

SENNET  
9 Oct 74

LONDON SQUATTING  
GROUPS

NORTH LONDON

CAMDEN: 220 Camden High St., NW1  
28 Camden Rd., NW1  
36 Southampton Rd., NW5  
485 3828

FINCHLEY: 12 Arkwright Mansions, 206 Finchley Rd., NW3 794 4194

HORNSEY: 31 Hornsey Rise Gdns., N19

ISLINGTON: 51 Hildrop Rd., N7 607 8981

TOLMERS SQ: 102 Drummond St., NW1 387 4004



Photograph: Robert Hope.

How the chic squat:-Vera Wood, squatter par excellence, spins a little wool in her contemporary Euston sitting room.

Sunday morning with **MANDRAKE**

# Squatting à la mode de W.1

NOBODY, as yet, is having the papers delivered but one group recently had the telephone installed and their house has been converted, during their occupancy, to North Sea Gas.

Squatting—which used, in London, to be an essentially working-class pursuit carried on in the remoter reaches of the city—has gone quite middle class and is lapping at the shores of W.1.

It's just behind Euston station, in fact, within hailing distance of such attractive properties as Euston Tower and Thames Television Studios, that three streets—Drummond Street, North Gower Street, Euston Street—and Tolmers Square have been setting squatting standards that are hard to match.

"Of course Charrington Street—the other (wrong) side of Euston station—was always known as the mecca of squatting," said Celia, one of the Drummond Street squatters.

"But people round here do try that little bit harder. Everybody seems to be middle class or Oxford graduates. It's embarrassing, really."

The Tolmers Village Association estimates there are about 80 squatters in the area who have moved in over the last two years, refugees from a contracting central London market of furnished accommodation where one can easily pay £15 per week for a single room.

It's at Celia's that they have got the 'phone in, a little surprising, perhaps, as one might have expected the telephone people to have been in cahoots with the owners.

But as the owners' response to the unexpected visit of Celia and co. has been to maintain a very low profile—so low indeed, that nobody at Celia's seemed quite sure who the owners were, though somebody thought they might have been British Rail—the problem hasn't really arisen, and the squatters have dealt, direct and unimpeded, with the G.P.O. Squatters, it seems, are discriminated against a little, though. Before the 'phone was connected they had

Like most of the Tolmers Village squatters, Celia and her friends have done a lot of work on their house, painting walls, replacing broken window panes and mending floorboards. But by general consensus the finest example of squatting chic in the neighbourhood is the North Gower Street building next door to the popular Shah Restaurant, named "Community House" by its occupants of six months.

Vera and John Wood have been squatting here with two friends since April and already they have put together a sitting room which would do no discredit to the pages of *Harpers and Queen*. Highlights include chiaroscuro lighting, hangings on the walls and the odd ecological trinket like Vera's spinning wheel. Not bad when you consider that on the Woods' arrival, Vera says, "You could stand on the ground floor and see the stars—the floorboards were out and there were holes in the roof."

Vera is a gentle, limpid lady but is clearly no teacake as she did much of the work herself, including the laying of the floorboards and the wiring of the place for electricity. But Community House's *piece de resistance*, perhaps, is the wall of an occasional bedroom on the top floor. It was open to the elements, Vera says, when they moved in, but it's been blocked off now with tiles and wooden panelling, giving an interesting Scandinavian effect. "We're just handy folk," says Vera.

Downstairs, hazel-nut butter and sesame-seed spread was simmering on the electric stove—Vera sells a little health food on the side—and a hip acquaintance, apostolically hairstyled, squatted on the floor and bargained gently for some bread.

Vera cast a satisfied eye over the fruits of six months. "Of course we're not the only ones," she said. "Michael, a couple of doors up the road, is doing wonders with his place. It's getting quite Knightsbridgey."