

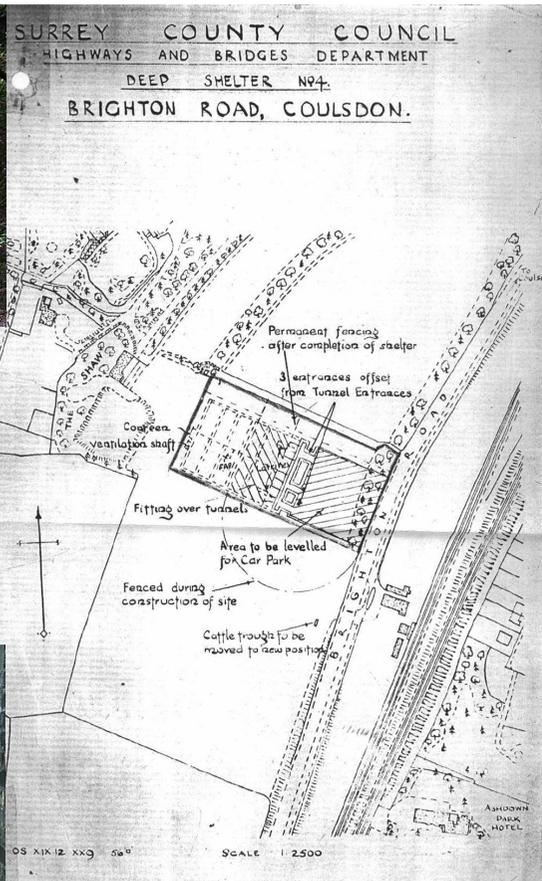


It didn't matter that that the hospital was some distance away via a steep path and that it had its own well-equipped mortuary. The rumours continued, and were reinforced by a few brave explorers who found ways into the abandoned, cold tunnels. The old weird machinery used by Cox, Hargreaves and Thomson, abandoned, unfamiliar and with French labelling, was often mistaken for strange medical contraptions and sinister hospital equipment. Imaginations ran wild – as did the rumours.



The most far-fetched rumour attempted to complete the association of the two locations by suggesting that the Deep Shelter tunnels somehow physically connected to Cane Hill via a long tunnel which led into the hospital buildings. Such rumours were easy to disprove by examining the plans and/or exploring the tunnels themselves, but the idea persisted. Perhaps it was simply too good to be abandoned.

Today, the tunnels are still extant and are marked by an overgrown copse of trees on the western flank of the A23. They escaped the demolition of Cane Hill Hospital and the construction of the new Coulsdon bypass (which only starts a few hundred yards from their entrance). Long derelict and sealed with soil, the tunnels still contain all the detritus left behind by their various occupants, which can still be interpreted if one ignores the more fanciful stories.



And in addition to their war time construction, and obvious historical importance, the tunnels also offer a tantalising glimpse into how fact turns into rumour; and how even the most outlandish rumours have their basis in some germ of truth. This Deep Shelter was probably unique in this respect, as it allowed the development of its own urban folklore to be examined and understood.

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