

Churchill's War Rooms

a review by David A Harvey

One of the many things which makes going out with my ladyfriend. Ros wonderful is that since she doesn't live in London she is an excellent catalyst for visiting all those interesting places which since I live in London I never get around to going to.

Looking for something interesting to do on a rainy afternoon that didn't involve trawling around the shops Ros and I visited the Cabinet War Rooms in Whitehall.

As befits its once secret status, as the home of Churchill's wartime cabinet, access is via an inauspicious entrance flanked by sandbags around the back of Whitehall by St. James Park. Once you get in, and at busy times you may have to wait, admission is £4.80 for adults (concs £3.50/under 15s free).

Built as the headquarters of British cabinet during WW2 the War Rooms provides an intriguing time capsule having been ordered sealed at the end of WW2 by Churchill who wanted them to remain ready and secret in case of war with Russia.

Upon entering the War Rooms everyone is issued with a hand-held audioplayer, which provides a commentary on the rooms as you progress through the exhibit. In order to let you go around at your own pace the commentary can be paused while you take a closer look at the exhibits and at various points you have the option of listening to additional readings from

accounts by people who worked in the War Rooms. These additional accounts add period colour and gives a feel for how the place functioned and how Churchill's personality moulded and dominated every aspect of the place.

You should allow yourself about one and a half hours to get all the way around, and possibly a little more if you need to take a break at the halfway point where there are thankfully some chairs and a static display about life in London during WW2.

The Imperial War Museum who maintained and run the Cabinet War Rooms have done a very good job. There is plenty to see and it is well presented, starting with an introduction to the period and the War Rooms part in it, followed by the tour with each of the rooms made up to look as they would have in use, and ending with a display of period documents from the Imperial War Museum archives (which changes every couple of months) and the giftshop.

Well worth a visit and if you become a friend of The Imperial War Museum (£16 per year when I last checked) you get free entry to The Imperial War Museum, HMS Belfast, Cabinet War Rooms and Duxford Air Museum which, if you visit them all, and they are all worth visiting (the Imperial War and the Belfast have improved beyond recognition following their recent refits), you could save you a few pounds in entry fees and give yourself plenty of food for thought and inspiration for gaming.

**The Cabinet War Rooms - King Charles St.
(020-7930-6961) Open 10am to 6pm daily.**