

St Paul's Grid Control Centre during the London Blitz

by Patricia Stone (nee Banks)

Secretary to Arthur Hawkins 1942 - 1944



Pat writes: - I was 14 years old. As we were spending all day in the air-raid shelter at school, the Headmaster considered I would be better off earning some money and placed me with a Missionary Society in Victoria Street, Westminster who paid me the grand amount of £1. 2. 6d. My Mother kept the Pound for my keep and the 2.6d was to partly pay for my week's season ticket. I think I had 4 pence pocket money left so I couldn't allow myself to be tempted for any 'knick-knacks'. The bombs were falling there too but the Headmaster hadn't considered that.

I stayed for two years, during which time I completed my Secretarial Studies at Pitman's College in Southampton Row. Pitman's Employment Bureau then found me a position with the Central Electricity Board in Aldwych House in the Strand.

As a junior typist, I was put in the Typing Pool with a strict lady (can't recall her name at the moment) who ruled with an iron rod. We were sent to take notes from any of the Engineers. Donald Leeson was one and Arthur Hawkins was the Operations Engineer. He was a very difficult man to work for but he kept insisting it was my work he wanted and made a request I should be appointed his Secretary.

One night a Bomb fell in the road outside Bush House, at the time the HQ of BBC World Service so when we arrived for work the next day, the front of Aldwych house (on the upper floors) had been blown out, the furniture was ruined and splintered glass was everywhere. Sadly, I have to mention the lady who had been in charge of the typing pool before I joined the C.E.B, her name was Miss Angel. She was caught in the Blast of that Bomb which fell in the Aldwych and sadly died shortly afterwards from her injuries.

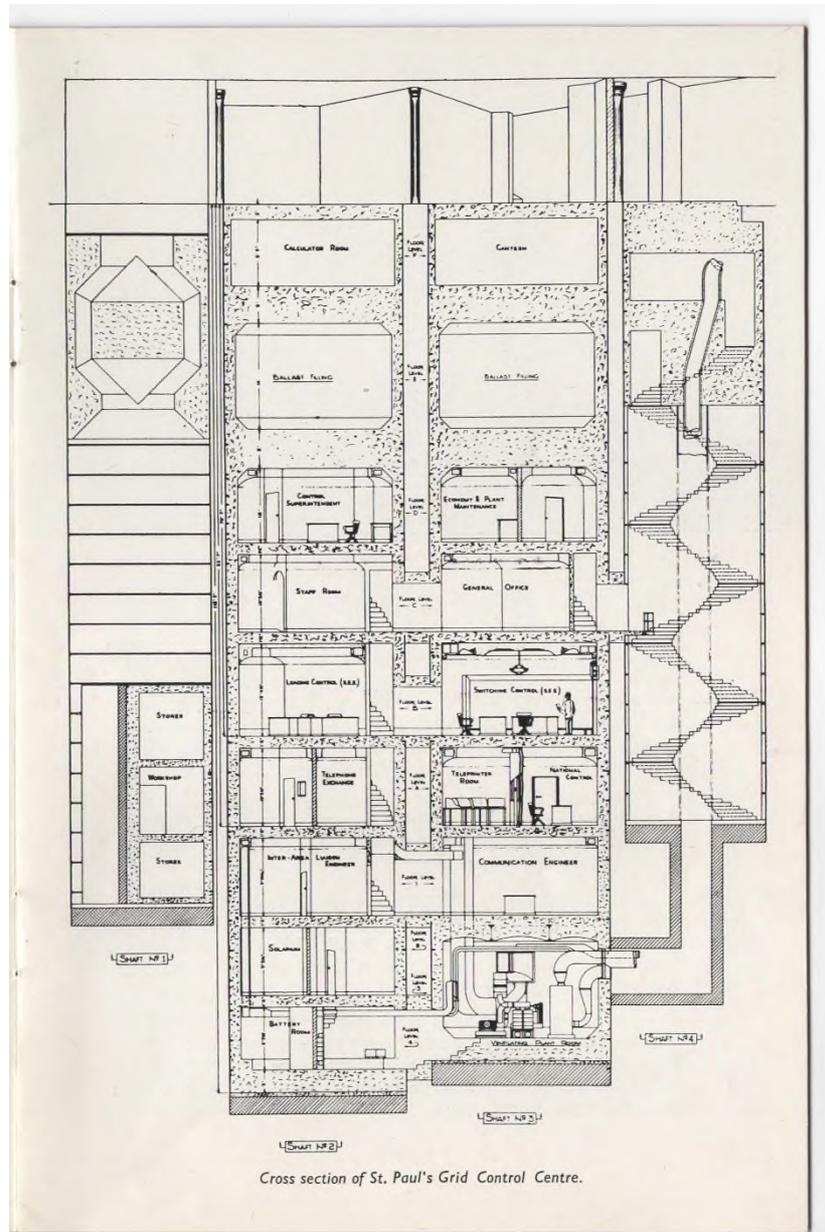


Work had to go on so everyone was transferred to a make-do typing pool on the ground floor of the Bombed out old St. Paul's Station. We were positioned near the top of two lift shafts one contained (so I was told) a 16' Bomb Block, below which housed National Control and Thames Area Control.

Adjacent was a smaller shaft with a circular staircase which provided access to the Control block and the offshoots to offices for the Engineers, the canteen and the washrooms and toilets. At the very bottom of the long stair case was a door we were never allowed through but I did get a glimpse into it a few times where Engineers were sitting viewing a huge circular wall screen which was the very beginning of the National Grid Control. I was only ever down there to get to the teleprinters in the outer room. I remember seeing one of the men with a "Flying Officer Kite Moustache" I saw him again one day outside a block of luxury flats at East Sheen when I

was visiting my Sister who lived in a house a couple of streets away. He was treated like a God at St Pauls. He never acknowledged that we were there. How days have changed.

As I've mentioned, the typing pool was on the ground floor but there was no heating, or not much. The place was draughty and lofty. The couple of small electric fires made no impression. An old carpet had been put on the cement floor. We would work in our coats and put hot water bottles in holdalls for our feet. We were a happy bunch and I don't remember anyone complaining.

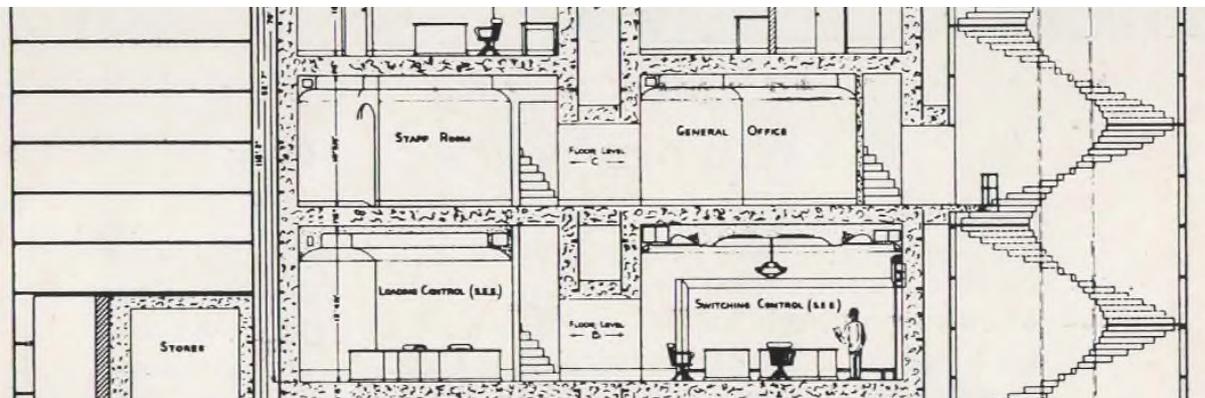


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Yes, Arthur Hawkins did work here. I got a call from him to go down with my notebook and he would dictate for a couple of hours at a time. All very technical but I loved it. The job I did was not like doing the weekly fuel figures. I had 2 typewriters, one normal size and one had a Brief Carriage. Columns and columns of figures which had to be typed onto a wax stencil and printed off on large Gestetner (duplicating) machine. How things have changed. My Shorthand speeds were 200 w.p.m. and I certainly had plenty of practice.



At the top of the small shaft where the steps appear, I used to run down to floor level C where I walked along to one or other of the offshoots which were used by the Engineers, so this I think was where the typing pool was as there was a staircase in the corner which we had to rush down when the sirens sounded.



The walls were bare brick and a large junction box was at the top of one of them. The reason I remember that is because one day there was some sort of lighting failure and, as Arthur Hawkins was the only Engineer present at the time, he was called to fix it. I shall never forget it. He climbed a long ladder, opened the box and started prodding around with his lead pencil! There were plenty of sparks and he nearly fell off. He was the most highly qualified Engineer at the organisation and should have known better.



When the sirens sounded we had to leave everything and rush down below to be safe. We were told not to discuss anything with anyone in the street, it must have looked very odd when we arrived for work, walking across rubble and disappearing behind a shattered wall. Once or twice I had to stay there for the night as the bombing was far too severe above us to get out which worried my poor parents to death as there were no telephones then to keep in touch. I was actually safer than they were sitting in their Anderson Shelter.

We were very fortunate to have a canteen down below and a wonderful lady who must have been a magician to produce all the meals she did. The food was strictly rationed for everyone. Canteens did get an allowance but very little. I can still visualise the apple rings strung up across the ceiling for them to dry, she made the most delicious apple pies. Bread wasn't rationed and that lady concocted all sorts of fillings. A true magician.

Mr. Hawkins was in the habit of bringing his little son (Andrew) in on a Saturday Morning and leave him with me to entertain with things on the typewriter. He was about 4 years old I think and had lovely blue eyes.

Mr. Hawkins moved around a lot but I still did his work. Sometimes I had to go down to Horsley Towers at East Horsley, where there were wooden huts in the grounds of that fabulous building with all sorts of people from different departments. I always found accommodation in the Towers itself. Whilst working here I remember witnessing some pretty horrific actions from some Engineers in the temporary wooden huts. Wires were loose everywhere in the typing room and needed to be sorted out. One chap CUT THE WIRE WITH A PAIR OF SCISSORS! He was thrown across the room and a lump was burned from the scissors.



I can't remember how long it was before Aldwych House was rebuilt and made sufficiently safe for us to move back. However, it was quite common to have a visit from young men in uniform to Aldwych House. These were members of Staff who had volunteered to fight for their Country. Of course, there was always a welcome for them.

One in particular, was in R.A.F. uniform my eyes alighted on! Some many months later, he appeared again to pay our wages. He had been demobbed and re-joined the Accounts Department. He had access to all my personal details then and could see where I lived. He made a point of saying we didn't live far apart. I was one side of the Thames in Fulham and he was the other side in Roehampton. He said he was having to settle down to his Studies again which had been interrupted by 4-5 years in Bomber Command. He and his Crew flew one of the few Lancaster's to come through to the end. He suffered repercussions from that experience for the rest of his life. Nevertheless, he got down to hard studying and after nearly 5 years, became a fully qualified accountant.

During those years we saw each other occasionally on the tube train going home but one night he stopped and invited me to a Concert at the Wigmore Hall. He had possession of 2

free tickets. We had very little money to pay for anything. After a short time, we got engaged and married on the 6th September, 1952. So, my name then changed from Banks to Mr and Mrs Dudley STONE and he applied for positions abroad. The next stop was Nigeria for us —for nine years, then Sierra Leone, South Africa, Rhodesia, Zambia and finally Kenya. In the middle of all that, we were in the West Indies.

Some years later when we were home on leave from somewhere or other, he had business to do in Cheltenham. Never being one to sit and twiddle my fingers, I saw they were advertising for Temps at the C.E.G.B. I mentioned to the fellow I'd been sent to work for that I used to work for Arthur Hawkins at the C.E.B. He looked aghast and said: - "didn't you know, he has been appointed Chairman of the C.E.G.B. and is now SIR ARTHUR HAWKINS. As it happens he is visiting here tomorrow.'

When A.H. arrived, he was approached by one of the men who led him to me. I've never seen him looked so shocked and he not only kissed me but then took me out to lunch so we could catch up and ordered the poor chap I was supposed to be working for as a temp that I wouldn't be back that day.! Coincidences, coincidences.

I read in the Obituaries Column that Sir Arthur died 13th January 1999 and is survived by his Son, Andrew (with the lovely blue eyes) and his daughter Anne.

I changed my job and so had Dudley but that wasn't the end of the Electrical Connection as his brother had a Son, Ronald, who was close to Dudley, and the family all knew about the Control Room, Horsley Towers, etc. which was near to them as they lived in Guildford.

Years went by, Ron grew up and the next I heard he was the Grid's Head of Employee Communications, after a career in Industrial Relations. I asked him if he had ever spoken to

anyone who knew of the St. Paul's Control Room. He hadn't but suggested I wrote to the then Chief Executive, Steve Holliday.

Ron came to see me recently and stayed. His Sister joined us the next day together with my



Son and we all went out to lunch and had a party in my flat afterwards together with one other person. This whole story is one of coincidences as I only moved back to Tunbridge

Wells at the end of 2013. We had been living in retirement in Norfolk. My next-door neighbour, Kathy Allen, happened to mention once something about her job in the Electrical Industry. She actually worked for Ron!! You can imagine the Reunion that tea party was. I have pictures of all these occasions and could let you have them if necessary. Ron had brought me a copy of the Pensioner's Newsletter, because of the article "Down the Hole"

I've wondered so many times through the years about that building and the fact that it has been found, or what is left of it, was wonderful news. I only wish I could see it too.

The names I do remember of those days were Elsie Darlington (another Secretary) and her Husband Charles who was in Accounts too I believe. John Waite, the Manager and his Secretary Miss Squires. Agnes Stiff who became in charge of the typing pool who lived up to her name and hated me as I was firmly fixed with Arthur Hawkins. Edna and Joan Mountain, sisters who lived in the real East End of London. They had 6 brothers, all in the Services. Joan was a year or so older than me and transferred to work for the Manager of Bankside Power Station. They also had a Canteen and I visited there for lunch on many occasions. I felt so sad when I heard it had been turned into an Art Gallery.



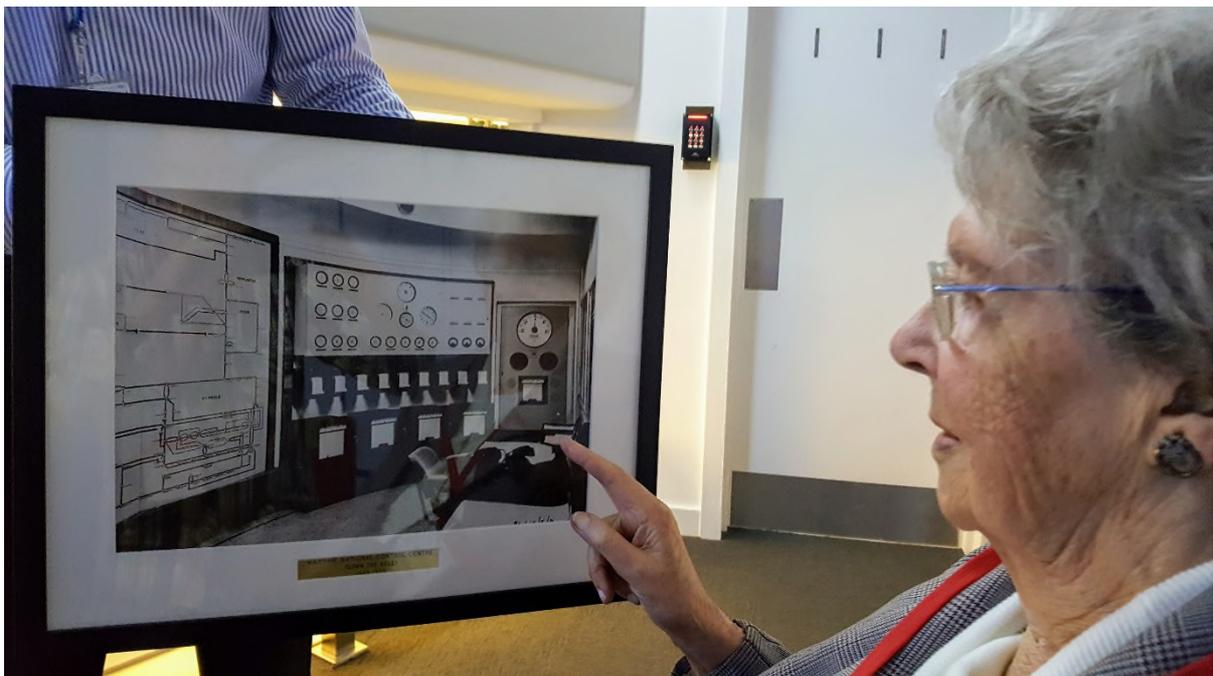
I do hope there is something which depicts it's real and original use throughout those dreadful days. Joan eventually joined the Land Army. It would be wonderful if some could

be found. What a reunion that would be. I am 89 now and can only get around in my Scooter but that wouldn't stop me, I'd manage it somehow.



Written by Patricia Stone (nee Banks) Secretary to Arthur Hawkins later to become Sir Arthur Hawkins OBE. CEBG Chairman from 1972-1977

Edited by Tony Malins 21 August 2017



Pat in Wokingham Control Room 2018. Some wishes come true.