



# The Maldens and Coombe Heritage Society

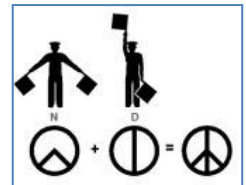
(Founded 2012)

## FOUR MINUTE WARNING - NEW MALDEN'S NUCLEAR POST

Julian McCarthy

I was only 7 in 1963. I have no idea where I was when Kennedy was shot; I don't recall the Great Train Robbery or Christine Keeler. I DO have a vague recollection of The Beatles and performing with three friends at a primary school concert singing 'She Loves You' with a guitar my dad had (unbeknownst to me) stayed up for most of the night making out of Cornflakes and Weetabix boxes, match sticks for the frets, cotton, and string – coloured, glossed with model aeroplane paints. I DO have a vague recollection of the first episode of Doctor Who and I can recall my brother and I daily walking past a sign and a funny symbol painted on a wall in Askew Road, next to the words 'Ban the Bomb'. I never asked 'what bomb?' and probably assumed that it was something to do with the empty areas called bomb sites that dad and mum referred to, as the one at the end of our road.

(A slight digression here but it was only two years ago when I visited a semaphore tower at Chatley Heath that it was explained to me that the symbol I had seen back then in 63 and later in the 70s as a 'Peace' sign, was actually good ol' semaphore with an 'N' and a 'D' standing for Nuclear Disarmament.)



If you were to have asked me then what THE four minute warning was I would have had no idea and perhaps, in the scheme of things, would have much less cared. The strange thing then, in later years and hearing of the 4 minute warning I can remember wondering what I would do, not realising until still many years later that I, and those around me, would not have been told anyway. But for some, three local volunteer members of the Royal Observer Corps, those four minutes would have appeared like a life time as they readied themselves to fulfil the commitments and put into practice what they had been trained to do for the period between any such warning and the hours thereafter.



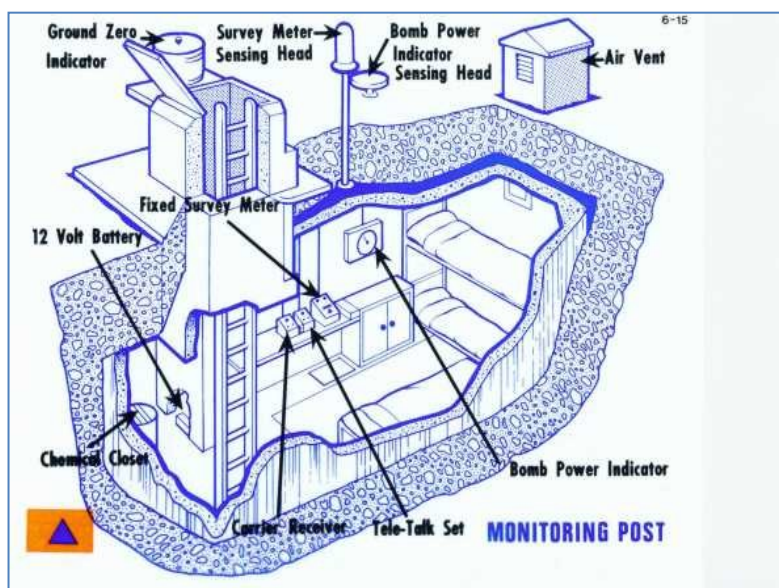
It was accepted that there was no defence against intercontinental ballistic missiles. However successive governments understood that many millions would still survive away from the impact zones.

The confirmation of a strike and the extent and power of the weapon used were also key to both military and civilian organisations. Further lives could be saved if the ensuing radioactive fallout was tracked and warnings given.

To facilitate this, over 1500 blast and (supposedly- see below) radiation protected, three man underground monitoring posts were built during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

This huge building program resulted in posts being built approximately eight miles apart in a network stretching across the entire country and one of these was (is) located in New Malden.

Provided with simple, reliable and robust instruments, and reporting back through larger Group and Sector control bunkers, the posts could warn the public and provide accurate data about nuclear explosions and radioactive fallout. This allowed the government to build up an accurate post attack picture of the whole country.



The underground posts were fairly rudimentary; there was a ladder down to a room and a toilet. A pipe extending above ground had instruments on it to measure the blast wave. Once the measurements had been made and the information sent, the job of a post's three personnel was then to monitor the fallout. The volunteers trained for duties that were to be carried out during the launch of a nuclear attack and were to continue to operate as the missiles fell and exploded.

ROC personnel were also expected to carry on with their duties for up to three weeks after an attack. However, as the posts did not have a sophisticated ventilation system; the air coming down from the outside was not filtered. It's not hard to imagine these posts becoming a coffin really.

All the sites were closed down when the ROC was stood down in 1991, as the Cold War came to end with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In the years since stand down many more posts have been demolished, some with indecent haste and many more are now in a poor state of repair, particularly those closed in 1968.

Only a relatively small percentage of the total have been preserved and these mainly by volunteers. Perhaps strangely, many of the posts have been acquired for preservation by non-ROC people and members of Subterranea Britannica are amongst the most avid ROC post owners."

Gavin Saxby, who is helping the Civil Defence and Emergency Service Preservation Trust restore the former Dundee Group Control, said preserving sites acknowledged the sacrifices ROC volunteers were prepared to make. "For some the Cold War is too recent to be history", he said "But now is a time when we can still reach back and touch the people who lived through it. We owe it to future generations to look after the sites and artefacts, to have them for research purposes and not let things decay."



## RECORD OF ROC POST-NEW MALDEN (Photo taken in 1997)

### ROYAL OBSERVER CORPS

~ An on-Line Survey of the U.K.'s R.O.C  
§ U.K.W.M.O Monitoring Posts.



SUBTERRANEA  
BRITANNICA

Record added	26/4/2001
Post Name	NEW MALDEN
OS Grid Reference	TQ21226967
County	Surrey
Date opened	October 1963
Date closed	October 1968
Location	In an overgrown compound in woods on the West side of Malden Golf Course. 150 yards North of the clubhouse.
Description	SEALED All surface features remain intact. The top of the access shaft has been capped with concrete.
Remaining Surface Structures	None
Date of Visit	31.5.1997
Future Actions	





## WHAT IT ONCE LOOKED LIKE



Well, apart from the 'green paint'

## WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TODAY















### **WHAT *SHOULD* BE DONE?**

*'Should'* is an emotive word as it imposes a task and or a responsibility on someone. It is evident that there is no money available to 'make things right' and it is only by the combined efforts of volunteers and enthusiasts that anything likely would ever happen.

The statement "We owe it to future generations to look after the sites.....and not let things decay." Is perhaps the driving force.

They were constructed to withstand a nuclear attack so they are not likely to fall apart.

However, it is the phrase- 'look after the sites' that is the key. New Malden is fortunate to have one of these and it should not (in my opinion) be so overrun. A little tender care afforded by volunteers cutting back the brambles and the ivy is all that is required.

### **WHAT CAN BE DONE?**

That really is dependent upon the golf course and land owner. If they were to allow a few volunteers to visit and safely cut back the Ivy and the brambles to how it was in 1997 then that is all that is required.

It is NOT proposed that anything more than clearing back the vegetation is performed.

## TOM KELLEY'S RECOLLECTIONS

### The Civil Defence and Auxilliary Fire Service

by Tom Kelley

The Civil Defence and Auxilliary Fire Service which had given such sterling service during the Second World War were stood down in May 1945. A farewell parade was held in Hyde Park on 10th June reviewed and addressed by George VI.

In 1948 the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb and Civil Defence became a necessity once again, together with the Royal Observer Corps who, with binoculars and telephone plotted the course of enemy aircraft. When we came to live in New Malden in 1951 their post was on top of the telephone exchange in Coombe Road, which was at the end of our garden, but they were very vulnerable in the age of nuclear weapons, and were moved underground, by 1965 the ROC had 1518 of these monitoring posts,



of missiles, radiation and decay of fallout. We on this occasion were removing 6 casualties in Niel Roberts stretchers up the shaft. The last SIO for the borough of Malden and Coombe is still alive and will be 90 in May 2011

### history

### Village Voice

each reporting to a group head quarters.

I joined Civil Defence in October

1957 as a result of a recruiting drive, first in the signals branch of Headquarters Section, using field telephones and radio, both in static positions and Land Rovers and Wireless Vehicles, later transferring to Ambulance Section. On Wednesday 20th. July 1966 we had an exercise which involved us going down a long ladder into the local bunker beneath Malden Golf Course. This was a fairly large control room from which the Scientific Intelligence Office used his equipment to to report fall

### Village Voice

vvoice.co.uk

Training for all Sections was carried out for the County of Surrey at a Rescue Range at Kiln Lane, Epsom where there were streets of houses used to rescue and treat casualties, this is now the site of a large branch of Sainsburys. The army also trained there, providing the Mobile Defence Corps.

When Civil Defence closed again in 1968 we formed Malden Emergency First Aid Society and in the 1970s we held an exercise in a bunker at North Cheam, the entrance was in Church Hill, and below ground were offices, beds, control rooms, all in good order that we were able to use.

Acknowledgements to Civil Defence Association.

The picture of Tom was taken by Ian Egin at the Malden Blitz Service and exhibition, held last year to remember New Maldens' civilian casualties from WW2. **VVoice**