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 I.T. Volume 2

SHOWDOWN AT THE SUPERLOO

by Penny Reel



The Politics of Euston

A while back, Euston Station, understudying Olympia, featured a display of Volvo saloon cars. Utilising its vast, central floor space; well away from platforms, escalators, fags and mags stands, booking offices, snack dens and the foul Superloo; accompanied by almost mute orchestral renderings of 'Come Prima' and 'These Foolish Things', and attracting thin crowds of idle, pimp-white raincoated observers, these exhibitions have by now become a routine event.

Fruit juice, the Welsh Tourist Board, childrens' art, famous press photographs and, close to home, 'Electric Scots'—the new five-hour special journey to Glasgow from Euston—these have all, in their turn, graced the station and added a dimension of fantasy to the bombarded transients that haunt the depressing terminal.

The Volvo display afforded a most singular spectacle. Perusers would, to a person self-conscious, first gaze at these reassuring confirmations of success and, growing emphatically bolder, peer with intensity at the interior upholstery. Finally, tracing a light finger along the crimson and chrome bodywork. A few, the very study of earnest sanity, asking concerned questions of the model sales clerk and coming away with a clutch of glossy literature, neatly sheafed.

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It made a welcome variation from the unseating circus of Watergate, however; from overpriced ham rolls, a speciality of the establishment, from late trains and tiresome hustlers. From the trepidation so characteristic of those days, when the man behind in the ticket queue might be carrying a means of explosion in his Humpty Dumpty carrier bag. Then it was a comfort to consider these virgin Volvos; the very epitome of progress and restrained design. Happy sublimation.

There were Volvos plastered with thick cotton wool, representative of a fall of snow that England, or more damningly North West London, would never see: Volvos with unlikely walnut dashboards and Volvos with *extra tread*.

I structured happy hours observing the various reactions and transactions this idiosyncratic exhibition engendered. No matter that the apathetic destitution of spirit attendant upon Crisis Britain was increased by the weather outside the station, or that the customary sprawl of hopeless alcoholic and the overlooked and forgotten flotsam of humanity continued to dominate the soul of the station. A-seeking warmth and comfort, companionship and ritual between its squeeze. And no matter that battles, more emotional than actual, were being fought daily outside its crystal walls. In Euston Station, the atmosphere is very much an exaltation of excellence; notwithstanding its shuffling bug-like community, oozing by. Doublethink, in the shape of continental cars, provide the means of escape from everyday, drear, reality.

A Glass Village

In the surrounding streets, however, the scenario of struggle continues up-front. Beyond and about this offensive glass village, disagreeable reminders of impoverished life encroach—a paean to Britain's own credibility gap. There is an equal, if imbalance, of meanness about the district of Euston, with its glut of Bed & Breakfast hovels, expensive retreats for weary Northerners, its bomb sites from the War, small businesses and impertinent offices. With its daily parade of ovine typists clipping across pavements and sour stationery slaves shuffling pieces of paper from desk to folder to file to desk. And with the Babel-like Euston Tower regarding all—a huge paternal threat.

Euston is in the throes of increased social status and, concurrent with this, amplified depersonalisation. For, although it has always been, like that other notorious centre for motor car exhibitions, Earl's Court, a transient umbilicus, and especially so since the new Euston Tower was built, there remains a, diminishing, residential community. One more autonomous and self-aware since it was threatened with extinction early last year.

This community is mostly centred about Tolmer's Village, as the residential association has so named it. The Village comprises the east-side of Hampstead Road, as far up as North Gower Street, North Gower Street itself, Drummond Street, Euston Street and a few smaller streets besides. Colloquially, it has been called 'Little India' on account of the homes and businesses of a compact amalgam of Bangla Desh' families concentrated on the west-side of the station, influencing the character and much of the politics of the area.

That Cumberland Market, west of Hampstead Road, and Somers Town, east of Euston Station, are not favoured with similar communities is due to the barbarity of re-development. The resident population of Cumberland Market gave up the ghost to Euston Tower—the unacceptable face of Capital radio—when Big Joe Levy and his Stock Conversion and Investment Trust (SCINT) monopolisers blitzed the area, whilst Somers Town, east of the wall, long ago relinquished its refugees from 17th century France, the Huguenots, in favour of squat and bland council dwellings; already infamous in having produced one of the most rampant skinhead gangs of the late sixties, and extremist Arsenal supporters of the seventies.

Since re-development has so miserably destroyed these two, formerly colourful areas, I shall by-pass them and concentrate my attention on Tolmer's Village. An account that may not, if the property moguls currently vying for the area have any say, be applicable eighteen or less months from now. The examples of Cumberland Market and Somers Town speak for their unpleasant selves as to the conclusions we might reasonably expect, when the music's over and the light is gone.

Both Sides Now

Tolmer's Village, an improbably last bastion, is almost rural in contrast with Euston Road just around the corner. Were John Waddington & Co. currently designing the Monopoly board, they would hardly amalgamate Euston Road with the Angel and Pentonville Road. In every respect, except purely geographical, Euston Road has eclipsed its lowly associates on the board game and although its three stations, Kings Cross, St. Pancras and Euston still largely contribute to the general sleaziness of the thoroughfare, its property value has lately soared, an elevation shared with its newly-built property.

The last few years have seen the erection of a new library, the George Bernard Shaw theatre, (a wimpish tribute to wimp), a large gold-reflected superstructure, Euston Tower and Euston Station. These have, all, transformed the value of the road, if not its basic charac-

ter, from virtually nothing to quite a lot.

Its back streets, on the other hand, remain hidden and lost. Tolmer's Village is a relatively inexpensive place to live and has maintained character. Food-wise it is well catered for. There are, in these few streets, two dairies and four Indian grocery shops. Whilst two caffs and one old-fashioned dining house, complete with waitresses in black with white pinafores, and slightly up the scale, a kebab house and five Indian restaurants—all very good—compete for the custom of those who enjoy dining out.

At the junction of Drummond Street and Hampstead Road, Lawrence's Corner is renowned throughout England for its stock of army surplus gear and hard-wearing casual clothing. Next door, Mrs. Lawrence and her daughter run an unfashionable, but fascinatingly eclectic boutique, selling everything from denim to silk.

The area also hosts a number of good pubs, ranging from patriotic Irish, through every degree of Iricism in all their beauties, to the plushiest of all, replete with both juke box and colour TV. There is a newsagent in the area, an optician, two betting shops (one opposite the pub with the colour TV—very handy), a mini-cab firm with a white Rolls Royce for hire, one shop specialising in curry powders of diverse concentration and unusual recipe for varying palates and another specialising in sticky Indian confectionery. There are two letterpress printers, two GPs and one cigarette machine further implementing the amenities of the area.

Buildings include a hostel for single ladies—much given over to those in the nursing profession—an establishment devoted to the various practices and pastimes of the Transport and General Workers Union and another the seat of the National Union of Mineworkers. There is a business celebrating African crafts, a museum of British Rail ephemera and a Moslem church. Lena Jeger is the, unchallenged, Labour MP for the area.

On the other hand, there is no launderette, the favourite gripe of the villagers, and a real inconvenience. Neither is there anywhere for the local children to amuse themselves out of doors; although a suitable space razed and cleared by the owners—the site of the late and laudingly lamented Tolmer's Cinema—in Tolmer's Square, has been enclosed, empty, by them. Another common complaint centres around the heavy, industrial work that takes place there nocturnally. Some of the drivers of a local transport company were, until recently, in the habit of leaving their lorries parked upon the pavements in narrow North Gower Street, whilst the drivers themselves kipped in the cab. And a magazine warehouse in tiny Euston Street attends a convoy of lorries from 10pm every night until 5.30 the following afternoon.

These are frustrations, if not atypical, then at least similar, of any community anywhere. What suddenly united everybody living in the area was seen as a grave injustice by all, and spotlighted publicly everywhere from propaganda in the modest, radical *Camden Tenant*, to *Time Out*, established and reliable, who ran a feature on the issue and gave it regular news coverage and *The Observer*, who covered it widely and helped explode to ignorant Camden Borough Council—ready to grant liberal office re-development concessions to Stock Conversion—the absurdity of the situation and the dismay of the tenants, was this re-development scheme itself. The media has been very down on Landlordism in the last few years. The Landlord, never a popular figure, has not been so reviled since Dickens. And while the Labour government has been so vague over the issue of property, currently organising their new election campaign under the shade of the Land Deal fiasco, it will be interesting to see just how far they can be trusted to acquiesce to the wishes of the people of this country for a more just redistribution of land. If they stick around.

Enter the Villain

Joe Levy is the accredited villain of the piece. Camden Council, with its two, equally appeasing, faces holds the cards. No heroes have yet emerged.

Mr. Levy, a director of Stock Conversion and Investment Trust, is the man responsible for enclosing Tolmer's Square and he stands to make a large deal of money from re-development. Consequently Mr. Levy and SCINT have come in for some very indifferent press. Chris Booker in *Private Eye*, describing the adventure as an 'amusing bonanza' was the first person to instance Levy's activities. In February of 1973, he wrote: 'Since 1962 (using his holdings in Tolmer's Square as a bargaining counter) Mr. Levy has been trying to make a deal with the local council, who want comprehensive re-development for housing over the whole area. Camden can't afford the money to buy the land by compulsory purchase. But in return for planning permission to build a large office block, Mr. Levy might be able to help them. The plan (currently before the GLC for observation) is that Mr. Levy should be allowed to build somewhere in the region of 450,000 sq.ft. of offices on 1½ acres of partly-council owned land on the Euston Road—i.e. a vast block, at the incredible ratio of 8 to 1, which could rise to 400 ft. In return for this amusing bonanza, Mr. Levy is to help Camden Council by financing their compulsory purchase operation.'

Quite apart from Mr. Booker's revelations, Mr. Levy was immediately proposing, in the interim between the issue of death and its irrevocable conclusion, to erect a car park on the Tolmer's Cinema site (despite the childish denials of both SCINT and Camden Borough Council, in the shape of honourable Ivor Walker, ever

since it became generally known).

*SCINT, actively Mr. Levy, had been buying up the property since 1962, when it was worth £50,000 per acre, and stood to make a profit of up to £20 million on the whole transaction. Booker, and another journalist, Bennie Grey, decided to stop him. Forming a company, Claudius Properties Limited, they delivered a rival offer to the deputy town clerk of Camden Council who, after years of negotiation, were on the verge of signing Mr. Levy's deal. Briefly, the Claudius Plan, backed by City bankers, outlined a deal similar to Mr. Levy's but with all the profits being ploughed back into Camden; an estimated saving of £50 per Camden ratepayer.

Following the Claudius action, the Tolmer's Village Association (TVA) was formed and spearheaded by a group of young students or architectural design. Some of these had been active with the Covent Garden opposition to development and had grown very interested in the threatened decimation of Tolmer's Square. Furthermore, they had seen the issue as a means of promoting their new and growing ideas of what a community should represent. It would be interesting to know how constant they have remained to their original motives and whether these are still upheld today, one year later.

The first action of the TVA, quite apart from taking over a number of Mr. Levy's houses lying empty in Tolmer's Square, was to form an Ad-hoc Committee to file a petition stating that the residents of the village were 'concerned about the future of our area'. 'Attempts to obtain information from the borough have been unsuccessful', it then went on to say, adding, 'the rumour is that Tolmer's Square, where the cinema stood, is to be used as a car park. If this is true, we object.' We being the, virtually unanimous, opinion of the residents of the Village and many of its workers. Unity had been established.

In Which a Writ is Frivolously Issued

Unity was to squabble amongst itself, though; and I'll return to this in a minute. What initially checked the newly-discovered autonomy of the residents was Camden's community planning and resources committee who, last September, threw the Claudius proposal out and reconfirmed its previous two decisions in favour of Stock Conversion.

Another journalist living in Camden, the late Nicholas Tomalin, then served a writ on the local council claiming that the deal was illegal because it 'clashed with the interest and wants of the people in Camden'. While a large advertisement appeared in *The Hampstead & Highgate Express* demanding that Camden Council stop the Levy deal and begging signatures.

It was *The Hampstead & Highgate Express* that helped fan the issue in these ensuing weeks, publishing letters by Christopher Booker and Nick Wates—a TVA founder and lately employed in a full time capacity to the said Association, for whom he performs functions of both an administrative and managerial nature—on one side of the fence, and Labour councillor, Ivor Walker, on the other. Walker's statements, indignant and pompous, were inflammatory and turned opinion against him as a result. He dismissed Tomalin's 'frivolous issue of a writ' and then served one, himself, on the *Camden Tenant*, after they had cracked a joke at his expense. Mr. Walker was, it appears, invited to attend Mr. Levy's party at the Dorchester Hotel but declined. He attacked the 'nice political games organised by well-housed dogooders'—many of them living, on a meagre student grant, in ill-conceived squats—and declared 'I have lived in the slums, which is more than can be said by most of the gesticulators'. Truly, he cut a ridiculous figure.

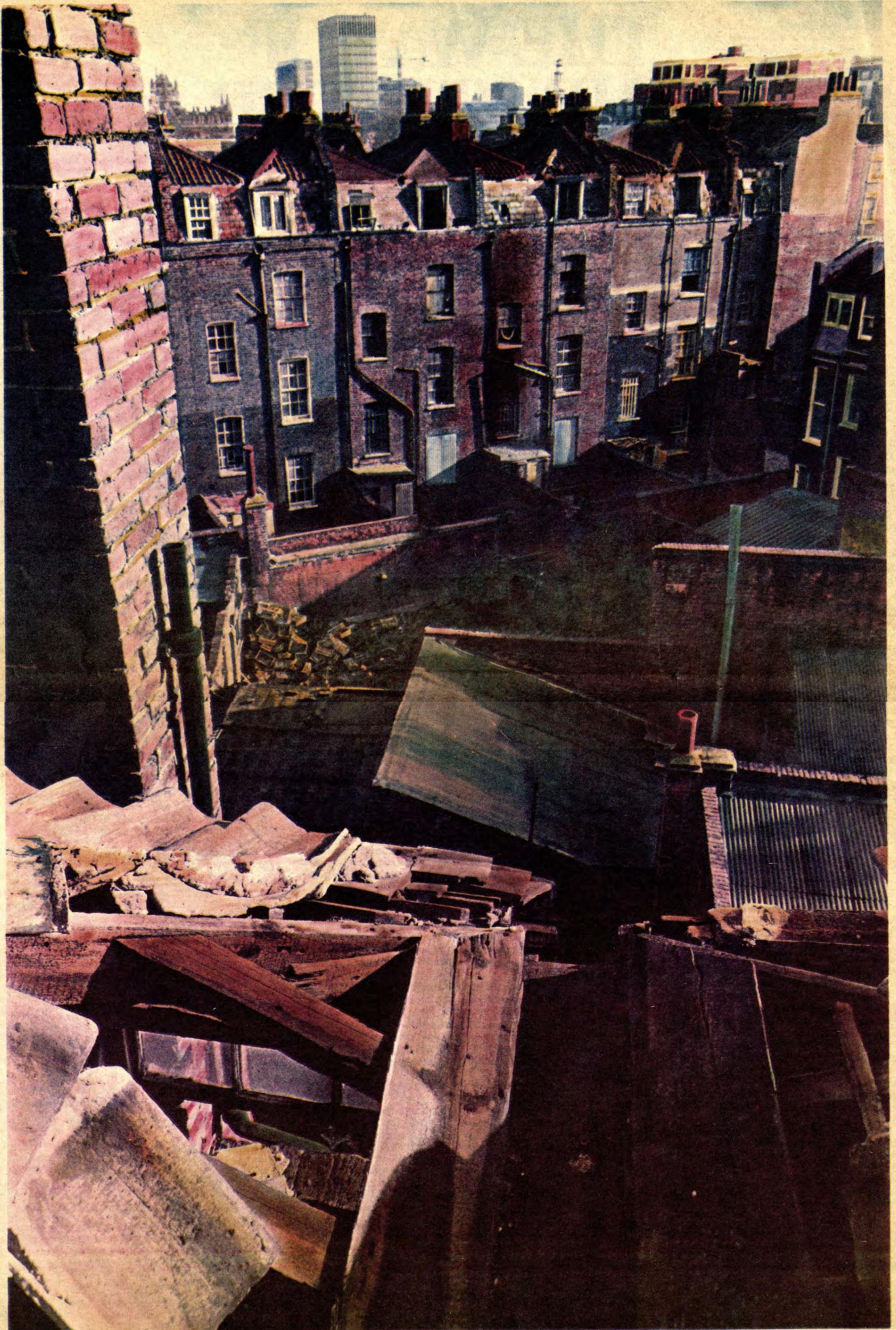
In the interim, though, the TVA won a small battle. By October, Camden Borough Council had deferred approval of the SCINT scheme.

Four days later, a building on the Hampstead Road collapsed. It fell in two minutes but nobody was hurt; an old caretaker living there, and entertaining a couple of friends, got safely away. Two policemen and a fireman were treated for gas poisoning and cuts after they had dragged at the rubble with their bare hands, to see whether anybody was buried underneath it. The building was owned by estate agents D.E. & J. Levy of 130 Jermyn Street; an address they share with Stock Conversion and Investment Trust.

The TVA called for an immediate inquiry into the collapse, stating that it was 'the most striking of a number of recent incidents which illustrate the appalling consequences of years of neglect in Tolmer's Square'. While their broadsheet, *Tolmer's News*, accused the agents of deliberately neglecting the property and allowing it to run down.

A surveyor of Mr. Levy, it later transpired, had been skulking about the house, the day previous to its collapse, and the previous morning builders of this same gentleman's direction had been on the premises to 'shore up a bulge in the front wall'. The implications were clear, and although it was never publicly expressed, feeling in the Village was high that it was the owners who were directly responsible for its collapse. However, both D.E. & J. Levy Estate Agents and SCINT refused to comment when approached.

Tolmer's News had only begun a month earlier and was issued free in the Village every fortnight. It had





further established the TVA in the community and attracted the support of the, normally indifferent, Indian sector. Some of the businesses in the area, for something more than purely mercenary ends, gave the Association small donations and the owner of a local second-hand furniture store gave his reasons for staying and wanting to stay, in a small article in the *Tolmer's News*.

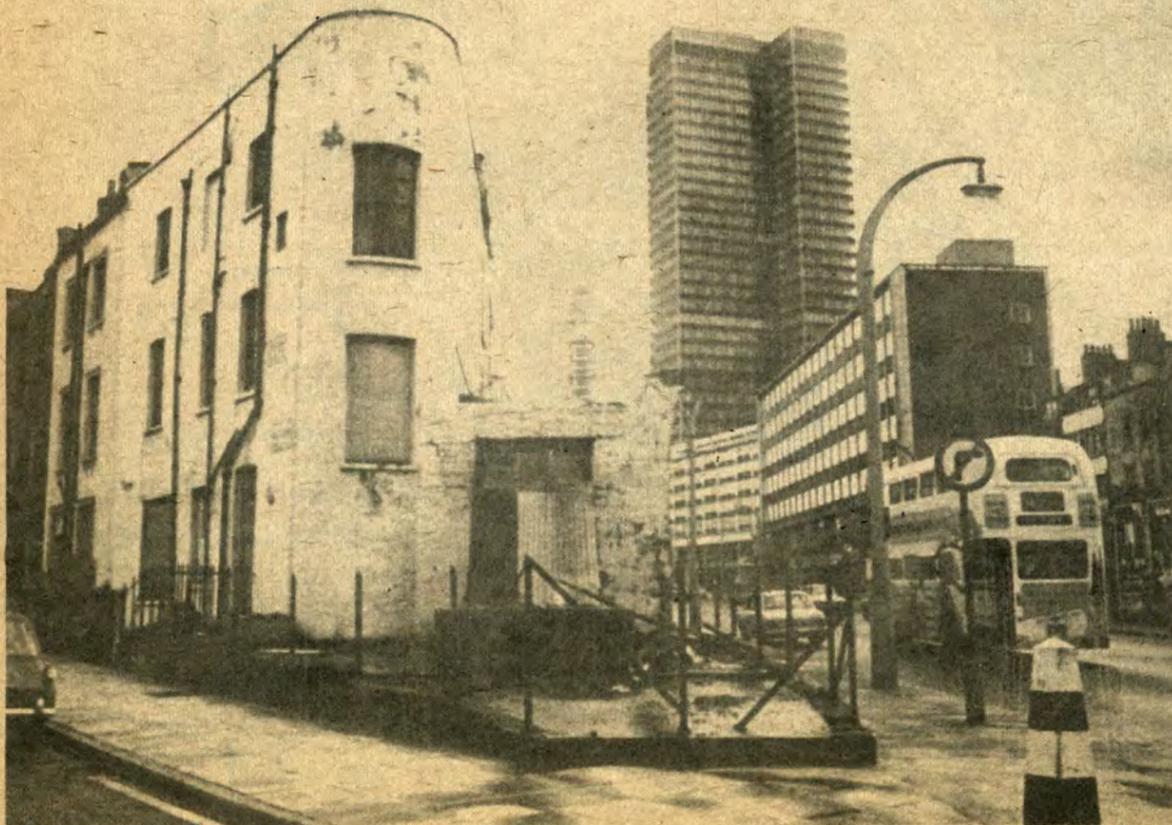
By that time, though, the Tolmer's Village Association, membership 200, seemed to be running out of steam. Attendances at their weekly meetings had gradually dwindled and their agenda began to take on a creeping personal grievance tenor. Some of the less radical members, particularly rent and ratepayers, feared an invasion by what they referred to as 'anarchist squatters' who would rape the area as mercilessly as Mr. Levy. This had happened in nearby Charrington Street and Kentish Town, with the result of alienating the residents from any future Tenant's Association.

In November the TVA attracted local attention once again by building a bonfire and throwing a party to celebrate the Guy Fawkes festivities. At the same time, they opened a shop at 102 Drummond Street, a former dairy, which they made their official headquarters and, a little later, adorned a rather grand old lamppost at the entrance to Tolmer's Square with brilliant carnival colours. Then nothing.

Wintertime Blues

Throughout the winter, when everywhere the prospects of anarchy versus totalitarianism were being weighed and discussed, the TVA went suddenly silent. Disappeared underground.

Two days every normal working week, the normal life of the area vanished, people entered and left dimmed



offices, ate their meals and placed their bets by candlelight. Mayells, the magazine wholesalers, began to get the trashcans purloined by toilet paper seekers, while, in the Capri cafe, straw men sipped hot tangerine tea and chewed toast. Architects may come and architects may go and never change your point of view. The blues hung, fog-like, over the whole of Euston and nowhere was this more manifest than in the pseudo-paradise station, where even the fresh mountain air of Wales, freely explained on the display stands, were less a haven for escapism than they were a reminder of the coal mines beneath them.

Spring declared peace. With the first suggestion of sun, the whole world stopped going bloody mad, allaying the *Mirror's* fears, and everybody got back to the wholly stimulating business of being alive. The TVA organised a jumble sale and gained more friends; Levy and Walker became no more than yesterday's smoke and 102 Drummond Street, taking its cue, no doubt, from Euston Station, held an exhibition of its own. And not a Volvo in sight.

The exhibition was an organisational success. Huge photographs, detailing every feature of the Village, encircled the walls, many of the residents' portraits also adorned the exhibition, made up into so many leaves of a huge family tree. Concise, well-designed plans suggesting various transformations, each with easy to understand captions, were presented to everyone for the first time. A clover and a rose, beautifully painted in green and red, were painted on to the window of the shop. And everyone dashed about pasting up flyposters and distributing leaflets. Its most remarkable and astonishing feat was to change the very reputation of the TVA from that of apathetic dryness to bright togetherness.

Other changes, though, were less than welcome. It had long been felt that it would be a blow for the good,

were the enclosed site of Tolmer's Square occupied and utilised. There had been some very interesting proposals concerning the use to which the area could be put, at the TVA exhibition. But when the TVA were approached with a view to instigating these, they backed down. Apparently, they were in the process of mollifying Mr. Levy, whose empty houses in Tolmer's Square they presently occupied.

It then transpired that the TVA had come to an agreement with Mr. Levy. *They were to be allowed to stay, unmolested for the time, in Mr. Levy's houses as long as they promised not to implement any further squats in Mr. Levy's houses and ensure that no other group squatted in Mr. Levy's empty fucking houses.*

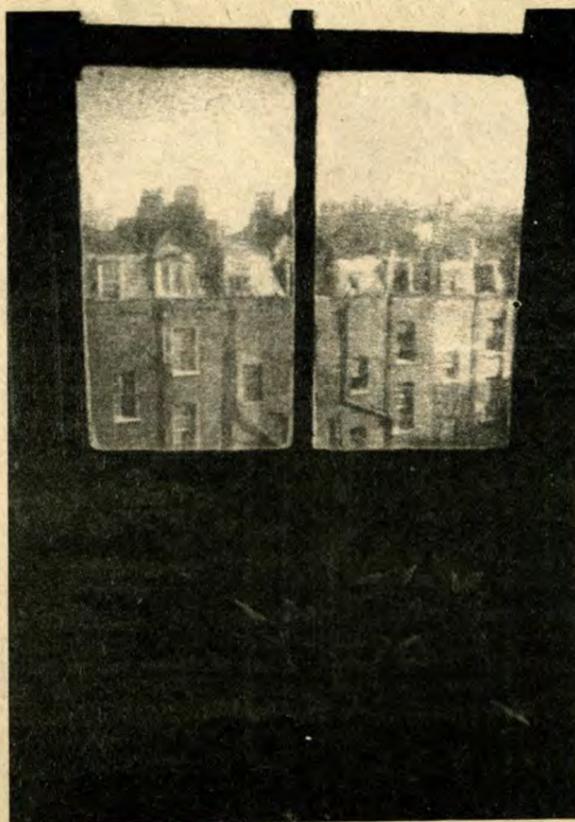
This was a low blow. Whereas previously, anybody wishing to squat had had free option, now the TVA were setting themselves up as an effective police force for Mr. Levy. Yes sir! The campaign was bowing down at the altar of compromise and, like Fleetwood Mac of yesteryear, the Tolmer's Village Association had SOLD OUT.

What Becomes Of The Broken Hearted?

Naturally, the TVA could justify this change of heart. Mr. Wates, working hard and long for the Association, out of the generosity of the Rowntree Trust who gave them a grant, put the point across that nobody even thought about squatting in the area until they made a public stink about it, which may have been true, but he also made the mistake of rejecting certain prospective squatters on grounds of unsuitability; his own criteria.

Meanwhile they were soliciting further financial help from CLAP—Community Levy (not Joe) for Alternative Projects—which had pledged to support struggling projects in Britain 'too unusual, imaginative, alternative or revolutionary to get money from the regular sources'—thus:

'Tolmer's Village Assn. is preparing a scheme for the development of the Tolmer's Square area. It will be based on the interests of the local community and should show how to break the hold of developers over local authorities and that the profits of development can be returned to the community... Among the possibilities are: that a major part of the site be leased back to a local association comprised of all the people who live in the area... and the sale of certain parts for office development by a



non-profit-making development company to provide a subsidy for purchase of the site.'

The local association referred to was of course the TVA, increasingly showing all the manifestations of elitism. It appeared that even if Camden agreed to the TVA scheme, it would once again be the decision of just a handful; not representative of everybody's demands. This was a sour period.

Tolmer's News appeared again. Shoddily designed but more approachable, less formal, than of yore. Plans for a Tolmer's Square club, providing bingo for the elderly and a discotheque for the young, long in the air, were shelved. Yet it wasn't all debit, the TVA were

pledging support for and helping barricade 220 Camden High Street against Mr. Levy's threatened eviction.

Sumer is Icumen In

Within the last month, the TVA appears to have rejected its straightening out process and is once again looking forward. A garden has been built in Drummond Street, next to the TVA shop, flowers have been planted and the Association is currently making up its mind between a children's playground and a beauty spot for the site. It is the only acknowledgement that greenery still exists in this whole wasteland of corrugated iron and rundown dwellings.

Furthermore, they are organising a summer festival to take place at the end of May. The usual community get-together. Street theatre, poets, rock and roll bands, ice cream and toffee apples, maybe even a tug of war between the Metropolitan Police and the Kentish Town Horrors.

Hopes are running high that Tolmer's Square will be liberated for the festival, but the TVA are still very cagey on this subject and refuse to sanction any possible plans for its occupation. Clearly it remains to be seen whether or not the Association will relent to internal pressure or finally illustrate their impotence for good. Any way, it will be taken at this time.

And while the Association struggles to assume an identity, oscillating between opinion like the American public, Levy meanwhile has turned nasty. He served an eviction order on 220 Camden High Street, and enlisted the help of 100 police to carry it through. Underneath the tension, it is assumed that the people from 220 Camden High might be coming to Tolmer's Square to live.

Sumer is icumen in. I shall be festival-bound in the grime of tiny Tolmer's come the end of the month. Trust you'll be there too. Even while I argue with many aspects of the TVA I wish them every luck in their proposed aims. As the *Camden Tenant* so succinctly put it. 'We all live in Tolmer's Square.'

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1953: BILLY WARD & THE DOMINOES - The Bells (5).

1954: SHIRLEY GUNTER & THE QUEENS - Oop Shoop (6), THE MIDNIGHTERS - Annie Had A Baby (5), THE PLATTERS - Only You (5), THE ROBBINS - Key To My Heart (6), MARVIN & JOHNNY - Cherry Pie (6).

1955: THE JACKS - Why Don't You Write Me (6), ETTA JAMES & THE PEACHES - Roll With Me Henry (6), OTIS WILLIAMS & THE CHARMS - Two Hearts (5), YOUNG JESSIE - Mary Lou (6).

1956: THE TEEN QUEENS - Eddie My Love (6), BILL DOGGETT - Honky Tonk (5), JESSE BELVIN - Goodnight My Love (6), OTIS WILLIAMS & THE CHARMS - Ivory Tower (5), JIMMY BEASLEY - My Happiness (6), YOUNG JESSIE - Hit, Git & Split (6), JOHNNY 'GUITAR' WATSON - Reuben (6).

1957: THE 'S' ROYALES - Think (5), JODIE SANDS - With All My Heart (7), THE CADETS - Love Bandit (6), DON COLE - Snake Eyed Mama (6).

1958: CONWAY TWITTY - It's Only Make Believe (4), FRANKIE AVALON - De De Dinah (7), JESSE JAMES - Red Hot Rockin' Blues (6), LEE ANDREWS & THE HEARTS - Tear Drops (7), BILL DOGGETT - Floyd's Guitar Blues (5).

1959: THE IMPALAS - Sorry (4), CONWAY TWITTY - Hey! Little Lucy (4), FRANKIE AVALON - Why - Venus - Bobby Sox To Stockings (7), FABIAN - Hound Dog Man - Turn Me Loose - Tiger - I'm A Man (7), RITCHIE VALENS - La Bamba (7), LITTLE WILLIE JOHN - Leave My Kitten Alone (5).

1960: JIMMY JONES - Handy Man (4), MARK DANNING - Teen Angel (4), JOHNNY TILLOTSON - Poetry In Motion (4), JOHNNY FERGUSON - Angela Jones (4), HANK BALLARD & THE MIDNIGHTERS - The Twist (5).

1961: BOBBY LEWIS - Tossin' & Turnin' (5), THE CAPRI'S - There's A Moon (0).

1962: JOHNNY CRAWFORD - Cindy's Birthday (7), CLAUDINE CLARK - Party Lights (7).

1965: THE RIGHTEOUS BROTHERS - Unchained Melody (4).

1966: SANDY POSEY - Born A Woman (4), THE GENTRYS - Everyday I Have To Cry (4), THE RIGHTEOUS BROTHERS - Soul & Inspiration (4), SAM THE SHAM & THE PHAROAHS - Little Red Riding Hood (4), BOBBY FULLER FOUR - I Fought The Law (7).

1967: LOWELL FULSOM - Tramp (6), SANDY POSEY - I Take It Back (4), JANIS IAN - Society's Child (4), THE HOMBRES - Let It (All Hang) Out (4).

1968: FRIEND AND LOVER - Reach Out of The Darkness (7).

1969: BILL DEAL AND THE RHONDELS - I've Been Hurt (4).

Sleeves are fully annotated with personnel, biogs., chart positions, photos and other useful information. Still available: Carats, Vol. 3: MGM Smash Hits 2315 136



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