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the council in exchange—in effect—for council help with his planning permissions.

While no one was sure what to do, no one spent any money and the area further declined. Simultaneously, and taking over from the sort of protest Rose Gavin had organised, the squatting movement invaded many of the blighted and deserted buildings (not to say the campaigning: a controversy locally as well as elsewhere). One neglected building actually fell down around its legitimate tenants; one that was squatted went from dereliction to a DoE listing. Christopher Booker and Benny Grey, the property journalists, came along with a maverick deal from their Claudius company, which promised to be more generous than anything Mr Levy contemplated: an offer of finance from orthodox sources but undertaken for non-profit-making motives. Eventually, Camden bought Stock Conversion out, at £4 million—a price said variously to be anything from a bargain to daylight robbery. Under the latest draft plans by Camden, the neighbourhood will now be developed piecemeal, though Tolmers Square itself will go. These and many more details are evidenced from a wide range of sources, laid out in an ingenious format which owes something to documentary film. This is work of propaganda, but it is—I think—honourably and innocently partisan.

The Battle for Tolmers Square is a sort of morality tale, with knights and dragons, and even Claudius's Sir Galahad. The forces of profit ranged against the people: a familiar theme. But Mr Wates has another, a radical, view. He is one of a generation brought up on readings of Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. They enjoy and celebrate the muddle of working-class communities, and decry the destruction brought about either by misguided philanthropic rebuilding, or commercial intrusions into areas of housing. He is clear about the sad influence of office development on land prices, and unhappy about the Community Land Act, which he believes forces councils to be far too commercial in their attitudes to property.

There are clear intimations that he has been thinking about how authorities might overcome the problem which has beset them since Victorian worthies first tried to provide adequate dwellings for the poor: how to finance buildings which necessarily will not pay for themselves for many years, if at all. (The related question is as important: how to help people to house themselves rather than make them clients of the state.) Mr Wates has another book in him, and we need it. For the time being, though, this is an unexpectedly exciting version of the muddles of the past. The language of thrillers applies to it: it was, indeed, hard to put down. So was Tolmers Square.

Richard North

Houses for London

The Battle for Tolmers Square. By Nick Wates. Routledge £2.95

Tolmers Square is one of those rundown, 19th-century, terraced rectangles which have been the centre of planning debate and financial wrangle for the last 20 years. Nick Wates's book is an impassioned account of the decline of the place, in which he has squatted and taken a leading part in community activity (as well as a First in architecture, planning, building and environmental studies might). It is a decline which began when the Victorians blasted their railways into the heart of London, to the nearby Euston, taking acres of working-class housing land for track and stations.

As the area became disreputable (and stations are notorious for attracting bad hats), it held charms only for the poor. However, it remained the centre of a thriving community, and still has, famously, Asian restaurants and army surplus stores. In the office building boom of the Sixties, Joe Levy and his Stock Conversion, the property development company, hoping to repeat their success at the Euston Centre (home of Capital Radio and Thames TV), began buying up land across the road, in Tolmers. By chance, they ran into fierce opposition in the formidable, slender form of Rose Gavin, whose Tolmers Square Tenants' Association was adamant that the world did not need more offices, and did need houses and flats. But offices produce higher rates than low rental housing, and councils have always found it impossible to undertake socially worthwhile projects without a firm income base. Besides, as the Sixties wore on, with Mr Levy and Stock Conversion continuing to dominate purchases in the area, it became clear that there were all sorts of deals which might be arranged, whereby the developer sold some of his land 'cheaply' to