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CHRISTMAS WITH THE MOLES



A Christmas party for the moles

Deep below London lies a hidden maze of government tunnels, part of a 1950s network established to protect the government. These tunnels may easily be entered from the public highway. We therefore chose this unusual spot for our Christmas Party for Moles, bringing cakes and gifts, decorations and Christmas trees to the very entrance of the home of the Nuclear Button. The government may not care for our sense of humour. They should be deeply grateful that we brought only Christmas stockings, and that our easily-accomplished weekend visit was not a trip by terrorists with a sinister seasonal sackful of gelignite and incendiaries. Such an act would have surpassed Guy Fawkes in cutting off a large portion of Britain's communications and defence capacity for months to come.

In happier spirit, DUNCAN CAMPBELL invites readers to the Moles' Christmas Party.

All photographs by Chris Davies.

WHO ARE THE MOLES that feed the *New Statesman* with its unending packages of secret documents and other bureaucratic detritus? This question, at once deeply troubling the MI5, the CIA and the KGB, will here, for the first time be answered. The underground spies in government ranks — the NS Mole Force — are in secret contact with our reporters at midnight rendezvous deep below our own offices.

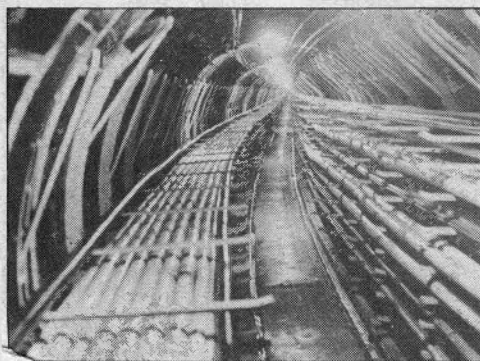
From run-down Bethnal Green, in the East End of London, to the plush western pastures of Maida Vale, from Euston Station in the north to Waterloo in the south, runs a network of secret government tunnels, built in the 1950s and 60s to protect the machinery and communications of government from A-Bombs and other mindless violence. Over 30 shafts and a dozen lifts connect these catacombs with the surface — most of them emerging unobtrusively in government buildings or telephone exchanges.

Inplausibly disguised as a touring cyclist, I have often visited these tunnels. An access shaft emerges, usefully, on a traffic island in a public highway — Bethnal Green Road, E1. On this festive occasion, my travelling kit includes not just a bicycle but a Christmas tree, decorations, and gifts for the new stars in the Good Mole Guide.

A manhole cover, gently raised, gives access to one of the Post Office's thousands of sub-surface cable chambers. But this one is different.

A stout grey-painted waterproof door leads through the side of this chamber. Open it, and you are standing on the top platform of a shaft one hundred feet deep. Climb down the rung ladders, and you stand poised at the entrance to the secret network. A long ribbon of lights and cables extends into the distance, as you look into Tunnel L (St Paul's to Bethnal Green). No bustling commuters or noisy trains here, just a pleasantly warm and enveloping silence.

... a long ribbon of cables and lights extends into the distance ...

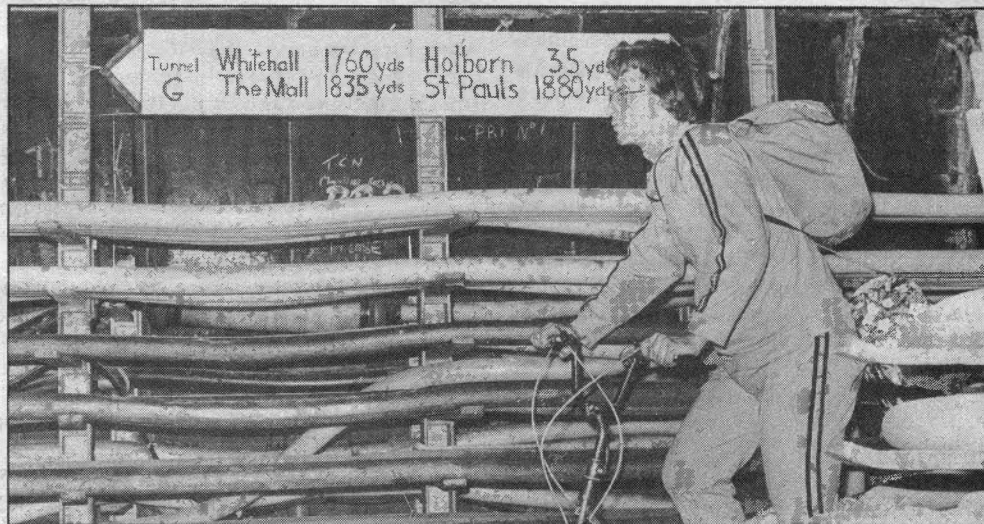


The tunnels have an eerie feel to them, as any bomb shelter might. There is no-one about after 5pm, and the Patrolmen who daily pace these subterranean corridors concentrate on checking their structure and not on keeping watch for journalistic infiltrators. There are over 12 miles of tunnel (I kid you not), so a bicycle does indeed make light of otherwise heavy footwork as one travels into and around central London on this uniquely quiet and highly exclusive subway. Alternatively, with health in mind, one may gently jog through these pleasant underground corridors, the only pollution-free running track to be found in (or under) central London. (At this point, I would stake public claim to the world record for the 1½ mile distance run one hundred feet below ground: 10.8 minutes, St Pauls to Covent Garden, Tunnel M.)

Riding down Tunnel L, one passes side shafts and alleys *en route* to the first interchange, directly below Postal Headquarters close to St Paul's Cathedral. Here, tunnels shoot off in all directions: three *rise* to join the ordinary London underground Central Line, and the Post Office's own underground mail railway. Tunnel R and Tunnel A grandly circuit round St Paul's Cathedral — they lead to an underground complex with six shafts below the Post Office's Citadel telephone exchange. Citadel's workings, and shaft, are hidden behind seven foot thick concrete walls.

But Tunnel B leads on to greater things, on to Holborn, home of *New Statesman*, and the seat of government. I ride through dense jungles of cable, and past noisy ventilator fans. The air becomes hot and fetid. We are nearing Whitehall.

Past Whitehall's umbilical cords, the track leads on to the bowels of government.



Christmas tunnelcruising cycle is laden down with mini-gifts for moles, a christmas tree and festive decoration. This time, the opportunity of an underground trip to the bowels of the Post Office Tower, or below the sacred grass of Lords cricket ground, is passed up. Tunnel F runs on to Maida Vale.

THE MOLES' CHRISTMAS PARTY is to be held at the entrance to the nastiest bit of government of all. This is the Chamber Of Mass Destruction With The Nuclear Button In It. It would naturally have been more exhilarating to have partied around The Button, but this precise bit of the tunnels is undoubtedly guarded by blood-thirsty SAS men with huge, slaving Alsatians. Reliable sources speak of at least a regimental Great Dane. We made do with the doorstep of the awful place.

Tunnel G (Holborn to Whitehall) took this reporter, with an entourage of festive moles, to the doorstep. We rode beneath trendy Covent Garden, past the side alley where the electric cars are parked. A few are lined up, their batteries on charge. The proper denizens of this tunnel network, readers may note, ride in greater style. Beside them are long, narrow trailers for hauling underground cables — umbilical cords of Government and Capital, not to mention the Post Office.

We pass more side turnings — Tunnel M leads off to Fleet Street (clearly a Mole Motorway this one) and Tunnel P meanders off under Leicester Square to finish up below the Post Office Tower. Finally Tunnel S heads left across the Thames to Waterloo, and the bizarre

roadsign, such as are to be found at every intersection, warns ominously that we are now travelling down a Dead End. There is 'No Exit' from Whitehall. Do we have no hope, if pinned down by the SAS? Three hundred yards on and we halt at the start of the Whitehall Bunkers. The main tunnel is 20 feet wide, and leads through double doors to the first of the Bunkers, a Post Office lair called Q-Whitehall. Q is Post Office jargon for hush-hush; rightly so, as this nest of wiring is the first part of the tunnel deep below Whitehall.

Down the Q-Whitehall tunnel, narrower eight-foot wide tunnels lead off to the bowels of the great Departments of State. There's one for the Ministry of Defence, one for the Admiralty, one for the Old War Office, one to No 10, one to the Treasury. At the end of each side tunnel a worn spiral staircase and mini-lift reaches up into the corridors of power. The air is fusty. It is being piped in, along great metal ducts, from the new offices of nice Mr Heseltine's Department of the Environment. Perhaps they've cut out the filters.

The whole of Whitehall, virtually, is interlinked through this central tunnel, which dog-legs around the Houses of Parliament (needless to say, these are *not* connected) finishing up in the gigantic underground complex below the DoE. This area, like the original small tunnel network, was first constructed as a World War

the Gents, to be precise. The fan may be heard and observed by taking a discrete footing on the ICA's sanitary ware. The odours then detected may well be naval.

BACK TO TRAFALGAR SQUARE for the underground mole party. We have gathered at the start of Q-Whitehall. At this point we are about 40 yards south of Nelson's Column and a hundred feet below it. Festivities ensue, as the cover depicts. A twelvemonth of uncovering bureaucratic skulduggery is celebrated, and the Mole Force is inspired with further Principle and greater Moral Courage, the better to combat Fear and Loathing instilled by the notorious Civil Service Estacode and the no-longer-quite-so-dreaded Official Secrets Act.

I muse on the etymological origins of mole theory. Comrade Lenin, it is understood, started the whole thing off with his loose talk about 'Red Moles'. The word was resurrected in Langley, Virginia, as CIA code for a Russian infiltrator into the West's secret works. Much popularised, it was launched into the British language a year ago as the style for Anthony Blunt, a spy for our wartime allies, those Russians. It has now lost all its pejorative connotations, courtesy of British Steel and its 'mole'. Mole is now British for 'Whistleblower', an excellent innovation. A toast to that. Moles are, now and henceforth, in the Public Interest. A

own shafts to the surface, Shafts NA and NB, might be suitable ways out. But no mole has ever spoken of these mysteries, and precisely where these underground accesses go. Shaft NA might emerge in the *Daily Telegraph*. Or — God Forbid! — *Daily Express*. Is Chapman Pincher a denizen of these shadowy passages also? I enquire, but the normal enthusiastic babble of the moles lapses into silence.

At the far end of Tunnel G, there is another interchange. We venture into Tunnel C, a bombproof highway to Euston. But a giant illuminated red sign warns *Danger*. This tunnel, a notice explains, is unventilated and has no air in it. Continuing this trip might perhaps provide a happy ending to the tale for the Post Office. Turning back, one climbs a steep staircase to the catacombs below our own Holborn office, catacombs which include an entire long-distance telephone exchange.

Close at hand, shafts GA and BC, complete with lift, now emerge in Holborn Telephone Exchange, and the entrance to this building is a mere 30 yards from our Great Turnstile offices. This geographical good fortune has already been communicated to other staff, and plans are in hand for commandeering the place as a People's Nuclear Shelter (with especial reference to journalists) should the Worst happen, or be thought likely. Until then, our handy Holborn shafts provide convenient access to



Stairs lead up from the deadly Euston tunnel to the Holborn tunnel.

2 'citadel' to resist 1,000lb bombs and V-Weapons. The tunnels and the DoE citadel were enormously extended during the 1950s as an A-Bomb shelter. The greater power of H-bombs has made them vulnerable and so the major government bunkers are now outside London.

But there's still one of these metaphysical buttons, in the Ministry of Defence Operations Centre. (Straight down to Parliament Square and it's the third tunnel on your left, sir.) Another shaft leads to the Cabinet Office, with its famed COBRA Cabinet Office Briefing Area, HQ of Mr Whitelaw and his heroes of the Iranian Embassy Siege. Close by COBRA is the one piece of Whitehall bunkery which may be visited by the ordinary tourist — Winston Churchill's WW2 underground headquarters opposite St James's Park.

Also opposite St James's is the Institute of Contemporary Arts, which tunnel enthusiasts believe to conceal a small but significant part of this sytem. A ventilator fan, linked to the Admiralty's bit of the Whitehall bunkers has been tucked into the fabric of the ICA — beside

toast to the Public Interest.

I have abandoned the cunning disguise as a passing cycle tourist, and dressed formally for this occasion. The senior ranks of the Mole Force demand it. Christmas tree and decorations are set out with gifts and consumables for many moles. Santa and Rudolph, ably played by distinguished poet Roger Woddis, join the happy scene. At the end of the celebration, we pose for the week's cover photograph. Thereafter, the moles disperse through the tunnels, our last lingerings undisturbed by Patrolmen, SAS guards, slaving Great Danes, or itinerant Post Office cable-laying persons.

I pedal off slowly on the trusty tunnelcruiser, away from the Dead End of Whitehall, and must now choose a route out. Back at the *New Statesman* offices, the Editor and other *generalissimos* of our journalistic enterprise are waiting urgently to sample the coming year's scoop harvest provided by the Mole Force.

A right turn into Tunnel M offers the prospect of a jaunt a hundred feet below Drury Lane. A little sign indicates that Fleet Street's



The lift in shaft BC emerges just a few steps from the door of the NS off High Holborn.

and from the mole holes a hundred feet below.

This article, no doubt, will result in the tunnels and the shafts of this extraordinary network being knee-deep in persons from MI5, MI6, the Special Branch, the Post Office, and Health Inspectors. They will find no moles; a new rendezvous has been arranged. They will, of course, be disturbed by the Big Question. Who was the Great Festive Mole who, last Christmas, instructed me to lift the manhole cover on the traffic island between Bethnal Green Road and Sclater Street E1, and thus opened up this underground world. Does he or she even exist? My lips should remain sealed but the position of this handy hole may be discovered from public sources.

To MI5 and the Special Branch, a Happy Christmas and a trying and unstable New Year for '81.

Readers who wish maps of this underground network for themselves may obtain them from the *New Statesman*, by sending a stamped addressed envelope and a £1 donation to the National Council for Civil Liberties Appeal to: 10 Great Turnstile, London WC1.