

# Bygone Days

## Don Rootes:- Retired Senior Control Engineer

### National Control and Thames South Grid Control

I visited Don Rootes for his recollections of the early days working “down the Hole” (the WW2 National Control Centre facilities); He is now 95 years old and still very active (an encouragement to us all)

He started his training with GEC which was interrupted by the outbreak of WW2 where he served in the RAF as an Engineer with posting at home and overseas. He joined the British Electricity Authority (BEA) in 1948 whilst the National Control room was still operating from its war time location in a disused lift shaft some 120ft below street level at the bottom of a steep set of stairs; the only entrance and exit. However in an emergency, access to St Pauls Underground tube train station platform was available.

There was only three staff in the National Control room. A National Control Engineer, Assistant Control Engineer (that was Don) and one Tele- printer operator. “We needed to be flexible in our working duties as a trip to the toilet was an adventure in itself needing to climb some 90 stairs to the top of the lift shaft and back again”.

Meals, prepared by the ladies from the canteen, also situated at the top of the lift shaft, were carried down to the Control Staff. He recalls that Mr Anslow, one of the National Control Engineers would often take his lunch out leaving Don In charge.

Later, around 1950 the Control room moved above ground to prefabricated buildings on the car park at Paternoster Square alongside St Pauls Cathedral. It was affectionately known as “The Hut” .This new building incorporated National Control and the original Thames Area Control which stretched from the Wash on the East coast to Littlehampton on the South coast.

The Thames Area was subsequently split into North and South. The boundary followed, in the main, the line of the river Thames. These newly established Area Controls were later relocated out of London to new facilities at East Grinstead in Sussex and Redbourne in Hertfordshire respectively. Don moved to Thames South, as an Area Control Engineer.

What happened to “The Hole: - Soon after vacating, all equipment was removed and the accommodation handed back to London Underground. However to facilitate road widening in the front of St Pauls Cathedral, the Underground station entrance was moved some 100 yards from its original place. In the early 1980’s the lift shafts were brought into use again as major underground tunnel ventilation shafts; the outlets can be clearly seen in the centre island of the road opposite the front of St Pauls Cathedral.

What happened to “The Hut”:- It only lasted a few years once the Thames North and Thames South Areas were relocated and National Control moved to Bankside House, Southwark It was replaced by Paternoster Office block which housed CEGB HQ

What happened to “Cuttens” Home of Thames South Area? The old Control room is now occupied by EDF and the original Victorian House refurbished to its former glory.

My thanks to Don Rootes (Retired) for his help and co-operation in preparing this story.

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Edited by Tony Malins

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