

## Grumpy Old Men's Club update

The April outing for the "Grumpies" was a visit to the Churchill War Rooms. A group of thirteen Grumpies enjoyed an audio guided tour of the War Rooms and the Churchill Museum.

The Churchill War Rooms are part of the Imperial War Museum comprising the Cabinet War Rooms, a historic underground complex that housed the British government command centre throughout the Second World War, and the Churchill Museum, a biographical museum exploring the life of Winston Churchill.

Construction of the Cabinet War Rooms, located beneath the Treasury building in Whitehall, began in 1938. They became fully operational on 27<sup>th</sup> August 1939, a week before Britain declared war on Germany. The War Rooms remained in operation throughout the Second World War, before being abandoned in August 1945 after the surrender of Japan.

After the war, the historic value of the Cabinet War Rooms was recognised. Their preservation became the responsibility of the Ministry of Works and later the Department for the Environment, during which time very limited numbers of the public were able to visit by appointment. In the early 1980s the Imperial War Museum was asked to take over the administration of the site, and the Cabinet War Rooms were opened to the public in April 1984. The museum was reopened in 2005 following a major redevelopment as the Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms, but in 2010 this title was shortened to the Churchill War Rooms.

During its operational life, two of the Cabinet War Rooms were of particular importance. Once operational, the facility's Map Room was in constant use and manned around the clock by officers of the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force.



*Map Room*

The other key room was the Cabinet Room. Until the opening of the Battle of France, which began on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1940, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's war cabinet met at the War Rooms only once, in October 1939. Following Winston Churchill's appointment as Prime Minister, Churchill visited the Cabinet Room in May 1940 and declared: 'This is the room from which I will direct the war'. In total 115 Cabinet meetings were held at the Cabinet War Rooms, the last on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1945, when the German V-weapon bombing campaign came to an end.



*Cabinet Room*

On 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1940, during the Blitz, it was decided to increase the protection of the Cabinet War Rooms by the installation of a massive layer of concrete known as 'the Slab'. Up to 5 feet thick, the Slab was progressively extended and by spring 1941 the increased protection had enabled the Cabinet War Rooms to expand to three times their original size. While the usage of many of the War Rooms' individual rooms changed over the course of the war, the facility included dormitories for staff, private bedrooms for military officers and senior ministers, and rooms for typists or telephone switchboard operators.

Two other notable rooms include Churchill's office-bedroom and the Transatlantic Telephone Room.



*Churchill's office-bedroom*



*Transatlantic Telephone Room*

From 1943, a SIGSALY code-scrambling encrypted telephone was installed in the basement of Selfridges, Oxford Street connected to a similar terminal in the Pentagon building. This enabled Churchill to speak securely with President Roosevelt in Washington, with the first conference taking place on 15 July 1943.

Later extensions were installed to both 10 Downing Street and the specially constructed Transatlantic Telephone Room within the Cabinet War Rooms. Churchill's office-bedroom included BBC broadcasting equipment; Churchill made four wartime broadcasts from the Cabinet War Rooms. Although the office room was also fitted out as a bedroom, Churchill rarely slept underground, preferring to sleep at 10 Downing Street or the No.10 Annexe, a flat in the New Public Offices directly above the Cabinet War Rooms.