Left: The anonymous, single-storey red-brick office block that stood above the War Cabinet War Room at Dollis Hill. The tall ventilation tower at the end of the building, with its high-level, louvred air ducts, was, perhaps, a clue that there was more to this structure than was obvious at first sight.

PADDOCK

The General Post Office established a research station at Dollis Hill in 1921 and it was here, in 1943, that Colossus, the world's first electronic computer was developed – later to be installed at Bletchley Park and used to break the German Lorenz code. Some years earlier however, in 1938, the site was identified as a suitable location for a dispersed War Cabinet War Room remote from the dangers of bombing in central London. The specific site chosen was an area of ground on the perimeter of the Post Office site parallel with Brook Street. The forty-feet-deep excavations for the two-storey underground structure began in October 1938 and the bunker was ready for occupation in June 1940. No dormitory space was provided for the working complement of 200 men and women. Instead, senior staff were allocated sixty requisitioned luxury flats in Nevilles Court in Dollis Lane, approximately 200 yards from PADDOCK, while the more lowly clerks and typists were billeted in nearby school buildings.

PADDOCK appears to have aroused Churchill's personal animosity and was not a success. The War Cabinet met there only twice, the first time on 3 October 1940, the second and last on 10 March 1941. Criticising the facilities at Dollis Hill, Churchill wrote to the Cabinet Secretary, Edward Bridges, shortly after the first meeting:

> 'The accommodation at PADDOCK is quite unsuited to the conditions that have arisen.'

Later he minuted Bridges that:

> 'The War Cabinet cannot live and work there for weeks on end … PADDOCK should be treated as a last resort.'

Below: A view down the spiral emergency escape staircase at the south end of the bunker.