

3 AUG 73

"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 "old-timers" 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



and Alice, who married and stayed in the Square, moving from number 3 to number 10, is 77, now a widow. She lives with her sister Florence who is 74, and her daughter who has lived all her life there.

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

# Oh for

residents who left as buildings 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 buildings to deteriorate."

Mrs Dodds remembers that when she was a little girl she went to the Congress. "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, complete 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

# a miracle in

sort of changed the character of the square, because before that we were off the beaten track.

Mrs Dodds thinks that it was about 1929 when they took the tower and spires off the church/cinema. "I think they were dangerous or something," she says.

"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.

One by one over years, the features of the square disappeared. The once beautiful buildings with their balconies allowed to crumble.

In March, 1972, the cinema closed down three months ago it was reduced to rubble. The building which had stood since 1776 was carted

away by the lorry load. The site on which it stood is now a flat enclosure, which they plan to use as a temporary car park.

As she looks out of her first floor window, Mrs Alice Rising can see for the first time the houses opposite, no longer blocked from view by the old church.

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

# Tolmers

knows little about the talk in board rooms and council chambers which will decide how long she can stay, or where she 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 Rising, and her brother and sister Jim and Florence Palmer, she can't help hoping for a miracle.



● Mrs Emily Dodds

# Square

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● Miss Florence Palmer (left) and Mrs Alice Rising



'If somebody could wave a magic wand and make this place what it was 30 years ago, I'd be the happiest woman alive!'