



100 YEARS

Churchill War Rooms Factsheet



At this must-see historic site, visitors can walk in the footsteps of Winston Churchill and glimpse what life would have been like during the tense days and nights of the Second World War. Visitors can see where Churchill and his War Cabinet met and step back in time in the Map Room, which has remained exactly as it was left on the day the lights were switched off in 1945. Other highlights include the Cabinet Room, Churchill's bedroom and the award winning Churchill Museum which tells the story of Winston Churchill's remarkable 90-year life.

Brief history and key dates

- When Germany invaded Austria in March 1938, Colonel Hastings Ismay, Deputy Secretary of Britain's Committee of Imperial Defence, immediately organised a search for an emergency working refuge to house the Cabinet and Chiefs of Staff in case of a sudden attack.
- The most suitable available London basement was underneath the western end of the New Public Offices – conveniently close to Downing Street and Parliament. On 31 May 1938, the site was confirmed.
- From June – August 1938, rooms were cleared, alcoves sandbagged, glass doors replaced with teak, brick partitions built, telephone lines installed, and a broadcasting connection was established by the BBC. By the end of August, the Map Room had been manned and tested and plans were well under way for air locks and steel doors to defend against gas attack. By September, the Rooms were ready for emergencies.
- On 29 July 1940 Churchill's War Cabinet met for the first time in the Cabinet Room, which is where the defence of Britain from invasion was now being coordinated
- By 11 September 1940 Churchill makes his first broadcast from the Cabinet War Rooms – warning Britons about the risk of invasion. Later that month, a bomb narrowly misses the Cabinet War Rooms, leaving a crater near the Clive Steps outside.
- In December 1940 Churchill and his wife Clementine move into the 'No 10 Annexe', new quarters above the Cabinet War Rooms following bomb-blast damage to 10 Downing Street in October.
- After the US joined the war, a small storeroom near the Map Room was secretly converted to become the Transatlantic Telephone Room where Churchill could talk in secret to the US President.
- The day after Japan surrenders (14 August 1945) the lights are turned out in the Map Room for the first time in six years.
- Work to strip the War Rooms began in September 1945. One room was later used as a teleprinter centre and then a TV conference centre for the Chiefs of Staff. Others are left untouched.
- In 1948, Parliament announces that the surviving sections of the Cabinet War Rooms will be preserved and will open to the public on a limited basis.
- In 1984, Imperial War Museums opens the War Rooms to the public. The Churchill Museum is added in 2005, and the site is later renamed Churchill War Rooms.

Did you know?

- The site was partly chosen because it was thought that the steel structure of the building above it would provide extra protection against bombs, although in reality a direct hit on the site would have been catastrophic.
- Churchill liked to watch German bombing raids from the roof of the building above the Cabinet War Rooms. On one occasion he is said to have sat on top of a chimney and flooded one of the rooms below with smoke.
- The wooden arms of Churchill's chair in the Cabinet Room are gouged with scratch marks that speak volumes for the nervous energy of its occupant. The marks differ on each arm: Churchill's right hand appears to have scratched at the wood, while the signet ring on his left made deeper gouges.
- Setting up a secure call between Churchill and the US President involved extremely complex technology, though the hardest part was getting the two men to start talking. Legend has it that both were reluctant to come to the phone until the other was on the line.
- Much of the work done at the Cabinet War Rooms was top secret. Margaret Calley, a Code and Cypher Officer, didn't tell her family about her contribution to Britain's victory until more than 30 years after the end of the war.

Things to look out for

- **Remington 'noiseless' typewriter.** Churchill insisted on a quiet working environment and ordered that his staff should use special noiseless typewriters imported from the United States.
- The **Convoy Map.** This features tens of thousands of tiny holes left behind by pins and markers illustrate the routes taken by the many convoys that ran the gauntlet of German and Italian submarines to deliver vital supplies to Britain, its allies and its fighting forces in theatres overseas.
- The **door to No 10 Downing Street** that was in use during Churchill's time as Prime Minister. In 1955 Churchill was forced to resign at the age of 80 after a series of strokes and minor heart attacks and, as the country's leader, used this door for the last time that year.
- **Union flag** which draped the coffin of Sir Winston Churchill during his funeral in 1965. The funeral arrangements of Sir Winston Churchill began in the late 1950s, several years before his death, since the scale and significance of the event meant that meticulous and timely preparations were essential.
- The **weather indicator sign**, which served as a useful guide to what conditions were like above ground. When a heavy bombing raid was in progress, Office of Works official George Rance would adjust the weather indicator to read 'Windy' as an in-joke.
- Wing Commander John Heagerty's **sugar cubes** which were discovered in a drawer within the central Map Room where they had remained hidden since the rooms had ceased to be operational at the end of the Second World War. Given that sugar was rationed, he had good reason to hide such a precious commodity!

–ENDS –

Notes to Editors

For more information, images or to arrange a press visit to the Churchill War please contact:
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Churchill War Rooms

Churchill War Rooms was the secret underground headquarters where Winston Churchill and his team directed the course of the Second World War. We show visitors where the staff lived and worked, explain how the decisions made here changed the course of history and reveal Churchill himself and his role in British history.

Opening hours: 9.30am – 6pm. Last admission 5pm.

Closed 24 – 26 December

Admission*: £19 Adults; £15.20 Concessions (Senior, Student, Disabled); £9.50 Child (5- 16); Free Child (under 5); Family tickets available; Special rates for groups of ten plus.

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* Please note entry prices include a voluntary donation, making a valuable contribution to the care and conservation of this historic site

IWM

IWM (Imperial War Museums) tells the story of people who have lived, fought and died in conflicts involving Britain and the Commonwealth since the First World War.

Our unique Collections, made up of the everyday and the exceptional, reveal stories of people, places, ideas and events. Using these, we tell vivid personal stories and create powerful physical experiences across our five museums that reflect the realities of war as both a destructive and creative force. We challenge people to look at conflict from different perspectives, enriching their understanding of the causes, course and consequences of war and its impact on people's lives.

IWM's five branches which attract over 2 million visitors each year are **IWM London**, IWM's flagship branch that recently transformed with new, permanent and free First World War Galleries alongside new displays across the iconic Atrium to mark the Centenary of the First World War; **IWM North**, housed in an iconic award-winning building designed by Daniel Libeskind; **IWM Duxford**, a world renowned aviation museum and Britain's best preserved wartime airfield; **Churchill War Rooms**, housed in Churchill's secret headquarters below Whitehall; and the Second World War cruiser **HMS Belfast**.

IWM Centenary

2017 marks Imperial War Museums (IWM) centenary. IWM was established while the First World War was still being fought. Since its establishment people have entrusted IWM with their stories of war from 1917 to the present day, in the knowledge it will continue to share these stories with future generations. IWM will commemorate its 100 years through a centenary of stories from its rich collections across its five branches (IWM London, IWM North, IWM Duxford, Churchill War Rooms and HMS *Belfast*).



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First World War Centenary

2014 - 2018 marks the centenary of the First World War, a landmark anniversary for Britain and the world. IWM is marking the centenary by leading a vibrant, four year programme of cultural activities across the world. For more information visit www.1914.org

