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

Identifying the true location of the Cabinet Room at Paddock – a discussion paper (Bill Ridgeway)

Background
The three most important rooms in a Cabinet War Room are arguably the Cabinet Room (in which important decisions are made) and the Map Room in which important up-to-date information is maintained, collated and made available and the Chiefs of Staff Committee Room. Whilst there is information indicating the location of rooms in Paddock designated as the Cabinet Room and the Map Room there is no information available which positively identifies the location of these rooms. Although we can be reasonably certain that the Map Room has been correctly identified there is doubt as to whether or not the true location of the Cabinet Room has been identified correctly and assertions as to the location of the Cabinet Room is therefore conjectural. A detailed structural survey has provided information which improves our understanding of the design, construction and use of Paddock and this discussion paper attempts to identify the possible true location of the Cabinet Room.

Other Cabinet War Rooms
Where there is a lack of information it is necessary to look further afield and deduce information from comparisons with the other similar sources. In the words of Sherlock Holmes *"When you have eliminated the impossible whatever remains however improbable must be the truth"* [1]. Three assets were used to accommodate the function of a Cabinet War Room; Storey's Gate, Westminster (CWR1) was an adaption of two basement levels of an extant building, Dollis Hill (Paddock, CWR2) was the only purpose designed and constructed structure and Rotunda, Westminster (Anson, CWR3) was an adaption of a void remaining from a dismantled gas holder. Even though all three assets were structurally very different they served a common purpose of accommodating the function of Cabinet War Room in support of staff for making political and policy matters (rather than military matters) for the conduct of the War. It is therefore reasonable to assume that
- the allocation of functions in CWR2 was adopted and adapted from CWR1
- the allocation of functions in CWR3 was adopted and adapted from CWR2
- rooms for certain functions adjoined each other in CWR1 and CWR3
- rooms for those certain functions would also adjoin each other in CWR2.

Both CWR1 and CWR2 were designed, constructed and were available for use before Churchill became Prime Minister in May 1940. CWR3 was available for use in Autumn 1943. It is therefore a reasonable assumption that Churchill had no input into the design and construction of either CWR1 or CWR2 (although he may have influenced later changes) and that he would have been involved in the design and construction of CWR3.

Physical evidence
It is said in support of the Cabinet Room being in the place we refer it now (LR001) is that the increased amount of air conditioning trunking would have been needed in view of the number of people (smoking). However, the additional air conditioning equipment would also be required to dissipate heat from communications equipment. In addition two members (both respected researchers) of Subterranea Britannica have commented that Cabinet meetings in Paddock were not held in the room we refer to as the Cabinet Room (LR001) and that this room was part of a communications centre. There is conjectural evidence to support an assertion the Cabinet Room was at the other end of the main spine corridor.

The door from the main spine corridor into the room (LR024) next to the Generator room (LR026) is thicker and more robust than many other doors in Paddock. It also had two locks. This indicates a need for greater security. This room leads into an area (LR021 and LR025). There is a double thickness (2 x 4½ inches) wall between the Generator Room (LR026) and the two adjacent rooms (LR024 and LR025). The double thickness wall and possible cavity insulation would have provided some sound insulation from the generator (which would have been needed to run only when the local electricity supply had failed) and provided a measure of security for conversations in the room.

The remains of battens on all four walls and ceiling of the two inner rooms (LR024 and LR025) suggests they were dry-lined. This is unusual as (in most of the remainder of the Sub Basement) battens suggesting the installation of dry lining are to be found as expected only on exterior walls to reduce the effect of dampness. The dry lining in this room would have reduced sound into and out of the room providing a measure of security for conversations in the room.

At the end of the 'L' section (LR021) there is a door (which used to have a message passing hatch) to the adjacent Map Room (LR015). This would be convenient for personnel and messages between the two rooms.

Standing at the main door into the Map Room (LR015) and looking to the right-hand corner there is a vestige of a doorway – now bricked up. This led into a room (LR011) which led into a room (LR009) at the end of the short spur corridor towards the Teleprinter room (LR006). Rooms (LR009, LR011 and LR012) have dry-lining on all four walls. The dry lining in a room (LR011) covers the now bricked-up doorway to the Map Room (LR015) and therefore obviously was applied after the doorway was bricked up. The dry lining would have provided a measure of security for conversations in the room. It is not known why or when the doorway was bricked up.

There is no available evidence to show whether or not the two areas (LR021 and LR025) were a single room or separate rooms during the time Paddock was used as a Cabinet War Room. A right-angled wall intrudes into this area and separates it from adjacent rooms (LR022 and LR023) [2] and changes the shape of this room from rectangular to an irregular 'L' shape. The reason for building this intruding wall is not known. It comprises of a different brick than seen elsewhere in the structure indicating it was possibly a later addition. It may have been built during the occupancy of the structure as a Cabinet War Room (as part of the original plan or a later addition) or after the War by the Post Office Engineering Research Station.

It is conjectured that the adjacent rooms (LR022 and LR023) were designated for use as a bedroom and study for Churchill – a facility which was provided for in both CWR1 and CWR3. The room (LR022) is adjacent to both the Map Room (into which there is a large window) and the suite of rooms which may be the Cabinet Room.

Analysis

I have heard (although not directly) a recollection from an unnamed person at the Cabinet War Rooms Museum of (some years previously) going down the main stairs and along and to the end of the main spine corridor and finding the Cabinet Room. This information is not dependable. Following this direction you would arrive at the room either presently referred to as the Cabinet Room (LR001) or at the other end of the corridor a suite of rooms (LR021, LR024 and LR025).

It is conjectured the adjacent rooms (LR022 and LR023) [3] were designated for use as a bedroom and study for Churchill and his wife – a facility which was provided for in both CWR1 and CWR3. The room (LR022) is adjacent to both the Map Room (into which there is a large window) and the suite of rooms which may be the Cabinet Room.

It is reasonable to assume that as the function of CWR1, CWR2 and CWR3 were identical the allocation of functions of rooms would also be (as far as possible considering a dissimilar shape of the floor plan) as similar as possible. The floor plan of CWR1 shows a cluster of interconnected principal rooms (i.e. Cabinet Room, Map Room, Chiefs of Staff Room). The floor plan of CWR3 also shows a cluster of interconnected principal rooms (i.e. Map Room, Cabinet Room, Chief of Staffs Committee Room with the PM's bedroom, a room for Commander Thompsons (Metropolitan Police), Clerk typist to the War Cabinet and General Hollis (Senior Assistant Secretary). A similar cluster of rooms may be found at Paddock.

The wall intruding into the suite of rooms (LR021, LR024 and LR025) is in a different brick than seen elsewhere (and also includes an area conjectured as being Churchill's bedroom and study) which suggests it was a later addition. Churchill is known to have been very involved in planning detail. It is noted *"Winston's ceaseless industry is impressive. He is always having ideas which he puts down on paper in the form of questions and despatches to Ismay or the C.I.G.S.* [Chief of Imperial General Staff] *for examination. Sometimes they relate to matters of major importance, such as the measures to be taken against invasion, or the provision of aeroplanes, and sometimes they relate to quite trivial questions* [like] *whether wax could be supplied to troops to put in their ears in order to deaden the noise of warfare."* [4]

A suite of rooms (two flats made into one) were provided at Nevilles Court not very far away in Dollis Hill Lane. Perhaps Churchill insisted on changing the floor plan to provide a bedroom and study which was not in the original floor plan. A bedroom was provided at CWR1 and CWR3 so it is reasonable to assume that one was also provided at CWR2. This fits well with the suggestion we have not correctly identified the true location of the Cabinet Room. It also fits well with the additional brick work and the blocking up of the door between the Map Room (LR015) and an adjoining room (LR011).

Given an assumed design requirement the Cabinet Room and the Map Room should be next to each other it is likely the Cabinet Room was not the room which is presently referred to as the Cabinet Room (LR001).

In an interview [5] John Milton (who was responsible for what we now call 'facilities management') states "to the left of the Cabinet War Room was the Map Room". This statement is an equally true description of the relationship between the Map Room (LR015) and both rooms which may have been used as a Cabinet Room when viewed from the main spine corridor – depending on if you are standing looking at or back to the outer wall. However the room presently referred to as the Cabinet Room is along the corridor from the Map Room and the room suggested as being the one designated / used as the Cabinet Room is immediately next to the Map Room. This adds weight to the possibility this latter room is the true location of the Cabinet Room.

In both CWR1 and CWR3 the Map Room, Prime Minister's Room, Prime Minister's Staff Room and Chiefs' of Staff Room adjoined each other and were interconnected. It is therefore reasonable to assume the Cabinet Room and Churchill's room in Paddock also adjoined the Map Room. This requirement would not be met if the Cabinet Room was the room presently referred to as the Cabinet Room.

The location of the room presently referred to as the Cabinet Room (LR001) (at the North end of Paddock) does not sit comfortably with what may be perceived as a requirement for a high status function. The Cabinet Room would need to have accommodated up to 21 known attendees (and presumably a few additional staff) presumably seated around a large conference table. Whether or not this may be accommodated in the room presently referred to as the Cabinet Room is questionable but not tested. If there was a requirement for an outer office (and none is shown on plans of CWR1 or CWR3) the room next to the room presently referred to as the Cabinet Room would have had in addition to the door to the Cabinet Room a door to what is assumed to be the BBC Studio, a door to what is assumed to be the BBC Technicians' room, a door to the main spine corridor and an open doorway (there is no evidence of a door) to the emergency staircase. This is not a secure situation. The room suggested as being the Cabinet Room would have a secure and fitting outer office.

There is also a question of whether it would be practical or there was a need to locate a Cabinet Room next to a Teleprinter Room – and with a message passing hatch between them. The noise of what may be as many as six teleprinter machines would have presented a problem – not eased by the presence between them of a message passing hatch with no sound insulation. I would assume most (if not all) outgoing messages would need encryption and the preparation of a punched paper tape before being sent and most (if not all) incoming messages would need decrypted and printed on receipt. (Punched paper tape enables transmission at a faster speed than if the message was sent from the keyboard or printed on receipt enabling efficient use of the rather slow network.) I would also assume routine and administrative messages would not need to be passed into the Cabinet Room. I would therefore conclude encrypting / de-encrypting would be done in adjacent rooms (LR009, LR011 and LR012). The cluster of rooms (LR004, LR006, LR007, LR009, LR011 and LR012) having no direct access with the main spine corridor would provide an additional layer of security. The probability of these assumptions being correct is evidenced by the message passing hatch between two rooms (LR012 and LR013) indicating the latter room (with access directly onto the main spine corridor) is a Messengers' Room.

There would not have been a need for a message passing hatch between the teleprinter room and the Cabinet room and the clatter of six Creed 7 teleprinters [6] [7] [8] would have been a major distraction from the deliberations taking place in the Cabinet Room (LR001).

In his description of Paddock '*Dollis Hill Research Station and the secret wartime bunker'* (Cliff Wadsworth) ex Staff Sergeant W J Milton records –

> *In the basement:- the Prime Minister's bedroom and study. This room was thoroughly soundproof. … Next door was the Cabinet War Room. Next to the Cabinet Room (sic) was the Map Room. … Then came the Operations Room which was fully manned by telephones.*

This statement, which we can only assume to be accurate, clearly places the actual Cabinet Room at the South end of the Paddock.

There remains a question of the usage of the room presently referred to as the Cabinet Room (LR001). To one side there is a room which we call the Teleprinter room (LR006) (although I have not seen evidence of this use) and on the other side is the BBC studio (LR002), and beyond that a room assumed to be a BBC Technicians' Room (LR003). More-or-less directly above is the telephone Main distribution frame room (LR102) and switchboard (presumed to be LR103). It would be logical for this group of rooms to be close to each other (on both levels) to form a communications centre (including message encryption decryption) for Paddock. Other rooms (LR013) from which there is a message passing hatch into LR012, the adjacent room (LR 009 and LR011) which across the short sub corridor and LR007 and LR008 suggests a coding / decoding hub for teleprinter traffic.

There is also a further unanswered question of why do some of the fluorescent light fittings in the room we refer to as the Cabinet Room (LR001) have angled deflectors towards the wall?

Conclusion

An explanation of why we have identified the Cabinet Room in two possible locations is the function was moved from one room to another. If this explanation is correct the doorway between the Map Room (LR015) and an adjacent room (LR011) may have been bricked up as it was not required and to provide additional security. The construction of the structure was completed a month after Churchill was appointed Prime Minister. Churchill was known to be involved with the minutiae of projects. It is possible that not liking the accommodation as planned he used his authority to relocate the Cabinet Room and make provision for a bedroom / study, provide a doorway between the Map Room and the relocated Cabinet Room and block up the now redundant door from the Map Room.

There may be no evidence to confidently identify the location of the Cabinet Room in either location. However it would seem on balance there is stronger circumstantial evidence in favour of the room presently referred to as the Cabinet Room was not designated / used for that purpose. There is also strong circumstantial evidence of the location of Churchill's bedroom and study and that to which we presently refer to as the Cabinet Room was the Operations Room / telephone / communications room. The identification of the Operations room is supported by the fact that it is immediately below the telephone Main Distribution Frame (MDF) / switchboard and also adjacent to the BBC studio.

Summary

We don't know (as a matter of fact) which one (or both rooms) were designated / used as a Cabinet Room.
We have physical evidence of changes to both rooms.
We have physical evidence of the room presently referred to as the Cabinet Room being used after CWR – probably by The Post Office Engineering Research Station for product research and development.
We can deduce possible scenarios by reference to information regarding CWR1 and CWR3.
We can come to reasonable conclusions based on deductions.

Glossary of terms used

Cabinet Room – a room in which the Cabinet held meetings
Cabinet War Room – a building protected by its design and construction to provide accommodation including a Cabinet Room, a Map Room, communications equipment, rooms for support staff and essential support equipment in which political and policy (not military) matters may be considered and decided upon.
Map Room – a room, usually with an array of maps displaying the current situation in the various theatres of war

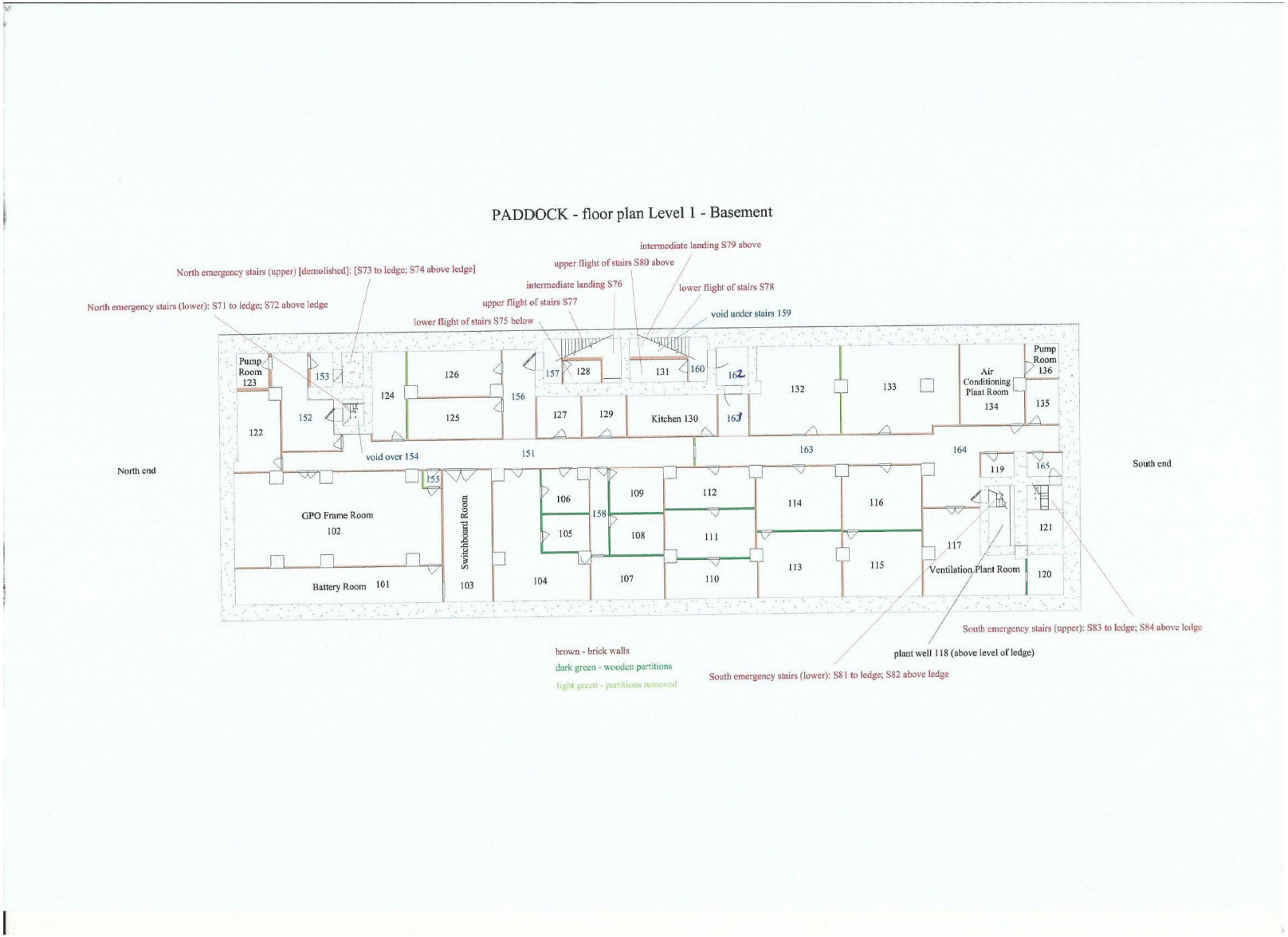
Notes

Each area (e.g. room, corridor etc.) has been allocated a Location Reference (LR) for easy identification. Please see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. (Some vertical contiguous spaces are, for convenience, grouped together.)

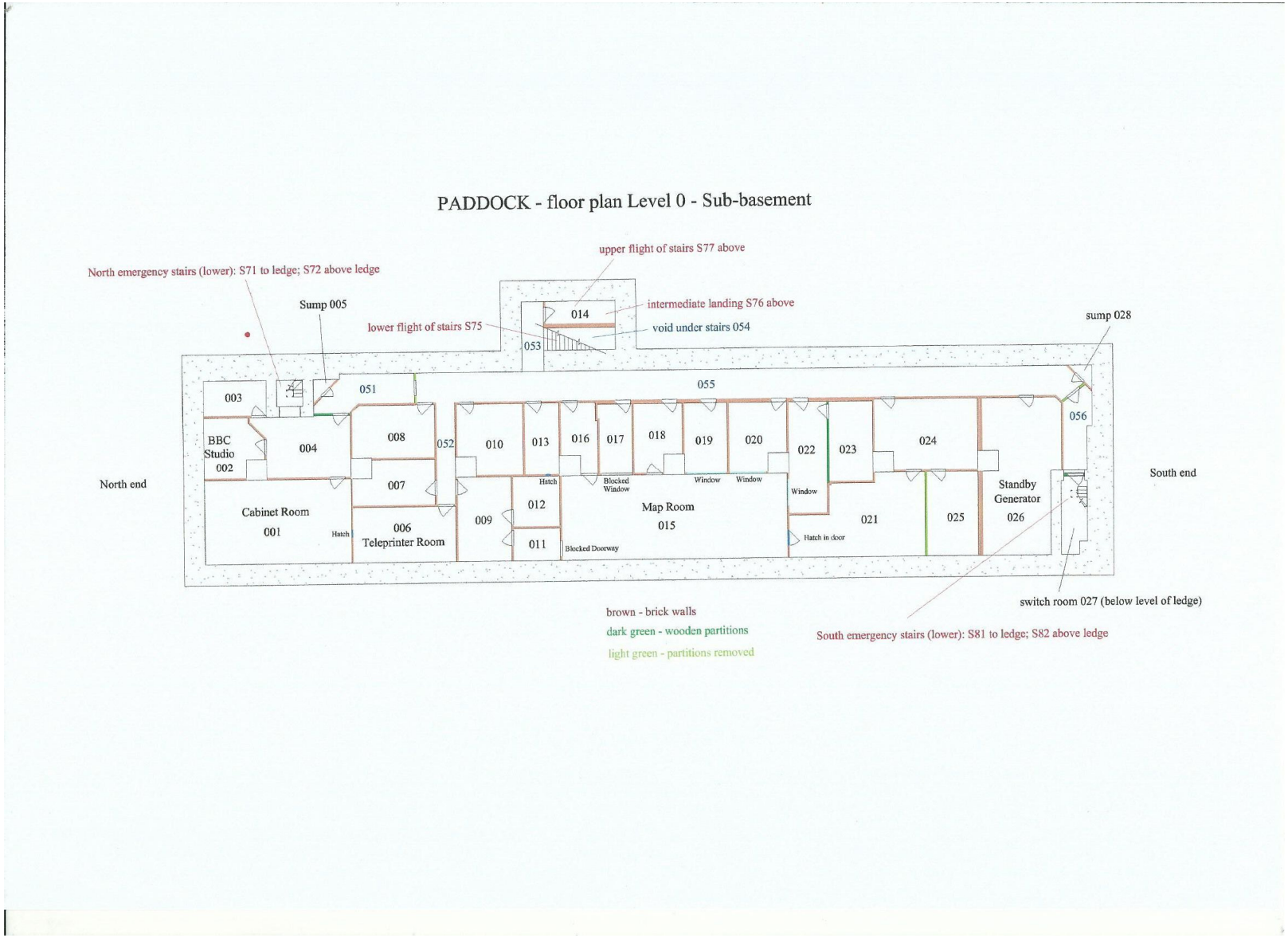
Source

[1] Conan-Doyle (Sir), Arthur, *Sherlock Holmes – The sign of the four*
[2] Object 188 in *The Paddock information collection*
[3] Object 189 in *The Paddock information collection*
[4] Colville, John; *The fringes of power – Downing Street Diaries 1939-1955* (1985) (John Colville was Private Secretary to Winston Churchill)
[5] John Milton (Imperial War Museum; Interview (3 reels / parts) www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80006095
Creed and Company (Croydon)
[6] Creed teleprinter www.vmarsmanuals.co.uk/newsletter_articles/creed7b.pdf
[7] Creed teleprinter www.youtube.com/watch?v=1t7q2TdYLDE
[8] Creed teleprinter www.youtube.com/watch?v=wf0a4tos3mk

Appendix 1 – Floor plan (with Location References) of the Basement (Hugh Ainsley)



Appendix 2 – Floor plan (with Location References) of the Sub Basement (Hugh Ainsley)



More information from *The Paddock Information Collection* is available at www.bunkers.org.uk/paddock.htm

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