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12 LIFE & TIMES

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EERIE GLANCE INTO A SECRET WORLD

**Jim Greenhalf on
a photographer
who was invited
behind the MoD's
closed doors**

The man in the subterranean, windowless room, somewhere in central London, was not disposed to be welcoming.

He said: "For my part I didn't want you here... We don't trust anyone here, it's our job. We aren't part of anything that goes on here and are in this room by grace and favour..."

"Nothing personal, but we work with nasty people every day and are trying to delay the inevitable happening... the work you are doing may put you at risk."

Welcome to the place where members of the Government, civil service and the military meet at times of crisis, for example at the start of the 2003 Iraq invasion and after the 2005 London bombings.

The man on the receiving end of the outburst was photographer David Moore. What on earth was he doing wandering round an active high-security Ministry of Defence establishment with a camera?

The story starts in December, 2004, when David made the following proposal to the Ministry of Defence:

"I would like to make photographs in secure areas of the MoD that deal specifically with UK airspace and counter-terrorism."

"If we can discuss the current situation of an 'invisible war' or 'war on terror' as a site for potential new photographic work, then the modernity of the MoD is more relevant than anywhere else in the UK."

Eighteen months later, the thick red reinforced steel door opened. But without the help of Angela Weight, curator at the Imperial War Museum, the door would have remained closed.

As she says on David's website (davidmoore.uk.com): "By going through the manager of the MoD art collection, we made it clear that this was a cultural project, not an exposé of the country's security defences."

As it was, David had to agree to not disclose the exact location of the multi-storey underground site and to obscure names and titles on doors. At the end of the six month shoot, the MoD vetted every photograph.



David Moore, above, captured mysterious, peopleless pictures of an active high-security Ministry of Defence establishment for his exhibition, *The Last Things*

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"The whole point is that this is a live environment, on stand-by continually and manned by the Royal Navy. This is not Cold War nostalgia," David says.

"Over 18 months, we progressed up the ladder of the security hierarchy. We found a couple of allies who really supported us. There were bigger motives, but I don't know what they were. They have never let anyone in before. I don't think they will let anyone else in again."

Angela adds: "It is hard for a civilian to understand the security mindset, with its obsessive need for obfuscation and double-think, but it has to be respected..."

"Wrangling continued over the captions to the images for some

weeks afterwards. There was to be no compromise on these; any form of linkage or association, such as the word 'government', for example, was firmly denied."

The writer Iain Sinclair, whose book *London Orbital*, was on a shelf in the bunker complex, described David Moore as a "photographer of secret places".

The apocalyptic title of the exhibition, *The Last Things*, is suggestive of a world where the worst has happened.

David's photographs show parts of the windowless, claustrophobic environment that will be the operational centre for those left to manage after a catastrophe. A single bed in a whitewashed

room, a single light above the bed, wire hangers above; landscape paintings on walls serve as windows; what looks like a television studio, a lectern with a microphone, chairs; surveillance cameras and a great door like the barrier of a bank vault or the reactor room in a nuclear-powered submarine: pictures without people.

His photographs of the inside of the House of Commons are also peopleless. David Moore's latest project, photographing interiors of the high-security Paddington Green police station in West London, makes a kind of trilogy: the House of Commons, where security decisions are taken; the security crisis management bunker, where decisions are implemented; and the police station, where the avowed enemies of both are locked up.

● David Moore's exhibition, *The Last Things*, is on at Impressions Gallery from September 19 to November 8. David will be giving at talk at the gallery on September 19, starting at 2pm. Admission is free. The Gallery, which opens at 11am, is closed on Mondays.