



● THE GROUND floor exterior (above) is an open invitation to winos and dossers . . . inside Mr Anthony Piery carefully examines a ceiling.



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Will their house last next winter?

Howard Hannah on a family who live in fear of a ceiling collapse

YOU DON'T like to move about too much when you're on the top floor of the Mell home in Hampstead Road.

What's left of the ceiling after numerous falls of plaster in the wet winter months, bulges down into the room like a giant's hammock.

You've got to tread carefully when you go to their toilet on the landing. Your feet sink down with the lino, and it seems that all there is to the floor is lino.

Downstairs in the cellar there's a rats' paradise, and on the ground floor, the shabby abandoned exterior is an open invitation for winoes seeking shelter.

But for Mr and Mrs Mell, their twin 17-year-old sons and grandma, Mrs Evanzell, who's in her eighties, number 66 Hampstead Road has got to be home, sweet home.

As a train from nearby Euston passed underneath and shook the house, Andy, an engineering student, told me: "I really don't think this place will stand another winter."

If things go on as they have done for the past four years—that is, no repairs in spite of visits by men apparently from D. E. and J. Levy, agents for the landlords, Joe Levy's Stock Conversion and Investment Trust Ltd.—he's probably right.

'No concern'

I say "apparently" from D. E. and J. Levy, because when I spoke to them last week, a gentleman who said he was in charge of their estate management said: "Nobody from here has examined the house at all."

He suggested that the men who called on the Mell family were "probably bogus and from one of these local associations which set themselves up as do-gooders."

"If you're talking about the top floor, the family doesn't have the top floor as part of their tenancy, so it is of no concern to them," he added.

Neither Mr Mell nor his wife Panyota speak much English, but using his son-in-law, Mr Anthony Piery, as interpreter, Mr Mell explained: "When our present landlords took over they came round and examined the top floor, which has leaked now for years.

"They said they were going to fix it and close it off. They haven't done either of these things.

"If we didn't put buckets and baths down to catch the rain, the place would be in a much worse state than it already is, and it would have come down into our rooms."

He pointed to the ceiling, which is crumbling and sinking. "That hasn't happened over the past few weeks, you can see that. It's been like that for years, and they can't say they don't know about it."

Mrs Mell shrugged her shoulders in despair. "My mother-in-law has really had enough. Because the place is in such a bad way, she cleans the place and it gets dirty again in no time," Mr Piery explained.

The man from Levy's said: "If they tell us of their complaints we will see what can be done about them, as we always do, if they don't tell us, what can we do?"

Meanwhile, the Mell family are hoping against hope that they don't have another winter at 66 Hampstead Road.



● Mr Anthony Piery (right) interprets the despair of his mother and father in law Mr and Mrs Mell, and shows the damage caused by years of a leaking roof.

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