

SCRUTINY

Duncan Campbell and Patrick Forbes

1985: A BUMPER BUNKER YEAR

Underground bunkers and 'hardened' war facilities have become one of the major industrial growth areas of the 1980s. The bunker boom is the result of expanded plans for 'home defence' introduced by Mrs Thatcher in 1979

A *New Statesman* survey found that, in the last year, at least a dozen new government war installations came into service, mostly in secret.

These include four new Home Office civil defence 'zone headquarters', five RAF and two Army bunkers, and a major NATO headquarters. The Northern Ireland Office, which has been lagging in the bunker race, has announced that it too will start constructing three new bunkers for its officials.

During 1985, the Home Office completed two new underground Zone Headquarters (ZHQs) at Chilmark, Wiltshire, and at Skendelby, Lincolnshire. Two other ZHQs have also been built inside disused Second World War meat

stores, at Loughborough, Leicestershire, and Hexham, Northumberland. Each ZHQ houses about 180 officials, and controls three or four counties.

But two Home Office bunkers have closed, unable to withstand the ravages of even the peacetime British climate. Bunker ZHQ10/2, secretly built in the 1960s below public offices in Southport, has been written off. Supposedly designed to resist an atomic explosion a mile away, it has been flooded and wholly unusable for at least six years.

Another Home Office bunker, ZHQ6/1 beneath Dover Castle, has also been abandoned. In a parliamentary answer to Tony Banks MP, the Home Office said this week that the Dover bunker 'could not be refurbished at an economic cost'. (But the real reason was probably

that it is was unlikely to have been of any use, as Dover is a top priority nuclear target.)

The Dover ZHQ became well-known in the 1960s as one of the chain of 'Regional Seats of Government' (RSGs) revealed during the 1963 CND Aldermaston march. A group called 'Spies for Peace' revealed the existence of 12 underground RSGs. The Aldermaston march then diverted to the Berkshire hamlet of Warren Row, where RSG6 had been secretly built in underground tunnels. Six years after this international *exposé*, the bunker was closed, and abandoned to rats during the 1970s.

Recently re-equipped with communications and generators, Warren Row is implausibly claimed by the Ministry of Defence to be a Territorial Army 'training centre'. It was observed to be under armed guard during last year's home defence exercise, Brave Defender. Warren Row probably now serves as the wartime military 'Armed Forces Headquarters' (AFHQ) for the Home Counties.

Three miles from Warren Row, the MoD has also taken back the use of another WW2 underground factory. Hidden in twin tunnels in a wooded hillside south of Henley-on-Thames, is a bunker which had been given back to peaceful industrial use for a quarter century.

A small engineering firm which used the factory has had to surrender its lease to the Defence Ministry. A small plaque outside now reads 'RSSD' (Reserve Sub-storage Depot). But the Defence Ministry admitted last month that its real purpose was to be an Army 'signals centre activated from time to time to

practice the war role'.

The Royal Air Force, meanwhile, had been constructing a chain of 'semi-hardened' sites for the new 'UKADGE' (UK Air Defence Ground Environment) radar system. Five of the new sites will be the home of mobile RAF radar stations, a new feature of the UKADGE system (see below). Three of these sites have been identified, at Hopton and Trimmingham in East Anglia, and at Tranwell near Morpeth. Holmpton, near Hull, may be a fourth site.

But a new top-security defence site, which the Ministry of Defence says is *not* part of its new radar system, is causing considerable concern in the Newcastle area. This is a so-called 'secure vehicle compound', which will be built alongside an existing Army bunker at Ouston, south of Newcastle.

Security measures planned for the compound are extremely high, and include a double layer of weldmesh fencing, like that installed at the Molesworth cruise missile base — and, allegedly, concrete machine gun emplacements. These plans have provoked local fears that the site may become a cruise missile convoy dispersal base.

Ouston, however, is far beyond the normal operating range of cruise missile convoys based from existing bases in the south of England. Since the Ministry of Defence will not state the purpose of the vehicle compound, it is impossible to refute local speculation that Ouston may be a third, reserve British cruise missile base.

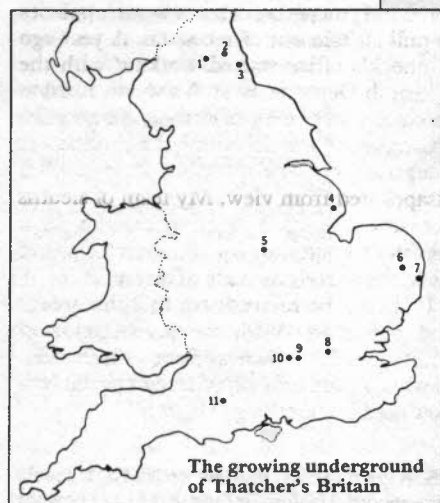
New computer for MI5?

Secrecy still shrouds a new intelligence computer which Defence Minister Norman Lamont admitted this week was installed 'in central London' two years ago. The computer adds to an increasingly integrated — and threatening — central government network.

Information about the new computer first appeared in an official list published by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency, which said that the Ministry of Defence had ordered an 'ICL processor' in January 1984, to operate a 'database'. Ironically, the very vagueness of the description drew attention to it.

MoD officials at first claimed 'it's not one of ours'. But this week Lamont, in reply to a question from Jeremy Corbyn MP, said the computer had been installed in February 1984 'to provide bureau facilities to certain MoD HQ staff'.

The ministry remains reticent, its press officers saying that even they had not been allowed to share the secret of 'who uses that particular computer'. Manufacturers ICL also refused to discuss the deal on the grounds that 'we're not empowered to talk about it'.



The growing underground of Thatcher's Britain

1. Hexham 2. Tranwell 3. Ouston
4. Skendelby 5. Loughborough
6. Trimmingham 7. Hopton
8. Northwood 9. Warren Row
10. Henley 11. Chilmark

