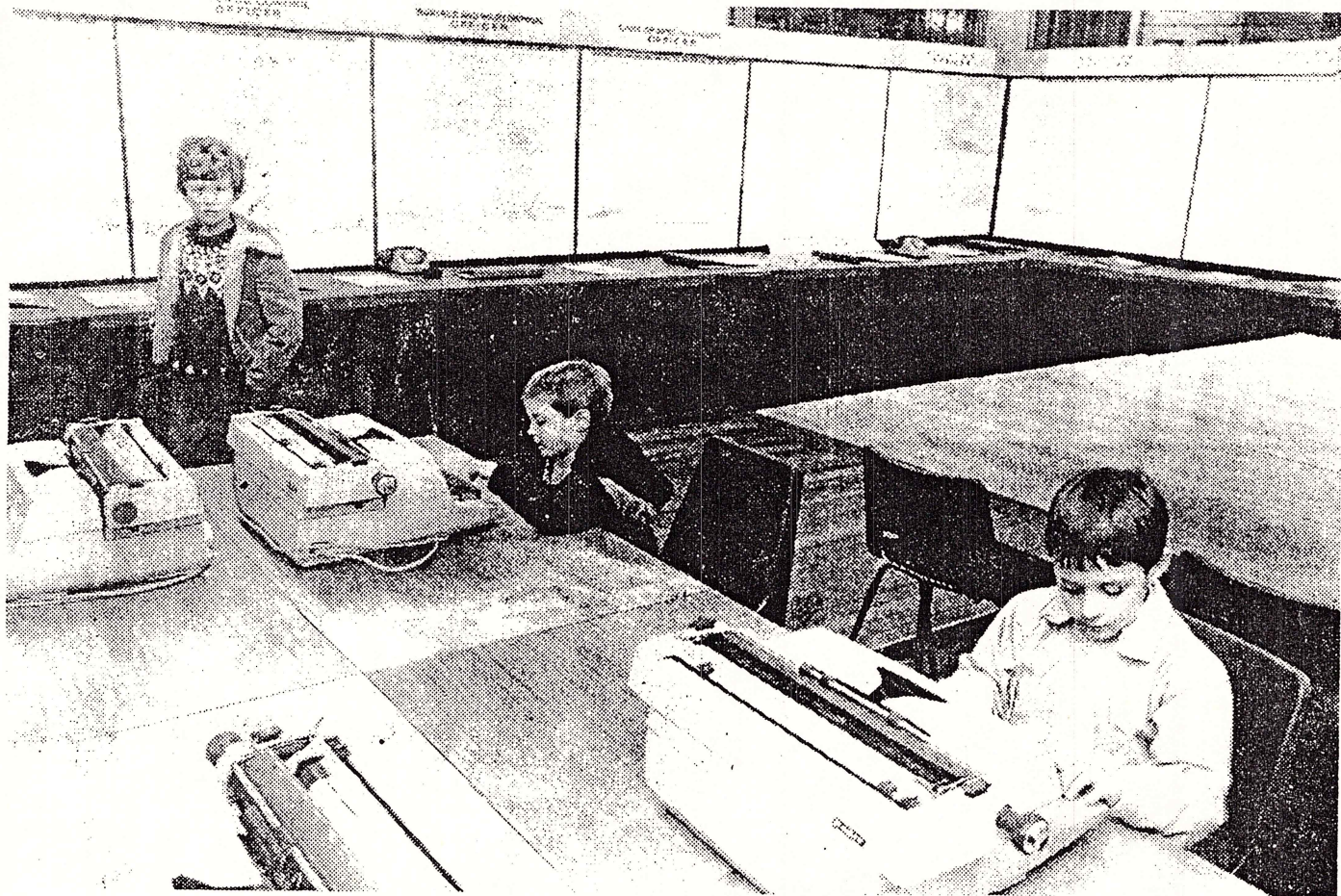


Region reveals secrets of 'doomsday' mansion

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Picture IAN HOSSACK



Children try the desks planned for use by "doomsday" controllers.

By JOHN EASTON

STRATHCLYDE Regional Council opened the "big house" in Linwood to the public yesterday.

The "big house" is a two-storey former mansion in tree-lined grounds in Clippens Road. The windows are boarded up to keep out vandals and white shutters are known to have been placed on top of them in times of international strife.

This is an emergency control centre, housing a "doomsday" network, to be used by some 50 people from district and regional departments and external organisations in the event of attack.

"People in the area have always been curious about the big house and treat it with a certain amount of suspicion," local regional councillor Mr Thomas Graham, said yesterday as

he stood outside with colleagues. Councillors John McDowell and Robert Gould.

"This open day is an attempt to show that we have nothing to hide. The house may come in useful at a time of major disaster, but there is no way we can offer protection if there is a nuclear attack."

Curiosity amounted yesterday to a trickle of adults and six 12-year-olds during the first two hours of opening. A similar exercise on Saturday, at Dungourney emergency centre in Greenock, attracted 62 adults and 21 children.

The interior of the house seemed straight out of a Second World War film with maps, teleprinters, a telephone switchboard, and cookers that appeared to have been fashioned in the same period.

"Well, they do work," an official said, with a hint

of embarrassment, as he demonstrated the emergency generator. "I am a bit surprised, though, about the ceiling." It is not reinforced.

Upstairs there are seven bedrooms. Downstairs consists of six operations rooms. However, in the event of nuclear threat, the entire staff would move to the basement. There is no living accommodation.

The centre is designed to provide an alternative form of control if local government broke down as a result of an attack. It is not a shelter and the public would not have access.

The centre would control the Renfrew, 'Dumbarton, and Inverclyde areas. It would seek to identify local problems resulting from an attack and ensure that surviving public services were used as effectively as possible.

A level of democratic

direction would be maintained by the appointment of a controller who would implement policy and decisions taken by an emergency committee consisting of three councillors.

Councillor Graham said: "We don't deny that the house can be of limited help in times of emergency, but the Strathclyde Labour group feels the Government's regulations about what to do in a nuclear attack are wholly useless.

"In times of international crisis, local folk have noticed white shutters being placed over the windows of the big house. At first it was quite frightening, but now it is regarded as something of a joke."

The handling of the open day was criticised last night by Mrs Anna McCurley, Tory MP for Renfrew West and Inverclyde, who described it as a "shabby"

exercise on the part of the region.

Following an afternoon visit to the centre, Mrs McCurley said she had been horrified by the behaviour of a group of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament activists, who had turned up and "generally made a fool of themselves."

"Officials were left to be the whipping boys of the regional council and suffer the ignominies of these people attacking the whole thing," she said.

"The facilities are inadequate and I will be calling for an improvement at regional council throughout Scotland. The entire question of civil defence is to be discussed during the first week of the new Parliamentary session and I hope there will be much more co-operation on the part of Strathclyde."