



28 October 2019

## ***Imperial War Museums acts to preserve secrets of Churchill's carpet***

**Private tours at the former Cabinet War Rooms have given visitors unique access to Sir Winston Churchill's underground bunker in Whitehall since the end of the Second World War. Imperial War Museums (IWM) is taking innovative steps to preserve the original carpet and its secrets in the prime minister's bedroom study.**

IWM offers private ['behind the glass' tours](#) of three hugely significant historic rooms at Churchill War Rooms – Churchill's bedroom, the Map Room and the Cabinet War Room – giving visitors exclusive access to rooms preserved almost exactly as they were left at the end of the Second World War.

To protect the historic carpet from deterioration, IWM has enlisted the help of [Eyemats](#), the leading experts in photographing, replicating and protecting precious and historic floors throughout the UK and Europe. Eyemats will be covering the original Second World War carpet with a painstakingly accurate synthetic duplicate, created by digitally stitching together thousands of high resolution images of the original – including all its historic damage and unique details.

Most of the objects in Churchill's bedroom – except his desk, the armchairs and the small single bed itself – will be temporarily moved so that the work can begin on **Monday 4 November**, with the whole operation set to be completed within three days.

### **Lucy Tindle, Exhibitions and Interpretation Manager, IWM, said:**

"Churchill may have only slept in his bedroom a handful of times, but his underground chamber remains historically important as the room in which he broadcast key speeches. This is one of the few locations where you can really walk in the footsteps of Churchill and see a historic Second World War location just as it was left when the lights were turned out at the end of the war.

"There's evidence throughout the Churchill War Rooms to suggest that the series of underground rooms was far from purpose-built, and was in fact a classic example of British improvisation. It's a challenging task, but new technologies and conservation techniques, including the amazing work Eyemats do, will allow us to better preserve the site so that it continues to tell its remarkable story."

### **Carpet as political currency**

A carpet might not be the usual sign of seniority, but in a war bunker it was a luxury few were afforded. The interior design in the Cabinet War Rooms fully reflects the political hierarchy of each of the bedrooms' inhabitants. Winston Churchill's bedroom is the only fully carpeted room, while Major-General Hastings Ismay, who played a key role in establishing the Cabinet War Rooms, was given a decorative carpet: a clear indication that the room was used by a senior officer. Sir Edward Bridges was afforded only a small carpet, despite being the most senior civil servant in the country as Secretary to the War Cabinet.

Churchill's own bedroom was conveniently situated next to the Map Room where duty officers of the Armed Forces gathered intelligence everyday throughout the Second World War. Along the corridor lies the Cabinet Room, where the Prime Minister would meet with the Chiefs of Staff to make pivotal decisions that would change the course of the war.

## **Making long term plans for what was a short-term fix**

The conservation work in Winston Churchill's underground bedroom also reflects the fundamental conservation challenge at the historic Whitehall site – that of preserving a location that was only really made to meet the short term demands of war.

## **Ends**

### **For further press information and interview requests please contact:**

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## **Notes to editors**

### **Installation timeline**

The installation will take place on **4-6 November**:

- **Monday 4 November:** Objects removed from the bedroom (the bed and desk will remain inside), carpet cleaned during opening hours
- **Tuesday 5 November:** Protective layer installed during opening hours
- **Wednesday 6 November:** Furniture returned to the bedroom

### **Historical context**

With rising political tension with Germany in the 1930s, plans for a purpose-built underground war room were drawn up in spring 1938. The search for a suitable site began, and on 31 May 1938, Colonel Hastings Ismay confirmed the basement of the Office of Works in Westminster as the ideal location. After a year of clearing rooms, sandbagging alcoves, installing telephone lines and strengthening key rooms, the lights were finally switched on in this Central War Room on 27 August 1939. The site became a crucial hub for gathering military intelligence, with up to 500 working underground at the height of activity.

Shortly after becoming Prime Minister, Churchill was given his own bedroom study in the War Rooms, right next door to the Map Room. The bed provided for Churchill was of the standard Civil Service type seen all over Whitehall. He is known to have spent the night here three times. Churchill made four major speeches from his bedroom study during the Second World War: exhorting Britons to prepare for a German invasion on 11 September 1940, a broadcast to the French Empire on 21 October 1940, a speech to the people of Italy on 23 December 1940, and a speech in response to the Japanese attack on the US fleet at Pearl Harbor on 8 December 1941.

### **Fortifications at Churchill War Rooms**

Along the corridors, beam and girders were placed to support the ceiling, and the buttresses were designed to limit damage done by blast waves. Wooden props and beams were also installed inside rooms as a crude precaution against the possible collapse of the building above during an air raid.

In late September 1940, Churchill discovered that the site was not in fact bombproof. He ordered the construction of a thick concrete slab above the ceiling, and an additional exterior apron wall at ground-floor level. The underground space near the Map Room Annexe was also filled in with cement. During the Blitz, the concrete slab beneath the Annexe was extended to bring more rooms under its protection

### **Private tours at Churchill War Rooms**

IWM offers private [‘behind the glass’ tours](#) of the three key historic rooms at Churchill War Rooms, all of which have been preserved as they were left at the end of the Second World War: Winston Churchill's bedroom study, the Map Room and the Cabinet War Room.

### **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.

Open daily: 9.30am – 6pm. Last admission 5pm. (Closed 24 – 26 December).

Admission: £22 Adults; £17.60 Concessions (Senior, Student, Disabled); £11 Child (5-16); Free child (under 5); family tickets available; special rates for groups of ten plus. Free for members.

A 10% discount is available for advanced tickets booked online.

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## **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 2.5 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**.