Bureau West Devizes, Wiltshire: An Early Component of the British Computer Landscape
by Bob Clarke and Will Baker

This paper offers an account of Bureau West, a recently demolished military facility on the outskirts of Devizes. The establishment was influential in the development of networked computer systems, the forerunner to the internet, making it an early component of that emerging technology. The design and layout of the site demonstrates how the threat of terrorist attacks, especially those originating in Northern Ireland, influenced defence landscape design in the early 1970s. Bureau West also had connections to the Polaris independent nuclear deterrent, further expanding our understanding of Wiltshire's connections with weapons of mass destruction. The work also demonstrates that a multi-disciplinary approach is required when investigating conflict sites from the recent past.

Introduction

On 14 February 2010, an article in the *Wiltshire Gazette and Herald* noted the sale of a small parcel of land, on Horton Road, Devizes. The site was to be cleared of derelict buildings and redeveloped for housing and other social facilities (Figure 1).[1]

The site, formally known as Bureau West, was a computer centre operated by the Ministry of Defence (MoD). Constructed in the early 1970s, it was the Ministry's first foray into becoming a fully networked organisation. Regionally, Bureau West appeared in a landscape already populated with substantial Government and military assets, including the extensive Central Government underground facility at Corsham[2] and more locally,

Fig. 1 Bureau West in transition. Military sites, during their operation, exude permanence. Once declared redundant few survive in physical form or as names in the landscape (2 November 2016: Bob Clarke)

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[1] *Wiltshire Gazette and Herald*, 14 February 2010, Bureau West site in Devizes is sold on. https://www.gazetteandherald.co.uk/news/5001300.bureau-west-site-in-devizes-is-sold-on/ [accessed 23 September 2019]

[2] COCROFT, W., THOMAS, R. J. C., and BARNWELL, P. S., 2003, *Cold War: Building for Nuclear Confrontation 1946–1989*, pp. 8, 214. Swindon: English Heritage, Swindon

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East Farm House, Broad Town, Swindon, Wiltshire, SN4 7RE; archaeospec@gmail.com

Le Marchant Barracks and the Wiltshire County Standby Control under the Library building in Sheep Street,[3] both in Devizes.

This paper describes Bureau West, placing the site at the centre of a highly technical and complex network. The activities enacted at the site demonstrate Wiltshire's involvement in the development of a fully networked computer system for the MoD, one that was to have major implications for the British electronics industry and led, in part, to the internet-reliant world we recognise today.

With the continual drawdown of Armed Forces after the fall of the Soviet Union in December 1991, many military sites have been released for development. Bureau West had become a backwater by this time, the operation having been surpassed by substantial advances in all aspects of computer technology. The Devizes sites' importance lies in the early years of the 1970s, and Britain's race in the development of networked computer systems.

The site is an example of the transient nature of contemporary military architecture: utilitarian in appearance, although frequently masking an important point in technological development, and often the subject of rumour and public suspicion.[4] It is for this reason Bureau West, its association with weapons of mass destruction and unique place in British computer history, has been recorded here.

The study of recent military sites relies on a range of techniques to produce as full an account as possible. This paper is no different. A combination of archaeological investigation complemented by archival work was used to produce this account. Indeed, the records examined were both incomplete and sparse in number, emphasising the importance of adopting a multi-disciplined approach.

Bureau West – A History

The Cold War ushered in a radically new form of conflict. The majority of the population was excluded from major ideological activities, but simultaneously placed them on the front line of a potential nuclear war.[5] Interestingly, while some of the military activities of the time have received considerable coverage in the literature, the role played by the computer continues to be overlooked, despite the fact that digital technology now permeates every aspect of defence. While this paper does not attempt to outline a history of computer development, it is important to emphasise that this technology developed rapidly when connected with defence industries in the aftermath of the Second World War.

By the early 1980s systems had been installed by the British to complement many aspects of the machinery of Government. Everything from the selection of winning Premium Bonds by ERNIE (Electronic Random Number Indicator Equipment) to the trajectory of incoming Intercontinental Ballistic missiles at Royal Air Force Fylingdales, North Yorkshire involved a level of electronic processing. A bewildering array of companies had been providing hard and software for different agencies since the early 1970s. This led to a complex number of operating systems being employed and, crucially, the majority remained stand-alone.

In August 1969, the MoD followed other NATO members in implementing its first functional codification system. The machine, including its software, was designed by the recently formed International Computers Ltd, and was located at Royal Air Force Hullavington, Wiltshire. It was fully functional by April 1970.[6]

International Computers Ltd (ICL) was formed in 1968 through the amalgamation of several independent defence related contractors. The initiative formed part of the then Labour administration's Ministry of Technology: an organisation created to exploit rapidly expanding international markets.[7] Naturally, the publicly backed company became the preferred contractor for many early Government projects, including the implementation at RAF Hullavington.[8]

In early 1971, a governmental working group was formed, tasked with identifying the problems of stand-alone systems operating within the Ministry of Defence.[9] A range of organisations

[3] CLARKE, B., 2005. Cold War Monuments in Wiltshire, *WANHM* 98, 1–11

[4] STRANGE, I. and WALLEY, E., 2007. Cold War Heritage and the Conservation of Military Remains in Yorkshire, *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 13.2, 154–69

[5] CLARKE, B., 2017, 'The Secret Taskscape: Implications for the Study of the Cold War', in, Rajala, U. and Mills,

P. (eds), *Forms of Dwelling 20 Years of Taskscapes in Archaeology*, 237. Oxford: Oxbow Books

[6] DEFE 36 – Annex 1, page 2, paragraph 6, thumb nail sketch of projects which are potential users of Bureau West, DCDC Hullavington, March 20, 1972.

[7] HC Deb 21 October 1969, vol 788, 1069–120, Ministry of Technology – House of Commons, Hansard

[8] ICL: CAMPBELL-KELLY, M., 1989, *A Business and Technical History*, 27. London: Clarendon Press

[9] October 1971 DEFE 6813/E3

already undertaking the conversion from manual to automated recording and data capture/processing were briefly assessed in a report issued in October of that year. These included, interestingly, the Polaris deterrent system.[10] The account of how aspects of the deterrent were managed during the early years of computer analysis are both enlightening and demonstrate a clear case for the proposed network at Bureau West.

> Annex 9, Polaris Weapons System Configuration Control and Failure Analysis.
> An ADP system is currently processed on the MOD computer installation at Faslane to record information about the Polaris weapon system. An ICL 4120 computer is used for 17 hours weekly. Input is by paper tape and output in printed form. All the processing is on magnetic tapes using conventional serial batch processing. [11]

The input data, created on punch cards, were produced in Bath and sent to Faslane where the card information was transferred onto the system. The mainframe then processed the information and produced a printed report. This was then posted back to Bath. The whole process of converting numerical information into text took around three weeks. The proposed re-routing of the Faslane system through a bureau facility would reduce turnaround time to 48 hours.[12]

The proposal identified a range of other benefits. A larger, centralised facility would bring a better economy of scale including smaller project teams, shift working, and a consistency of approaches to problems. Integrated computer systems would allow for large scales of staff experience.[13] At this time the working party estimated that both the hardware and software would cost *c.* £659,000 (ICL had yet to design a system), while the facility was likely to cost a further £750,000.[14]

The facility was to be as close as possible to Royal Air Force (RAF) Rudloe Manor or Royal Naval Stores Depot (RNSD) Copenacre, both of which were located in Wiltshire. This rationale was part of the Government's intentions to disperse important centres beyond London and the South East.[15] Both Rudloe Manor and Copenacre consisted of above and below-ground facilities. Stone quarries, originating in the 18th and 19th centuries, had been developed into underground factories during the Second World War. These had then been converted into communication and storage hubs early in the Cold War, due to the threat of hydrogen weapons.

A date for the construction of the facility was set during an internal meeting at the MoD on 23 March 1972; work was to start on 1 April 1974 and was expected to take up to 15 months.[16] Naturally, there was some organisational resistance to working through a centralised network. One opponent was the—now defunct—Royal Ordnance Factory (ROF): a large group of Government-run ammunition manufacturers.[17] The ROF employed around 3000 people whose only task was to deal with all aspects of the transaction recording. Worryingly, the organisation had 'already [been] talking to ICL – maybe [to] setup their own bureau'.[18] Interservice rivalry was also a problem, as any proposal to have the Royal Air Force operate a new facility was met with indignation from both the Royal Navy and Army.[19]

By early April 1972, it appears that, despite protests, RAF Rudloe Manor was to be the preferred location for the Bureau. Further analysis of the requirements had revealed the size of the proposed undertaking. The facility would support all three armed services. It would be fitted out with 800 terminals, with four terminals to a unit, one third of these tied directly to tasks designated by Bath, while the remainder would take in services from around the United Kingdom.[20] The Bureau would be connected to all sites via the standard telephone system and the internal network of the MoD.

Specifics regarding the form of the Bureau and type of support services required were also taking shape. Conversations in April,[21] expected the completion of the 'computer block' by end of 1974. This was ambitious as tenders for the construction work were not going to be requested until December 1972. It was now estimated that the facility would cost somewhere in the region of £850,000 (April

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[10] *ibid.*

[11] DEFE 6813, Annex 9 Polaris Weapon System, 20 March 1972

[12] DEFE 6813, Annex 9 Polaris Weapon System, 20 March 1972

[13] *ibid.*

[14] *ibid.*

[15] *ibid.*

[16] Meeting Minutes 23 March 1972 - DEFE 6813/E39

[17] NEVELL, M., ROBERTS, J. and SMITH, J., 1999, *A History of Royal Ordnance Factory, Chorley*. Trowbridge: Carnegie Publishing

[18] E31 02 02 72

[19] *ibid.*

[20] E35 letter from C Wallingworth AD of (POL) Capt Burvill RN

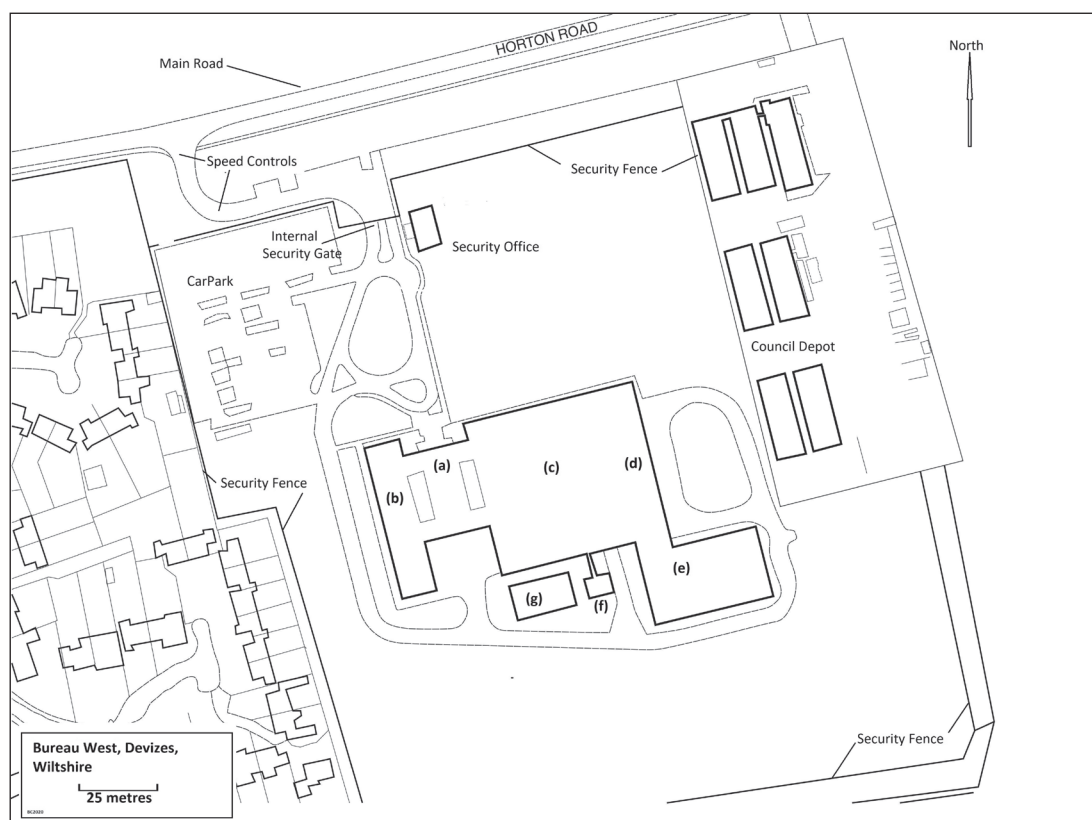[21] 18 April 1972 Letter from WR Atkinson. Central Computer Agency E37

Fig. 2 Plan of the Bureau West facility, Devizes, Wiltshire. Key (a) Reception; (b) Office Complex; (c) Computer Hall; (d) Computer Hall Air Conditioning Plant; (e) Plant Room (power); (f) Strong Room; (g) ?Service Centre. (Base map source: © Crown copyright/database right 2020. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service).

1973), one with a standby generator.[22] However, any form of networked, real-time operation was still considered 'impossible', only the most basic functionality was expected by the end of 1975.[23]

The last document so far discovered in the National Archives notes that there is a '[c]lear urgency to get the project underway.[24] Resistance to Bureau working was becoming ever more vocal, presumably as more organisations woke up to the potential of computers, while every month the project sat on the drawing board the costs increased.[25] Moreover, support for ICL was faltering. The company had offered a timeframe for the supply and testing of a computerised system, however, it was suggested that some form of competitive tender for

this service ought to be retained.[26]

At this point the public records cease, leaving the most crucial question unanswered, namely what circumstances brought about the change in location for the site from RAF Rudloe Manor to the outskirts of Devizes. With all paperwork concerning the design, construction and subsequent commissioning of Bureau West currently unlocatable, we must rely on the archaeology of the site to complete the account of this unique facility.

The Bureau West Complex

Bureau West lay to the south of Horton Road, Devizes; the main complex stood at the centre of a security compound (NGR SU 02607 62923). The land originally formed part of a Prisoner of War camp and a number of structures utilised by Wiltshire

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[22] *ibid.*
[23] 14 April 1972 sStee to Atkinson l E38
[24] 2 May 19 72 Effects of a elay in delays to BW. F Steel, Head of Computer Projects – DFEFE 6813/E39
[25] *ibid.*

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[26] *ibid.*

Fig. 3 The Security Office. Note weather canopy
(26 April 2010: Neg N. 062A: Bob Clarke)

Fig. 5 A security sign amongst debris in main reception
(26 April 2010: Neg No. 051A: Bob Clarke)

Fig. 4 Frontage of reception and control of entry to main complex.
Note damage caused since facility was abandoned (26 April
2010: Neg No.041A: Bob Clarke)

Council remain to the immediate east of the location.

The compound was large (5.32 ha) and was surrounded by a security fence 1,083m long and 2.43m high (including barbwire) (Figure 2). The main entrance—a double-gated system accessed from the Horton Road—was controlled by an electric barrier directly in front of the security office. A substantial carpark (3.72 sq. m) dominated the entire northwest corner of the compound; several bicycle sheds were also located here. A further vehicular entrance, this time single track, entered the site in the north-western corner of the compound.

A single-storey security office, rectangular (L14.38m x W8.71m) and aligned north–south, lay 45m inside the main gate (Figure 3). The structure was a brick and breezeblock construction, with a low pitched roof. Windows in all four elevations provided all-round coverage. The western elevation was protected by a small canopy.

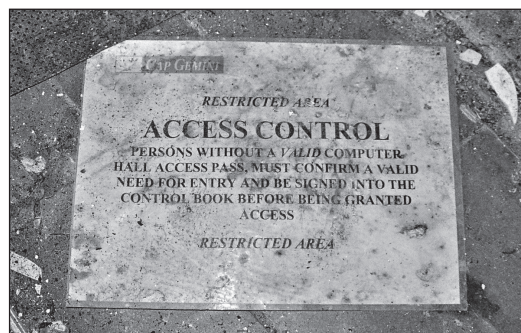Although heavily vandalised at the time of recording (26 April 2010), something of the routines enacted at the security office can be recognised. The canopy provided a weather cover for those either completing visitor paperwork or signing out keys. Interestingly, the most northerly window in the western elevation was manufactured from toughened glass. Internally, a brick-lined room (rather than plasterboard) lay behind the reinforced window. Comparison with other military sites in the area suggest that this room contained the key press and was used to issue access paperwork (visitors and car passes), and thus required a more secure environment.

Main Complex

Most of the Bureau West complex consisted of a series of interlinked structures standing at the very centre of the compound. As no original plans have so far been uncovered it has been impossible to ascertain whether all the structures described below are contemporary, although, on balance this seems likely.

Reception and Controlled Entry Point

Entry to the complex was gained via a designated reception. Behind the reception was a single-storey flat-roofed office suite where the day-to-day operations of the site (Personnel; work services; etc.) were controlled. The structure was timber framed, with a low, flat roof. The frontage comprised substantial wooden-framed, floor-to-ceiling, doors and windows, which had been heavily vandalised (Figure 4). A locally printed sign (A4 in size), presumably originally displayed through the now smashed glass, was noted. The sign bears the CapGemini logo, dating it to the late 1990s (Figure 5).

Fig. 6 View of complex looking southeast. Office Complex [R], Reception [C], Computer Hall [L]
(26 April 2010: Neg No. 3438A: Bob Clarke)

Fig. 7 Internal view of the Office Block (top floor) looking south. The structures fixtures and fittings have been almost completely destroyed (26 April 2010: 2925A: Bob Clarke)

Fig. 8 View looking southwest. Computer Hall air-conditioning plant [R] and Plant Room [L] where it is proposed the standby generators were housed (26 April 2010: Neg No.095A: Bob Clarke)

Office Complex

To the immediate west of the reception, and dominating the whole site, was a two-storey office block (L53/.30m x W13m) (Figure 6). The building comprised a steel frame, clad with pre-cast, pebble-dashed concrete panels, supplied with ready formed window apertures. The block was flat roofed. Internally, the offices were serviced by two wide, floating staircases, located in designated stairwells, each with a fire door. Both floors appear to have been mostly open plan, although a number of segregated rooms may have existed (the internal aspects had been almost completely destroyed since abandonment) (Figure 7). One room that did survive appears to have been a small cinema. Located on the ground floor, the room was created using a steel

frame and infilled with blockwork; this may explain its survival.

The Computer Hall

To the east of the reception stood the largest building on the site – the Computer Hall (Figure 6). The design was loosely based on a structure built for the Department of Education and Science, Darlington.[27] The design provides some clues to the challenges faced during the early days of computer development. The structure was one enclosed space, covering an area of 31,282.32 sq. m.

The Computer Hall was a flat-roofed steel frame construction with blockwork infill, externally clad

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[27] DEFE 36, -Aide Memoire, 2606HEA16854/01, Letter to W. R. Atkinson from SL. Enoch, 3 May 1972

Fig. 9 Inside the air-conditioning plant room in the eastern end of the Computer Hall (26 April 2010: Neg No. 1317A: Bob Clarke)

with squared corrugated plastic-coated windowless steel sheets. Internally, access was gained via an automatic door in the reception. Other entrances/exits included: service doors for the movement of equipment; access to an adjoining plantroom; and admission through a corridor to a strong room. A substantial extraction system was built into the roof of the Computer Hall. Originally the building had a suspended floor, creating a void below (1.2m deep). The void performed a number of functions including routing cabling and allowing the circulation of cooling air, and possibly as a moisture interceptor if the nearby river flooded.

Computer Hall Air-conditioning Plant

The eastern end of the Computer Hall contained a substantial air-conditioning plant (Figure 8). This area was segregated from the workspace by a blockwork wall and the external elevation was supported by substantial RSJs.

The eastern elevation comprised six large roller shutters with grilled vents above them. Internally, it appears at least three large air-conditioning units stood on a concrete floor. One overhead walkway—

the steel ladder was extant—must also have been here (Figure 9). At the time of recording, the machinery had been removed exposing the circulation vents. It was here that the ducting carrying the refrigerated air entered the suspended floor of the Computer Hall. The air then circulated under the floor and up through the equipment, cooling the electronics and pushing the hot air toward the extractor fan in the ceiling. The air was then ducted back down to the Plant Room where it was either recirculated through the air conditioning units, or allowed to vent to atmosphere via the grills in the eastern elevation.

Plant Room (Power)

To the immediate southeast of the Computer Hall (connected to it by a short corridor) stood another, similar, structure (L21.58m x W11.80m) (Figure 8). This was probably the emergency power room mentioned in the specification. It was a concrete construct, including roof area; the structure was clad with similar square-section sheeting to the Computer Hall. The structure was two-storey, the second floor being a void *c*. 2m between the concrete floor and flat roof. The western and eastern

*Fig. 10 External View of Strong Room
(6 April 2010: Neg No. 2117A: Bob Clarke)*

*Fig. 12 Service Centre looking east. Computer Hall to [L] (26
April 2010: Neg No.329: Bob Clarke)*

*Fig. 11 One of the two safes abandoned in the Strong Room (26
April 2010: Neg No. 2723A: Bob Clarke)*

elevations were supplied with substantial roll-up doors for the movement of equipment. The upper floor had ventilation grills along the entire western elevation.

Internally the structure was sectioned into three areas. The eastern third of the building appears to have housed generators. There are two ceiling-mounted lifting rails capable of taking 1 tonne loading and on the roof above there was evidence for substantial heat exchangers, presumably to cool the running equipment below. The function of the other two rooms is unclear, however, one is likely to have housed a series of large batteries that formed a Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS). A UPS allows for a continuous power feed to sensitive equipment should a main power outage occur. The batteries maintain a power feed while the emergency generators initiate and start to produce the required current.

Strong Room
To the south of the main complex, connected to the Computer Hall via a designated corridor (L6.61m x W 2.07m), was a small rectangular room (L9.22m x W7.04m). Externally, it was of similar appearance to the plant room and Computer Hall (Figure 10); internally there were no fixtures. The structure behind the outer cladding appeared to be concrete in composition and at least 0.91m thick. Inside the room were two free standing but very substantial security lockers.

The purpose of this structure is unclear, although, the presence of security lockers suggests it may have been for the storage of sensitive or secret material (Figure 11). The possibility that it was a protective structure for shielding magnetic tape from the effects of a nuclear attack should also be considered.

?Service Centre
A rectangular, free-standing structure (L21.58m x W11.80m) was located to the immediate west of the protected room (Figure 12). The structure, clad similarly to the Computer Hall, had been divided into three bays, each of which could be accessed by a large roll-up door. It appears this building housed a number of maintenance areas, presumably maintaining unserviceable air-conditioning units and other general, non-computer related machinery.

The military landscape

Many military sites in the United Kingdom are persistent places in the landscape. Their layout and design often provide substantial clues as to their function, technology, and the perceived threat at the time of their construction. This is especially the case when considering military sites of the 20th century, and the layout of Bureau West conforms to this maxim.

The main complex at Bureau West stood at the centre of a security compound, the reasons for which are two-fold. The potential to expand the facility had been considered from the outset,[28] leading to the position of the structures. It was also sited so that intruders would need to cover a large amount of open ground before reaching the facility. However, it is the road layout that allows the researcher to say something about the perceived threat and political climate at the time of construction. Two access points—a main two-way gate and a single-lane track—allowed traffic to be restricted during periods of increased threat levels. The incorporation of two 90-degree bends in the single-track made direct access to the main gate almost impossible. This level of entry control was a rare feature of the military landscape and help to date the facility to the mid-1970s.

Since the late 1960s the British mainland had increasingly become the focus of attacks by terrorist cells aligned with the Provisional Irish Republican Army. This became ever more problematic for the security services as many military sites were simply not laid out to protect against such attacks. Increasingly from 1975, and certainly by the early 1980s, armed guards, checkpoints and restricted vehicular access had become a common feature of the military landscape. Chicanes were laid out on the approaches to main gates – usually employing oil drums filled with concrete and movable barbed wire entanglements. These were often complemented with sangars (protected points constructed using sandbags and corrugated tin sheets) or circular Yarnold posts[29] – essentially concrete pipes stacked up to 2m, providing guards some level of protection. The important point is that these enhancements were both additions to the original main gate area, and very ephemeral in their impact on the landscape.

[28] DEFE 36, Aide Memoire, 2606HEA16854/01, Letter to W. R. Atkinson from SL. Enoch, 3 May 1972
[29] COCROFT, W., THOMAS, R. J. C. and BARNWELL, P. S., *Cold War: Building for Nuclear Confrontation 1946–1989*, p. 8. Swindon: English Heritage

The layout of Bureau West allows for a threat-specific landscape to be recognised. Considering the design of routes into the compound from Horton Road, the architects clearly had the real threat of terrorist attacks in mind.

Discussion

Military sites provide us with a dichotomy. They outwardly project a sense of control and permanence. This impression of authority and exclusion can subsequently become the focus of suspicion and rumour, especially amongst those who are excluded.

Polaris

While the purpose of the facility was well known locally, this did not stop speculation. During research for this paper a recurring theme was the suggestion that the facility had some involvement with the nuclear deterrent, specifically the Polaris weapons system. This was initially considered apocryphal; however, it now appears this perception was not entirely incorrect. How much involvement must, unfortunately, remain speculation, indeed, the whole idea may have stemmed from the initial discussions surrounding the original proposal (see above) and nothing more. What is apparent is that the public were concerned that the Bureau had a connection to weapons of mass destruction.

Into the Computer Age

Interestingly Bureau West has very little visibility in the public record, and the same can be said of other government archives interrogated for this project. One consideration may be the medium on which records were generated. If some form of electronic device and/or magnetic tape was involved, then much will now be beyond the reach of the researcher, primarily due to the archaic nature of both the machinery and operating systems of the time.

> Mr. Archie Hamilton
> Bureau West provides computer support to many areas within MoD. As a result, the bureau holds a great diversity of information, both classified and unclassified, in its computer systems. It would be neither practicable nor in the interests of security to list it. Security measures are taken to prevent unauthorised access to these systems both while they are attended and while they are unattended.[30]

[30] Vme Computers (Security) 08 November 1988 Volume 140, Hansard

Fig. 13 Rear of Reception and Office Complex. Note under cover vehicle parking (26 April 2010: Neg No. 3265A: Bob Clarke)

It appears, as noted earlier with the Royal Ordnance Factory, that the MoD wished to maintain as much control over Bureau West as possible, and this may be one of the reasons the facility was built in Devizes. Initial locational considerations would have placed the Bureau within the direct influence of either the Royal Navy, Army or Air Force. The location is close to Le Marchant Barracks, Devizes, although, the fact that it is a totally separate entity suggests it was not a part of that site.

Autonomy, or the control of the bureau function, becomes more probable when the process of computerisation is examined. By the time Bureau West had started the process of centralisation, reliance on the technology was already spreading through Government departments at a rapid rate.[31] An examination of Written Answers regarding defence, posted in December 1975, reveals 51 computerised systems had been installed across the military function, and a further 15 were under consideration.[32] The potential for chaos appears clear.

The reasons for centralisation of processing in a Bureau-style function brought with it many economies. It reduced mainframe duplication, terminals could be linked to the Bureau, alleviating the need to duplicate complete systems and the initial expenditure that brought. A central pool of expertise could be formed and kept up-to-date more easily in a bureau facility, subsequently reducing manpower across the Government departments; and new systems could be brought into the network, especially if the operating systems already ran existing functions.

As commissioning and connection started at Bureau West, others in the scientific and engineering communities, specifically at University College London (UCL) and the National Physics Laboratory, Teddington, London, were working on a form of advanced networking. Working alongside teams in the United States they developed the forerunner to the Internet and by the late 1970s, all Government functions had become linked via this rudimentary network.

Towards Redundancy

This paper has concentrated on the origins of Bureau West and the early days of computer technology in Wiltshire. What follows is a brief account of the facility until abandonment. The system proposed

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[31] *Computers*, HC Deb 10 December 1975, vol 902 cc243-8W, 243W, Hansard

[32] *ibid*.

by ICL was still in development when the Bureau opened in 1976, and, as with much early computer technology, operation was problematic;[33] indeed by 1978, the cost for the 2900 series system had escalated to *c*. £30 million.[34]

By the turn of the decade a substantial number of ministries had started the move to digitisation. Unsurprisingly, this spawned a range of separate organisations, all with an interest in exploiting the technology.[35] In an attempt to limit both equipment duplication, costs and different operating systems, the Government brought the three main military protagonists into one group: on 1 January 1984 Bureau West joined the Defence Data Processing Service and the Defence Administrative Computer Division to form the Directorate of Central Computer Services. At the time of the Bureau's closure in 1999, the operation had been contracted out to the French computer facilities company CapGemini.[36] The name of the site in Devizes, Bureau West, was retained, ensuring it remained in the landscape until the site was cleared in 2014.[37]

Conclusions

The Cold War and home-grown terrorism dominated military doctrine throughout the second half of the 20th century. During that time task-specific facilities, such as Bureau West, were built across the United Kingdom. Their outward appearance was often utilitarian in nature (Figure 13), and public rumour and suspicion accompanied their continued presence in the landscape. The spectre of nuclear attack, a reoccurring theme in the Cold War, served to heighten these suspicions. Research for this project has demonstrated these suspicions may, in the case of Bureau West, have been well-founded.

The multi-disciplinary approach to this site has demonstrated that historical records cannot be completely relied upon. To fully understand a military landscape archaeological evidence must also be considered. Had no site investigation taken place the anti-terrorist layout, a factor that underpins the period of construction, would not have been recognised. At the turn of the 21st century, networking had become a commonplace in Government departments. It should not come as a surprise that Wiltshire, already containing a range of substantial government facilities, became an early component of this 'new' defence technology.

Acknowledgements

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[33] DEFE 36 – Ministry of Defence: Bureau West, later Directorate of Central Computer Services: Annual Reports, 1983 – 1987, Introduction

[34] *New Statesman*

[35] DEFE 36 – Ministry of Defence: Bureau West, later Directorate of Central Computer Services: Annual Reports, 1983 – 1987, Introduction

[36] https://www.gazetteandherald.co.uk/news/5001300.bureau-west-site-in-devizes-is-sold-on/

[37] DEFE 36 – Ministry of Defence: Bureau West, later Directorate of Central Computer Services: Annual Reports, 1983 – 1987, Introduction