

SECRET PAPERS REVEAL FEARS ABOUT THE COLD WAR TURNING HOT

Covert search for shelter was driven underground

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THE news that the Soviet Union had acquired the atomic bomb forced the government to begin a covert survey of deep underground shelters and tunnels that might be capable of withstanding a nuclear attack, Home Office papers for the late 1940s and early fifties reveal.

The nationwide survey was to be carried out in the utmost secrecy so as not to cause panic among the public, which had been told the government did not feel it necessary to maintain a system of anti-nuclear shelters.

"We must not let the people know this is a civil defence exercise," a Home Office document declares.

Far less did Whitehall mandarins want the public to know that they were investigating possible deep shelters for use in the event of a nuclear war.

Shelters with clearance of between 15 and 50 feet could be capable of protection from the effects of atomic bombs similar to those dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki surmises a memo included in the papers released yesterday at the Public Record Office, Kew.

In all 26 sites in England and Wales were identified earlier on.

It was left to the Scottish Office to investigate the situation north of the border.

Facilities on private land could either be requisitioned by the crown or by the local

Taxman had poet in sights

TEN years after he died, the inland revenue finally called off the hounds, and might even have paid a rebate – they were convinced that Rupert Brooke, the poet who gave voice to the lost generation of first world war youth, was financially worth more in death than in life.

As a consequence the taxman pursued his mother, Mrs Parker Brooke, in an attempt to squeeze from her as much money as they could.

Officially Rupert Brooke had died for king and country as a sub-lieutenant serving with the Royal Navy. In fact his early death on the Greek Island of Skyros was due to blood poisoning.

Nevertheless, after the great war his works and in particular *The Soldier*, captured the mood of the nation, causing the inland revenue seek what it considered its due.

authority, or negotiations could be made with the landowner.

Inspections of the potential deep shelters to assess their state of repair were to be carried out discreetly by the department of works, whose officials were told to use only their own records to complete the research.

From the outset, it was clear,

that places in these shelters would be extremely limited.

"The general public is now well aware that the shelter provision made in the last war is being removed because it is largely obsolete, but it would probably react strongly to a suggestion that in a future war no effective provision can be made for the protection of the public on the account of the high cost," a paper warns.

Possible sites included old railway tunnels, caves at Chislehurst, and tunnels at Dover.

Home Office ministers were emphatic as late as July 1949 that all of these findings should be kept under wraps.

"It is one thing for the ministry of works to carry out inspections which can be regarded as a normal routine job, and quite another for us as the civil defence department to appear to be taking an active interest in underground accommodation."

It could be interpreted as the government taking a decision over shelter on who would survive.

The documents give no indication as to who might be offered a place in the shelters should the cold war turn hot.

The pretence that the UK could survive a nuclear attack was carried on into early sixties, when V-bombers carrying the British deterrent were permanently airborne.

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