AUG 1973 CAMPEN JOURNAL

"IF somebody could wave a magic wand and make this place what it was twenty years ago, I'd be the happiest woman alive," said 73-year-old Mrs Emily Dodd as she surveyed the sad delapidation that is now Tolmers Square.

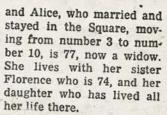
Mrs Dodds told me this week that she gets a sinking feeling in her stomach every time she thinks that because of redevelopment in the area she will have to leave the square that has been her home for 64 years, writes HOWARD HANNAH.

"I know I won't be really happy anywhere else, and I keep thinking that maybe some miracle will happen so that I can stay here for the

rest of my days," she says. She is one of the "oldtimers" of the Square, the long standing residents who are clinging to the remote hope that they won't have to move somewhere else when the square is developed.

The Palmer family came to the Square in 1916 -Jim, and his sisters Alice and Florence. Jim is 83 now,

Jim Palmer



Now all that is left for Mrs Dodds and the Palmers are memories of the once , beautiful tree-lined square, and the cats left behind by



residents who left as buildings in the square became

ings in the square became run down. "It was about 15 years ago that we all began to think we would have to move," says Mrs Dodds. "It was about then that they started allowing the build-ings to deteriorate." Mrs Dodds remembers' that when she was a little girl she went to the Congre-"It was a lovely place

then. There were big trees, and the branches used to hang over from beside the church. They almost touched

the houses. In 1924, the church, com-plete with its tower and two spires, was converted into a cinema — the Tolmer. "There were always plenty of people around then," Mrs Alice Rising told me. "It was supposed to be the cheapest cinema in London. That



sort of changed the charac-ter of the square, because before that we were off the aten track.

Mrs Dodds thinks that it was about 1929 when they took the tower and spires the church/cinema.

"At that time, the cinema was the big thing — they were just starting with the talkies, and families used

to go to the cinema week.

week. One by one over years, the features mer Square disap. The once beautiful with their balconies allowed to crumble. In March, 1972, cinema closed doc

1972 cinema closed down three months ago it duced to rubble. The ing which had stood p since 1776 was carted

rubble by the lorry load.

now a flat enclosure, now a flat enclosure, hich they plan to use as emporary car park. As she looks out of her t floor window, Mrs lice Rising can see for the time the houses oppo-no longer blocked from or by the old church. new by the old church.

Mrs Dodds can look across he square to number 17, house she moved into when she was nine. She



knows little about the talk cil chambers which will decide how long she can stay, or where she will will move.

She does know that she won't be able to end her days in the square that has been her world for 64 of her 73 years. But like Mrs Ris-ng, and her brother and sister Jim and Florence Palmer, she can't help hop-ing for a miracle.







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