

# Collapse—demand for an inquiry

Ham & High 19.10.73

A DEMAND for an immediate inquiry into the sudden collapse of two houses in Hampstead Road, Euston Square, was made this week.

Nobody was seriously hurt, as the houses Nos 56 and 58, owned by Stock Conversion and Investment Trust collapsed into the street early on Saturday morning.

The occupants had fled only minutes before rubble poured down, throwing up a large cloud of dust. Police and the Fire Brigade were called immediately, and the road was sealed off until late in the afternoon.

The Tolmers Village Association, who called for the inquiry issued a statement saying that the collapse was "the most striking of a number of recent incidents which illustrate the appalling consequences of years of neglect in the Tolmers Square area."

Builders arrived on Saturday morning before the collapse following a visit the previous day of a surveyor working for D. E. and J. Levy, Stock Conversion's agents. The builders had instructions to shore up a bulge that he had noticed in the front wall.

The tenant of No 56, Mr Mario Castro, a Portuguese, told the police afterwards that at about 9.30 am he had gone downstairs into the street because he had heard a lot of banging. While he was talking to the builders, they heard a loud crack. He rushed upstairs and shouted to two friends who were asleep in the house and they fled, partially clothed.

## POISONING

At first, police thought that a passer-by had been buried by the debris. They tore at it with their bare hands, but found nobody. Pc Cyril Clements and a fireman were treated by an ambulance crew for gas poisoning from a ruptured pipe, and Pc Michael Swales was treated for cuts to his hands.

The three occupants of the houses refused to go to hospital although were suffering from shock. All their personal property was destroyed, but two of them accepted an offer from Marks and Spencer in Camden High Street, of a complete set of new clothes. All of them declined temporary council accommodation but were given a meal.

The GLC's assistant District Surveyor later went to see the remains of the houses. He reported that No 54 was also damaged, but there was no immediate alarm. Water was still gushing out of broken pipes on Monday afternoon, but the gas had been turned off immediately.

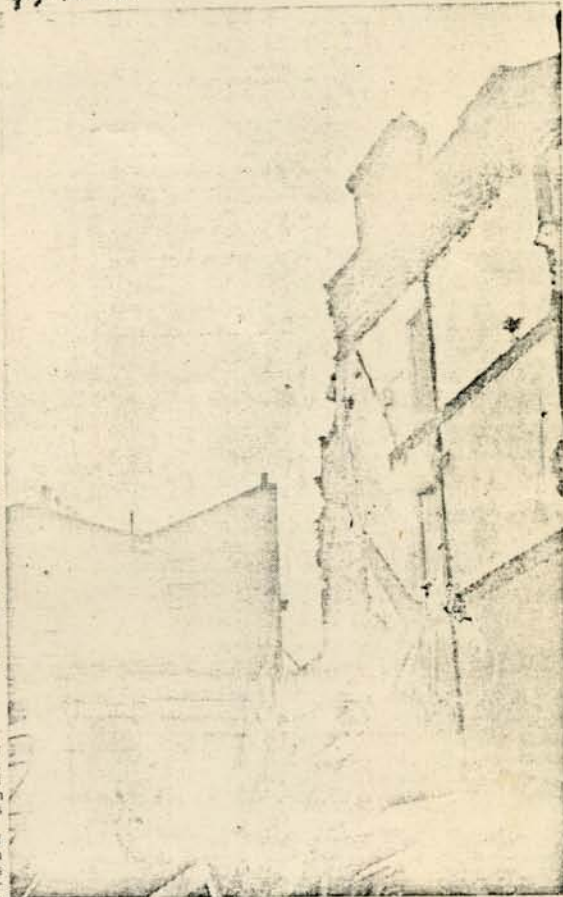
A spokesman for D. E. and J. Levy said that they were going to hold a thorough investigation into what happened.

The GLC's District Surveyor's Department held a meeting with D. E. and J. Levy on Tuesday, at which it was decided that the firm would erect shoring and scaffolding, and clear the site. They were also going to safeguard No 54.

Camden Council decided last week to halt negotiations with Stock Conversion for redevelopment of the site, pending discussions with the Environmental Secretary of various forms of community-based development.

The Labour group voted to withdraw a report recommending acceptance of the Stock Conversion deal. In a division only Labour Councillor Tim Skinner abstained.

Councillors John Thane and Ivor Walker voted for the withdrawal of the report and did not abstain, as we incorrectly reported.



● The scene of devastation after the houses had collapsed.