

### **The u3a How things Work visit to the Cold War Bunker Gravesend.**

Our visit on the 24<sup>th</sup> Feb 2023 started with trying to find somewhere to park! But once that was found the visit proper started.

What was the 'Secret' Bunker for?

It was felt in the early 50's that some form of protection for important service individuals was needed in the event of a Nuclear bomb attack.

It must be remembered that this was an extremely tense time worldwide; nothing changes!

This period was particularly fraught with the threat that the Cold War was going to possibly become a Hot War with a great deal of 'Sabre Rattling' by the West and Russia.

So a plan to provide emergency shelter for Civic and emergency services was conceived, building underground shelters throughout the UK in the hope to protect and maintain some form of communications and administration services in the event of a Nuclear attack.

Our visit on Friday evening took us underground in Woodlands Park near the main gates of the park.

The site, unknown to me and probably to a great deal of Gravesham residents, was built in 1954 a time when building materials and indeed Government budgets were still suffering from the effects of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, so the construction appears, nowadays at least, to be a hopeful and decidedly budget construction.

We were shown a video of a film from the period with a Government warning of how to behave during and after Nuclear attack; an optimistic plan I suggest.

We were then given a talk regarding the site's history from decommissioning in the 1960's to its use as a Civic document store and the current use as a historic site. After which we then escorted in smaller groups around the 14 rooms that the facility consists of.

The rooms are set out in period style with furnishings and equipment that has been donated and purchased to give the authentic feel to the building. The site is looked after and curated by volunteers, three of whom kindly gave us their time to show and describe the workings of the Bunker.

To modern day eyes the conditions in the Bunker are very spartan and the efforts at protection from radiation seem naïve. Low budgets meant no effective air-locks or blast doors were employed on the entrances and only 14 days of food rations were stored, meaning that leaving the Bunker for provisions etc. would be necessary, with the risk of bringing contamination back into the Bunker.

It was an interesting visit and showed us a world that most of us didn't know existed with details of other Civil Defence activities that have only fairly recently been stood down.

The site is available to anyone to visit and tickets can be bought online through Visit Gravesham website. I can recommend a visit either solo or as part of a group.









