason for the decision has not been given publicly but it is assumed to be due to the cost of doing so. The last public open day was 22 September 2018. It is not known whether or not the pumps are still working or if Paddock is being maintained on a simple ‘care and maintenance’ basis without regard to historical integrity.

Enquiries for tickets for the September 2018 public open day started in March 2018.<sup>[8]</sup> Up to 30 prospective visitors were turned away from the September 2018 public open day<sup>[9]</sup> because of insufficient capacity to accommodate them. There were 426 people on the waiting list for tickets for the September 2018 public open day.<sup>[10]</sup> This indicates a potential demand for an additional 7,242 visitors over 17 years for the September public open day alone.

There were 34 public open days during the period 2002 to 2018 (17 years) on which there were an estimated 750 visitors a year: An estimated total of 12,750 visitors. In addition there were 9 private open days for English Heritage on which there were an estimated 100 visitors a year: An estimated total of 900 visitors. There were also private visits on which the number of visitors are not known. The total number of visitors to Paddock on public and private open days over the 17 years was about 13,650.

There is clearly a long-standing and continuing strong interest in Paddock and a demand for public and private open days. It is hoped they will be resumed – one day.

## **Source**

<sup>1</sup> Brent Council; Grant of Planning application 97/1409

<sup>2</sup> Brent Council; Grant of Planning application 99/1457

<sup>3</sup> Brent Council, *The Architectural Heritage of Brent* (1984)

<sup>4</sup> Maria Michael

<sup>5</sup> <https://winstan.co.uk>

<sup>6</sup> Philip Lindhurst

<sup>7</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lidar>

<sup>8</sup> Maria Michael

<sup>9</sup> Maria Michael

<sup>10</sup> Maria Michael

## Gallery



A group of SubBriters rest between tours: Public open day, 18/09/2010



Presentation to Katy Bajina (red top) on retiring from Network Homes: Public open day, 07/06/2018 (Photo: Bob Templeman)



Maria Michael, Roy Kenneth, Katy Bajina, Winstan (Stan Streather) and Andrew Smith: Public open day, 09/06/2016 (Photo: Nick Catford)



Information display boards: Public open day, 07/06/2018 (Photo: Bob Templeman)

More information from *The Paddock Information Collection* is available at [www.bunkers.org.uk/paddock.htm](http://www.bunkers.org.uk/paddock.htm)

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