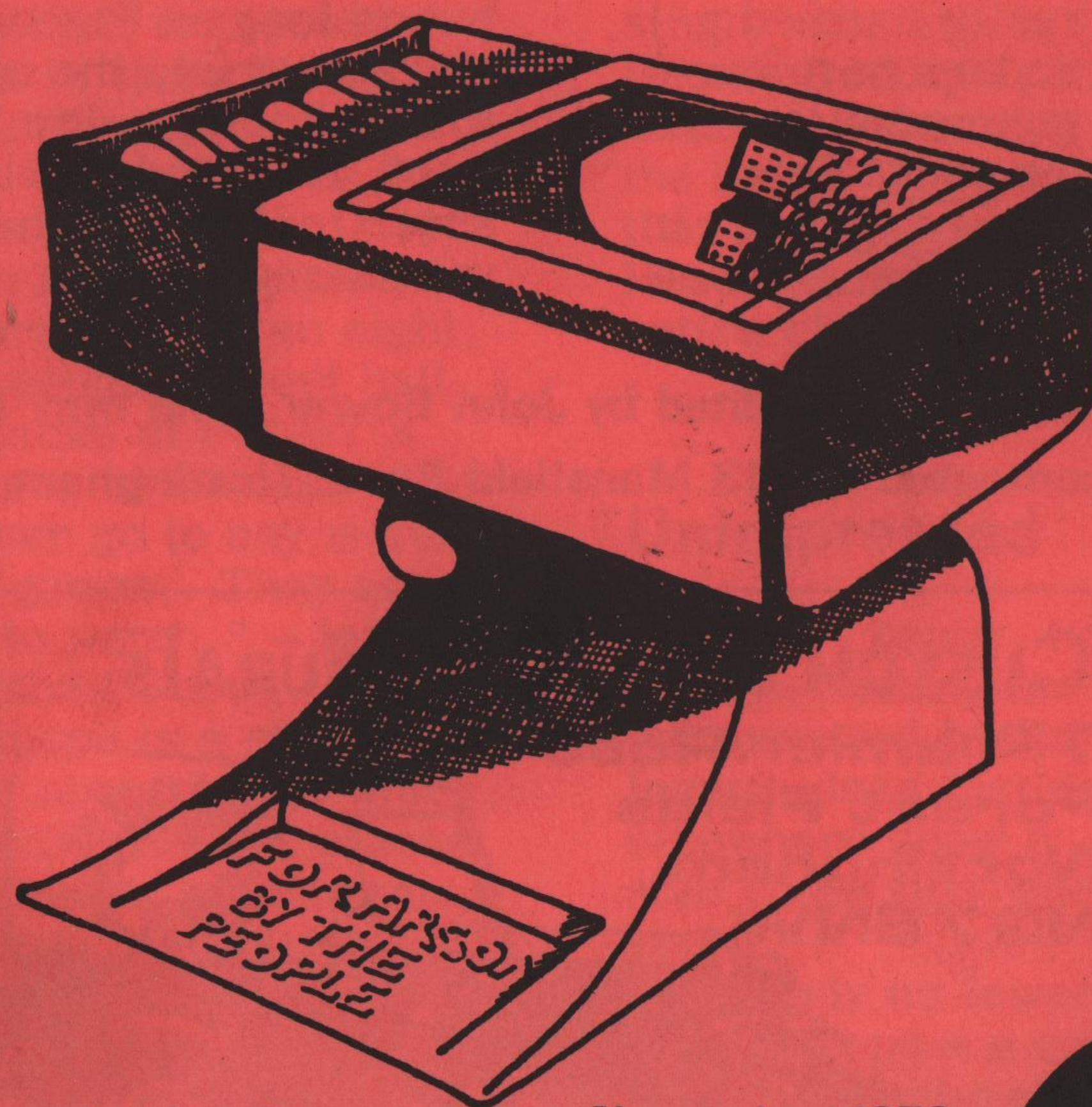




PIGEON POST

Has the fire gone out?



Number 1

November 1979

Nottingham Edition

10p

Introduction

APPROPRIATELY, the week that sees the birth of the new technological Times also sees the first issue of Pigeon Post. If the Times points the way forward, Pigeon Post is a definite step back.

Although we cannot claim that during its production no finger actually touched a button, readers have our absolute guarantee that this magazine is completely untouched by computer. In fact, much of what you see

before you is entirely hand-produced.

Nor do we have the backing of a wealthy international corporation. Pigeon Post is a multi-hundred pence operation.

The day of the carrier pigeon may be gone - though with the deepening energy crisis who can be sure? - but as long as Pigeon Post stays in print, the age of low technology, low investment, low productivity and sheer inefficiency has not yet passed.

Pigeon Post is edited by John Bower, who may be contacted via 33 Mansfield Road, Nottingham.

CUSTOM DESIGN & MURALS.

7 Premier Road
Forest Fields
Nottingham
NG7 6NW

0602
609087



HAS THE FIRE GONE OUT?

A LOW-KEY sort of place, Nottingham, easily embarrassed by anything too grand or successful, fond of grumbling about anything that costs money, not over keen to dwell on its own virtues, happiest of all when pulling itself to pieces.

There is masochistic relish in the way it gloats over its crime figures (the worst in Britain, or is it Western Europe?), panics at the prospect of an eight million pound concert hall, or nit-picks at Forest's recent run of success ("We will never go to any more Forest games. They are so boring to watch." - letter in the Football Post).

And there is a strange modesty about things which more self-confident places would trumpet ad nauseam. Think what most cities would make of Robin Hood. True, bright ideas do surface from time to time for neon-lit "Welcome to Robin Hood City" signs at the city boundary or mass-marketing "I Maid Marian" t-shirts and Robin

Hood hats.

But the surprising thing is how few Robin Hood Laundromats, Maid Marian Filling Stations and Friar Tuck Inns there are. Haworth probably has more Brontë businesses on its single main street (the Brontë Boutique, the Heathcliffe Hairdressing Salon, the Emily Tea Rooms etc.) than Nottingham has Robin Hood businesses in the entire city.

Unimpressed

Times change, however. Though Nottingham remains unimpressed by its famous legend, less fastidious folk elsewhere know an exploitable commodity when they see it.

Already no fewer than two rival groups - a company called Adventureland Ltd, led by Mr Wieslaw Kliszewicz (a native of Nottingham), and a consortium organised by Notts. County Council - are

hoping to set up giant Robin Hood "theme parks" in the north of the county somewhere near Mansfield Woodhouse.

Mr Kliszewicz is prepared to spend at least three million pounds, while the county council hopes to raise ten to twenty millions by persuading large companies ("household names") to invest in its scheme.

Theme parks are new to this country. The most famous is Disney World in Florida - and Mr Kliszewicz has promised something comparable.

Centre piece

The centre piece would be an authentic medieval castle with armoury, dungeons, torture chamber, banqueting hall (medieval banquets evenings only) and the headquarters of a children's "Outlaws' Club". Outside would be a reproduction medieval village with peasants' huts, execution blocks, gallows, stocks, pillories and ducking stools.

Visitors would be invited to draw a longbow or stand in the pillory and be pelted with rotten vegetables. Nearby would be an "interpretation" of Robin Hood's

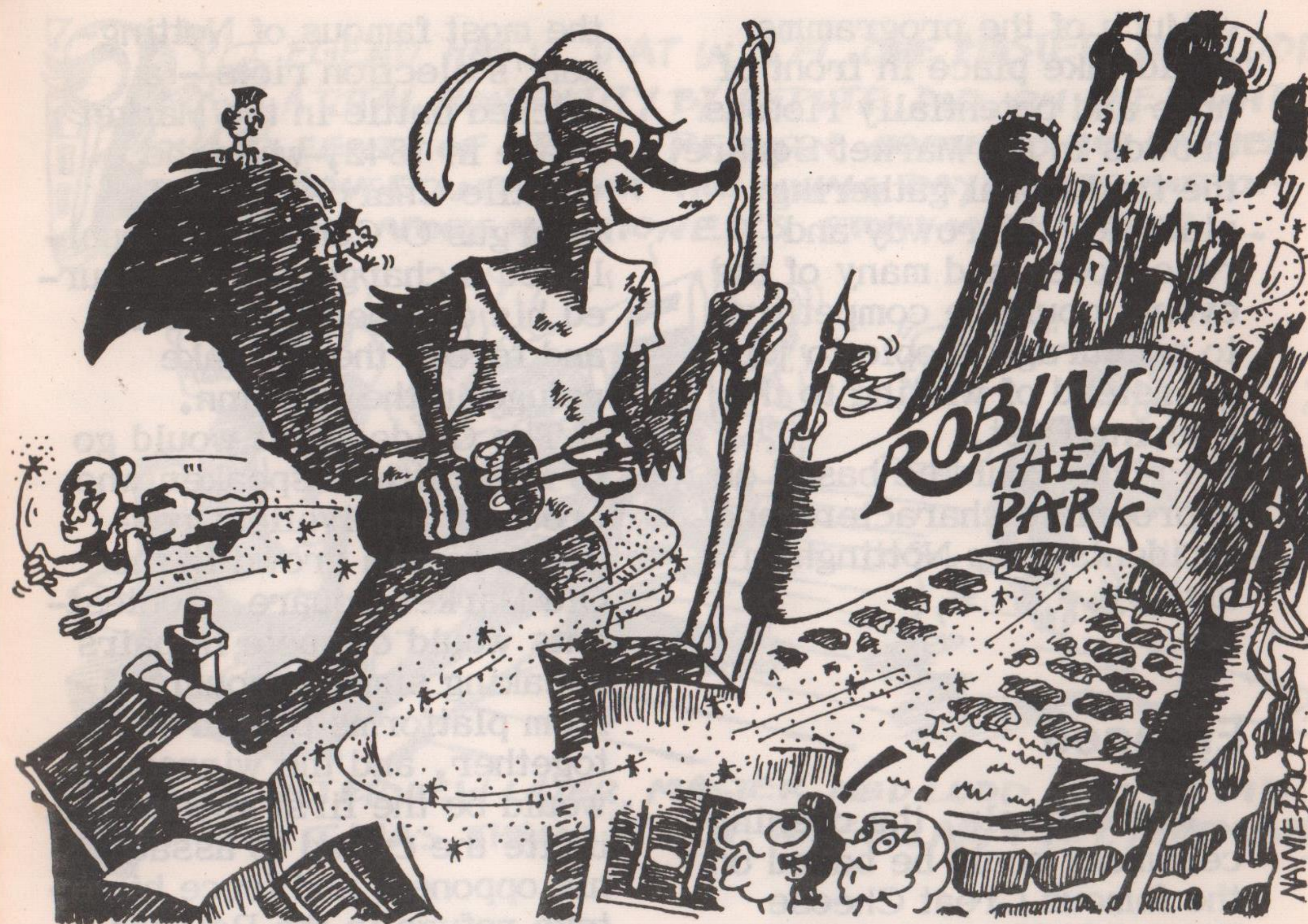
legendary camp. Amenities would range from a cafeteria and a bureau de change to a motel and a caravan park. Mr Kliszewicz hopes that visitors would "leave the modern world behind and enter a land where fantasies are realised".

But, harmless though this seems, we are living at a time of economic restraint. Can the citizens of Nottingham afford to see money invested elsewhere in the county to exploit a legend many of whose key episodes take place in their own city, and which relies heavily for dramatic effect on the wickedness of their own Sheriff?

Unfortunately, short of turning the whole city into an urban theme park (and many would welcome the chance to replace the castle with something older), it would be difficult to compete directly with this sort of thing.

However, where legendary and semi-legendary figures are concerned, the city has more strings to its bow than Robin Hood - Bendigo, Feargus O'Connor, the Luddites and the Nottingham Lambs, for example.

Here, perhaps, could be the makings of a theme, if not for a park, at least for an imaginative tourist promotion scheme which house-



hold names might be persuaded to invest in.

For these heroes of Nottingham's not-so-distant past do have something in common: in one way or another, they were all at odds with the establishment. Bendigo and O'Connor were imprisoned, the Luddites (those the authorities could catch) were hanged or transported, and the Lambs (the Nottingham mob) were always at hand to make trouble whenever they could.

In fact, if Nottingham has a personality and a tradition, it is this rather than the

romantic and unhistorical capers of Robin Hood. This is the robust ancestor of all that grumbling and self-detraction which drizzles from local radio 'phone-ins and the letter columns of the local press (a sort of ingrowing toenail of the civic psyche).

So why not stage a festival which attracts visitors to spend their money in the city and at the same time revives that boisterous and independent spirit so abundant in our forebears but dwindled now into little more than a verbal tic?

Much of the programme could take place in front of huge and potentially riotous crowds in the Market Square, the traditional gathering place for the rowdy and rebellious, and many of the events could be competitive to encourage people to join in instead of writing to the Evening Post.

Prizes could be based on appropriate characters and incidents from Nottingham's history.

Enraged

For example, the opening ceremony could be based on the famous Great Cheese Riot of 1766, when a mob enraged by high prices bowl-ed cheeses down Wheeler Gate and Peck Lane and knocked over the Mayor, who was trying to restore order.

If the current Lord Mayor were sporting enough to offer himself as a target, the festival could open with a skittles contest. There would be prizes for everyone who knocked him down, and a special award for the highest number of direct hits.

There could be a number of other trophies. A Feargus O'Connor Golden Fist, for example, could be based on

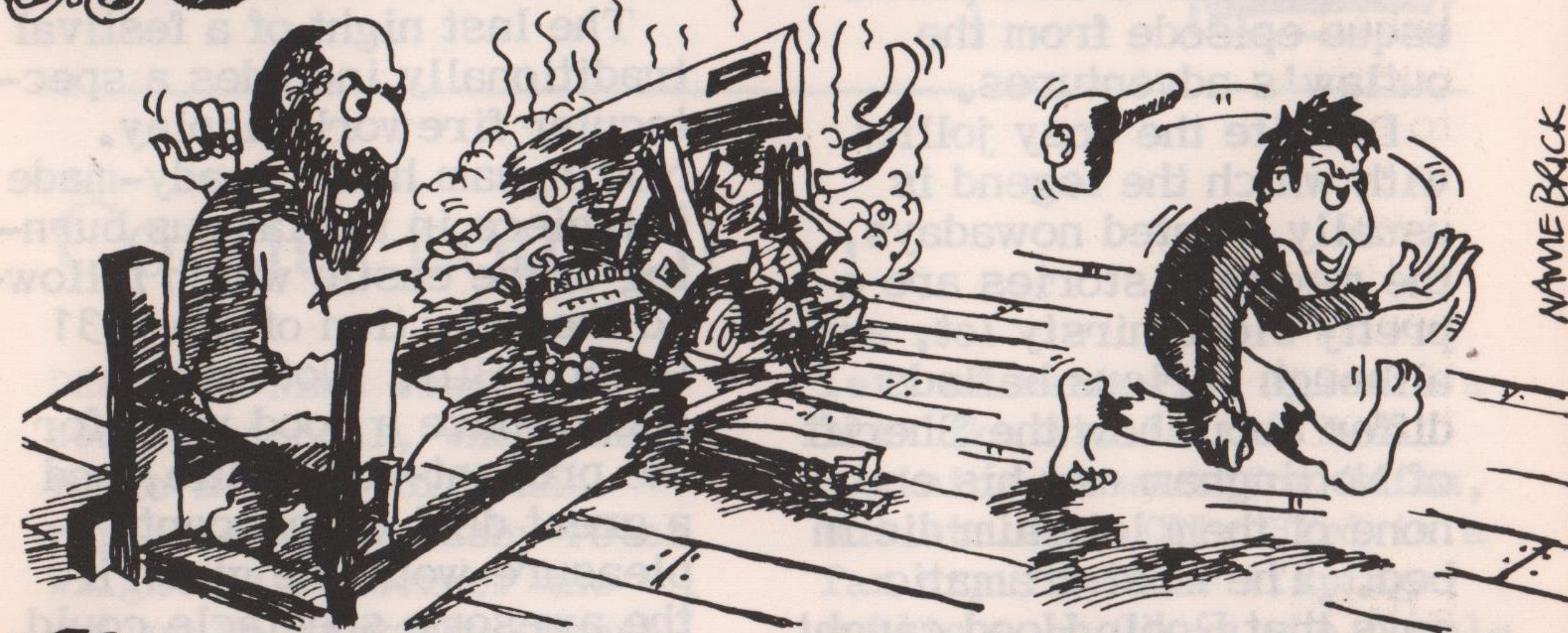
the most famous of Nottingham's election riots - a pitched battle in the Market Place in 1842, when the volatile Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor personally led a charge which captured his opponents' platform and forced them to take refuge in the Bell Inn.

The Golden Fist would go to the political speaker who aroused the liveliest response from a crowd in the Old Market Square. Contestants would compete in pairs speaking simultaneously from platforms placed close together, and the winner would be the first speaker to incite the crowd to assault his opponent and force him to take refuge in the Bell Inn.

There could be a Ned Lud Hammer, named after the weapon used by the Luddites to smash the stocking frames of employers who exploited their workers or damaged the trade by producing inferior goods. (In Yorkshire, the hammers were known as "Enochs", after Enoch Taylor of Marsden, near Huddersfield, who made both hammers and machines, giving rise to the Luddite cry, "Enoch made them, Enoch shall break them.")

The Hammer would be awarded to the contestant with the best scheme for

LEGEND HAS IT THAT IN 1779, ONE MASTER NED LUDD, A TOTAL NONENTITY BY REPUTE, DID, ON THE EIGHTEENTH OF APRIL, RETURN HOME TO HIS FATHER'S HOUSE AND BEAT THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS OUT OF THE AFOREMENTIONED'S STOCKING FRAME....



IN AN INTERVIEW LATER, MASTER NED LUDD SAID HE DID IT 'COS IT WAS THERE!!' (C.F. W.C.SELLAR + R.J. YEATMAN)

obstructing the tide of progress, such as knocking down the Broad Marsh Centre, or turning Concorde into something more useful like lumps of scrap metal.

And there could be a Bendigo Belt, given to the most conspicuously reformed drunkard. The story of Bendigo is well-known. Bare-knuckle champion of England and all-round sportsman, he later became a champion drinker too and was sent to the House of Correction twenty-eight times for being drunk and disorderly. Then, at the

age of sixty-one, he was unexpectedly converted and joined the Ebenezer Lodge of Good Templars.

Psychologically, his new life was not so different from his old, however, the Church Militant being in Bendigo's eyes more of a Church Pugilistic, and he was quite likely if faced with a rowdy audience to leap down from the platform and employ some of his old skills in the service of his new master.

The Bendigo Belt would go, therefore, to the reformed sinner who managed most successfully to confuse new

life and old ("Hello, sinner. Want a divine time?" etc.).

It would be a pity to miss out Robin Hood completely, so the closing ceremony could be based on a picturesque episode from the outlaw's adventures.

Despite the cosy jollity with which the legend is usually treated nowadays, the medieval stories are a pretty bloodthirsty lot, and although various ballads differ about how the Sheriff of Nottingham met his end, none of them lets him die in bed. The most dramatic says that Robin Hood caught up with him in the streets of Nottingham and, after putting an arrow through him, chopped off his head just to make sure.

Symbolic

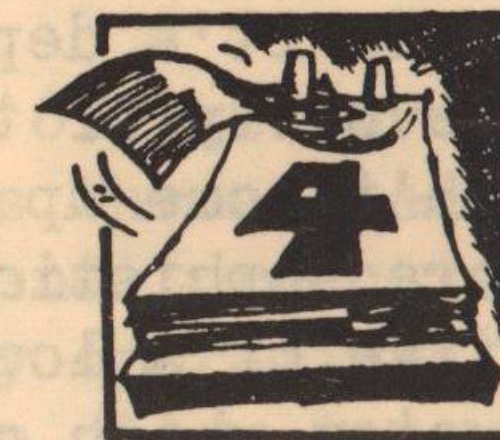
What better way to end a festival than ceremonially decapitating the Sheriff of Nottingham? Procedure could be varied depending on how the Sheriff had behaved in his year of office. If he had not ground down too many peasants and had given most of his money to the poor, the ceremony could be purely symbolic. But black marks would obviously go to a

recent Sheriff who landed in court after a fight with some old-age pensioners who made rude remarks about ratepayers' money as he got out of the civic Rolls Royce.

The last night of a festival traditionally includes a spectacular firework display. Nottingham has a ready-made set-piece in the famous burning of the castle which followed the rejection of the 1831 Reform Bill. Not many people have a good word for the present-day castle, and a great deal of innocent pleasure would be given if the awesome spectacle could be repeated:

"Volumes of flame issued from all the windows of the building; the dun-coloured smoke rose mist-like in rolling masses, amongst the pelting rain; showers of sparks were falling in all directions; the roofs were dissolving in streams of molten lead; on the terraces and walls men might be descried by the light of the fire, hurrying to and fro, like restless spirits at some infernal incantation, while the blazing Castle glared on the atmosphere from its rocky steep, amidst the darkness of the night, as a tremendous sacrifice to the demon of anarchy and crime."

FOUR WEEKS



County council

DRAMATIC NEWS from the county council, where rough, tough Herbert Bird has replaced wishy-washy Peter Wright as leader of the ruling Conservative group. Clearly, this is symptomatic of something - but what? Punk rules O.K.?

But what's a nice party like the Conservative Party doing with a wild bird like Herbert?

Sheer funk is the most likely answer. Shattered at the cuts demanded by the headmistress in Downing Street (remember, this is the group that already prided itself on "good housekeeping" - i.e. cuts), appalled at what this might mean at the elections in eighteen months' time, the party has decided that Herbert is the man to go into the jungle with.

In the flush of success, Cllr Bird described himself as "progressive, somewhat

left of centre". This is a bit like Attila the Hun claiming to work for Oxfam, but at least Cllr Bird is a far cry from the lispng public schoolboys who populate the present cabinet. More to his taste is a common-man bluntness, often indistinguishable from plain rudeness. (In Tory party terms, perhaps this is progress.)

Few doubt his basic ability, but he is inclined to get a little bit over-excited, especially when a long morning at County Hall is followed by an afternoon committee meeting. It is times like these which produce his more controversial pronouncements, such as his ludicrous "morals of a pig" attack on the county's teachers (though this also diverted attention very effectively from the dreadful hash the council had made of its inquiry into

the school at Sutton Centre).

So it's depressing that the party of the gentry can't come up with anyone more sophisticated - indicative of a local government system which only the elderly, the well-heeled, the unemployed and the mediocre can spare the time for.

Depressing too that Cllr Bird's election came only three days after the great "cuts" debate (broadcast live on local radio), where his main contributions were hitting the microphone and missing the point.

So what can the county expect over the next eighteen months, apart from a generally rough ride? Well, Cllr Bird is convinced "deep down" that there is "something radically wrong" with the bureaucracy at County Hall, though it will

Pollution

THAT INTERESTING chemical mixture which slithers under Trent Bridge should definitely be sweeter from now on. The Severn-Trent Water Authority has opened the first stage of an ingenious purification scheme on the Trent's filthiest tributary, the river Tame,

take him at least four months to find out what.

When he does, he expects to "concertina" committees and departments in the interests of efficiency - which, coincidentally, will also mean more central control.

Meanwhile, at least one group of people will be delighted at the turn events have taken - the shell-shocked Labour minority on Gedling Borough Council, where Cllr Bird will resign as council leader as soon as a replacement can be found. Rumour has it that so eager was the Labour group to get Herbert off its back that some members even offered to canvass on his behalf when he put up as parliamentary candidate at a recent general election.

at Lea Marston, near Coleshill in Warwickshire.

The Tame and the Trent (whose source is sometimes said to be a public convenience in Stoke-on-Trent) have the unusual property of becoming purer the closer they get to the sea, so polluted are their upper

reaches in the industrial west midlands. Only unpolluted tributaries like the Derwent make the Trent fishable by the time it gets to Nottingham.

The scheme, the first in Britain and only the second in the world, involves diverting the Tame through a series of worked-out gravel pits adapted as purification lakes. Slowing down the river flow allows suspended solids to sink to the bottom, from which they

are removed by a suction dredger.

Completion of the seven-lake system is threatened by public expenditure cuts, but when fully operational the first lake alone is expected to take out seventy per cent of the suspended solids.

The completed scheme will improve the Tame from a standard rating of class four (grossly polluted) to class two (doubtful quality).

Media

REGULAR READERS of the Evening Post will know that, despite pretensions of political neutrality, it has never been the local Labour Party's most fanatical supporter: With the Post's local monopoly, this ought to be bad news for Labour. Fortunately, readers are more aware of the Post's true colours than perhaps the management likes to think, and this healthy scepticism gives Labour an unofficial platform in the Post as the implied opposite of everything it says.

It was not surprising, however, that the 1973-76 Labour council launched its

own monthly civic newspaper, the Nottingham Arrow, to pass on its own policies as well as useful information instead of having to rely on the Post. Distributed free to every house in the city, the Arrow looked bright but was stunningly boring, with articles on dull municipal topics which read as if extracted by torture from reluctant bureaucrats who on the rack bled thick official jargon and clotted Guildhall prose.

When the Conservatives took over in 1976, the Arrow was clearly doomed, though it stumbled on for a few more issues, switching

abruptly and hilariously from eulogies of council redevelopment schemes to preaching the joys of buying your own council house. Finally, at issue 30, it got the chop.

Now, six months after Labour regained control, the Arrow is back - with issue 31, as if three years were a mere hiccup in production - the Times of the Town Hall Fleet Street.

It is different, though. Although the editorial board is still the unlikely duo of stolid Town Clerk and flashy Chief Publicity Officer, behind the scenes are two of the twenty-eight former Evening Post journalists who parted company with the Post in last December's dispute.

Their influence is obvious in the generally zippier and more readable style. Somebody has even persuaded the Town Clerk to say something funny about Robin Hood.

Good news also is that there are apparently no plans to revive the deadly "Down Your Ward", in which your friendly local councillor was given the opportunity to bore your toenails off with worthy civic platitudes expressed at throat-stretching length.

What has changed since the Arrow was last on the doormat is the launching of the weekly pro-Labour Nottingham News, the paper started last February by the Evening Post's dissident twenty-eight.

The News looked precarious at first - it gave the impression that the staff were simply marking time until the Post took them back (unlikely) or they got proper jobs elsewhere (a lot of them did - including the editor).

The umbilical cord with the Post was obviously hard to cut. Every editorial was a pained assault on the old boss and every other news item was about the dispute. There were times when the paper seemed no more than a strike weapon.

Now, with over forty issues behind it, the News has the feel of an established paper, and the National Union of Journalists is at last taking it seriously as a long-term prospect, with plans to make it a workers' co-operative with capital of £250,000. A prospectus is being drawn up offering £5 non-voting shares, and the NUJ hopes to raise £100,000 by asking its members to contribute one day's pay.

Buildings

AN INTRIGUING little conflict has erupted over the future of Lambert's factory on Talbot Street, a mid-nineteenth century building attributed to T.C. Hine, Nottingham's best Victorian architect. With the contractor's cranes looming over the demolished rear of the building, the city council has hastily slapped a building preservation notice on the front part.

News of the demolition came as a surprise, apparently. The owners, Welhind Nineteenth Ltd, claim that advance notice was given to the city planning department, but if this ever arrived it appears to have sunk without trace in the department's files.

The latest plan is to include the building in the newly declared Canning Circus conservation area.

Leading the preservationists is Conservative councillor Andrew Hamilton, a member of the city planning committee and recently elected chairman of the Nottingham Civic Society.

Cllr Hamilton is a very active conservationist, particularly in connection with the excavation of the medieval castle.

A further twist in the tale is the revelation that John Corder, Cllr Hamilton's predecessor as society chairman, had resigned because he didn't think the building was worth the society's support - and because he works for John E. Mitchell & Sons, the estate agents acting for Welhind Nineteenth.

So what happens now? The building preservation notice lasts for six months, at the end of which the Department of the Environment will confirm or refuse it. Meanwhile, Welhind Nineteenth have announced no definite plans for the site, but say they have not ruled out a hotel, and the Civic Society has presented an 800-signature petition to the city planning officer, Stephen Byrne.

Is the building worth saving? After all, the problem wouldn't have arisen if it had already been on the

Department of the Environment's list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest.

The DoE list is far from foolproof, however, and Victorian architecture is appreciated more than it used to be. Lambert's factory is unique in Nottingham, Italianate in style with a bell-tower at one end of the facade and at the other a pavilion - an open-arched structure which in its native Italy would shelter the occupants from the sun and catch the ascending breeze, but in Nottingham keeps off the rain and catches the rising industrial stink.

These exotic silhouettes are seen at their most striking from the hills to the north and east - the top of Waverley Street and the Arboretum, and parts of St Ann's. If they went, the local skyline would subside still further into horizontal mediocrity.

NEWS OF OTHER buildings is mixed. The latest proposal for Strelley House, on Commercial Road, Bulwell, is to turn it into a restaurant. Built in 1667 as a free school by George Strelley, it is a grade II listed building in red

brick, with curved and stepped Dutch gables. Its deteriorating condition has worried the city planning department for some time.

Strelley House is not to be confused with Strelley Hall, built in 1791, which is actually in Strelley - the last unspoilt village on the Nottingham fringe. The home of the Edge family for 250 years, Strelley Hall fell vacant after the death of the last member of the family, Miss Mary Edge, in 1978. Later in the year, the contents were auctioned for nearly £500,000 (the Victoria Club bought 160 bottles of 70-year-old port for £5,000). Broxtowe District Council has now given permission for a computer services firm to convert the building into offices.

Meanwhile, the renovation of the ponderous late Victorian Queen Street Post Office is being delayed while the owners, Norfolk Place Properties, wait for the market to improve. The plan is to keep and clean the original 1898 facade (badly blackened by industrial pollution), but build a new block of offices behind it, incorporating the original banking hall.

The best news is from Sneinton Windmill, built in 1807 and associated chiefly with George Green (1793-1841), the increasingly famous miller and self-taught mathematical genius whose theories the world is only just catching up with.

The George Green Memorial Fund recently bought the now sadly dilapidated mill and at a special ceremony on 8th November handed it over to the city council so that renovation could begin.

An international fund has been launched to raise £20,000 to help restore the mill to working order, and the city council has allocated £95,000 over the next few years for work on the mill and a surrounding park.

The mill is the last of dozens which once ranged the Nottingham skyline, and is still a striking feature from many parts of the city. It will be even more so when restored to full glorious sail.

Festival Hall

IS NOTTINGHAM to get a decent concert hall at last? Not if the city council Conservative opposition has its way. Group leader Jack Green and finance spokesman Bill Bradbury continue the sour objections which led them when they were in power from 1976 to 1979 to scrap the Festival Hall scheme bequeathed to them by the outgoing Labour group.

Building the hall in conjunction with the Theatre Royal renovations, as the original plan provided, would have cost perhaps half the £8m now quoted. Recently, Cllr Green attacked the scheme as "sacrific-

ing everything for the sake of one prestige building", while Cllr Bradbury was particularly annoyed that £100,000 a year less would be spent on smoke control.

Happily, the controlling Labour group is pressing ahead despite objections, and a start on the 2,400 seater hall is planned for May 1980.

With Princess Anne opening the renovated Theatre Royal and the Queen Mother opening Derby's splendid new Assembly Rooms, it seems likely that a royal personage will also be called on to open the new Festival Hall.

But will Cllrs Green and

Bradbury have overcome their objections sufficient-

ly to allow them to attend the celebrations?

'Who said?'

"HOWEVER, EVEN before the carcasses for Cannes were given leave to move yesterday, a greengrocer at Grantham was making a move on his own behalf. He had French golden delicious apples on his shelves, but he thought that two could play at this business of banning and had them all removed. The old bulldog spirit was aroused. Where better, too, than in Grantham, the home town of our Prime Minister ..."
(Evening Post "Comment", 30th October)

"SOUTHAMPTON were incredible, better than us in every department. No, we are not tired after our European travels in the week. The only one who was tired was Peter Shilton after he picked the ball out of the net so many times. Kenny Burns has a broken nose. It might improve his vision. It will certainly improve his looks, so something good comes out of every disaster."

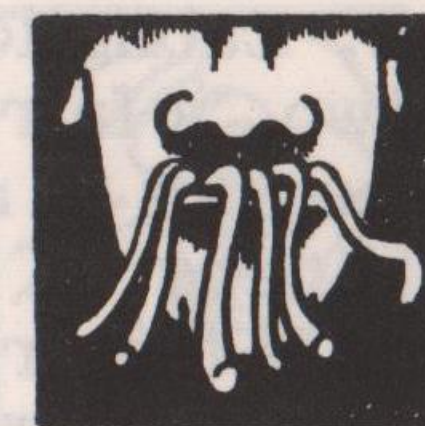
(Brian Clough, taking Forest's 4-1 defeat by Southampton in good part)

"THE GOVERNMENT was given a very clear mandate to cut back on public expenditure. This is what the public wanted.

"I only hope it doesn't lead to loss of life."
(Cllr Stewart Pattinson, chairman of the county council environment committee, on the council's plans to reduce treatment of icy roads this winter)

"EDWALTON WILL remain Edwalton, and NOT become part of West Bridgford. The village will remain a village and must accept the presence of the estate, though after so many years, a great many residents on that 'estate' are buying their own houses, just as are the people moving into Manor Close, so surely the time has come to appreciate that we are all one community, not 'them' and 'us'."
(Stephen Morris, editor of Nottingham Topic)

Food



TRATTORIA ROMA, of 157 Mansfield Road, is the type of restaurant where teachers and community workers go for a special treat - but when they get there pretend it's the kind of thing they do every night of the week. The secret is to call the place "Nino's" familiarly and compare it favourably with Reno's of Alfreton Road.

The atmosphere is typically "Italian" (old Chianti bottles and rather cramped tables), and so at first sight is the menu. Our party opted almost to a man for the Prawn Cocktail (and either prawns are shrinking or these were shrimps), although the choice encompassed Smoked Salmon (£2.50), a splendid Cannelloni (£1.00) and other assorted pastas and pizzas all around the £1.00 to £1.40 mark. I think you need to be fairly hungry to tackle a pasta dish as a starter, but one of these and a glass of wine would make an excellent, and fair-

ly cheap, "supper".

The inevitable steak, chips and salad followed - although to be fair to Nino (if indeed it is he who masterminded the menu), there is a fair range of steak dishes, including the Bistecca Pizzaiola (£3.40), with a sauce of tomato, garlic and mushrooms enlivening a not particularly tender steak. But it was tasty. And the Saltimbocca Nino (£3.20) - veal in white wine sauce - really was quite good.

Well, I said chips and salad, and that's what the menu promised - but the salad turned out to be lukewarm tinned French beans. A pity, when a crisp green salad with French dressing would have added so much to the meal.

The range of desserts was severely limited, as seems so often to be the case - the inevitable ice cream, cheese, fruit salad (is there really any point in asking whether it is fresh or not? - we did, and it wasn't)

and, as a concession to Italian cuisine, Zabaglione. At £1.50 for two, a fair degree of agreement is needed among the diners. I have often wondered if they really would do three helpings if requested. Zabaglione can be a most delightful dessert, consisting as it does of nothing but egg whites, sugar and Marsala - an alcoholic white froth! But the secret of a successful Zabaglione is to combine all ingredients thoroughly. Ours were separating as they arrived at the table, making what looked like the Italian equivalent of Guinness.

Not a bad meal, though, washed down with a litre carafe of the red house wine (£3.50). I liked it, as I usually do cheap Italian reds, but it would be fair to say it was a "robust" wine.

Total damage? Around £5.00 a head - and that's not too bad, including as it does 15% to the government to build nuclear power stations with.

For that kind of money,

though, I would plump in future for either Trattoria Antonio, just off Trent Bridge and very busy, or La Buca, on Clinton Street and very handy for the centre of town. Both have much less conventional menus, would be a little more expensive, and have really excellent desserts. But that's another story.

Finally, for those of you who have just been given a wok (a rounded Chinese "saucepan") for your birthday and are wondering if you'll ever be able to find all those mysterious ingredients that Chinese cookbooks call for: a Chinese "supermarket" on Mansfield Road (just above the International Community Centre) sells bean shoots (22p/lb - cheap), water chestnuts (25p/½lb) and bamboo shoots (22p/½lb), as well as other fascinating Chinese-style goodies. Dried fish appears to be a speciality - although what you do with them I really don't know. Good eating!

Pubs



WRITING a regular column on pubs and related topics seems a straightforward assignment. It's probable that the length of time people have been writing about drinking places is only marginally shorter than the length of time drinking places have existed. Thus "The British Pub", or more frequently "The English Pub", has acquired an identity which is vigorously proclaimed and defended.

In reality, however, it is as difficult to describe and identify as "British Weather" or "A Stiff Upper Lip". So at the very beginning the writer encounters his first problem - myth v. reality.

In future issues, therefore, rather than going thirstily in search of the "atmosphere", "friendly landlords" and horse-brasses apparently beloved of most writers on the topic, I'll be trying to look at how far the licensed trade, the pubs, the breweries and, perhaps most importantly, the drinking public actually conform to

their popular images.

Take the pub landlord, for example. Is he the universally popular "mine host" figure written of by Dickens, or a two-faced skinflint whose twin hobbies are short-changing the customers and watering the beer - or is he simply a retailer trying to run a small business in a competitive market?

Does he provide a community service, or is he merely interested in maximising profits for himself and his brewery? Or is there a formula by which these apparently contradictory objectives can be reconciled?

And the British Pub itself - does its long history and great traditions make it worth preserving in its present form, or is "tradition" an excuse for poor service to the customer, archaic working conditions for staff, and inefficient and outdated business methods?

And are new developments and modernisation in the industry killing the pub as it has been traditionally known?

And what of the customer? Is he (or, more recently, she) satisfied or simply long-suffering (in another Great British Tradition)? And how well are consumer organisations such as CAMRA representing his or her interests?

These are some of the questions I'll be trying to answer. I'll be doing this by getting out and talking to people in pubs or with something interesting to say about them. I hope this column will arouse interest and constructive controversy - I don't intend my opinions to monopolise it, and will welcome comments and information.

Meanwhile, let's look briefly at the three pubs which probably create first impressions for most visitors to Nottingham - the three nearest the Midland Station.

The Bentinck Hotel - the closest and most obtrusive - is the only one of the three not representing a local brewery. It's a Bass Worthington house and, until recently, was notable only for offhand, surly service and the worst pint of draught Bass I've ever tasted.

But now it's well worth leaving an inter-city train

for. New manager Mike Rawlings provides excellent beer and very good (lunch-time) food at only slightly inflated prices. For the first time in the last five years the Bentinck is beginning to realise its potential.

The Queen's Hotel (Shipstone's) is not, in my opinion, a station pub. It's a Meadows local which stands near to the station and attracts the custom of railway employees rather than travellers. Unfortunately, redevelopment has isolated the Queen's. But, even so, it strikes me as being a pub with a constitution strong enough to withstand its arteries being severed by town planners.

The Granby Hotel completes the trio. Surprisingly, it's a "local" in a non-residential city centre area. I'd have assumed its popularity was with Meadows folk taking Dutch courage before a trip to the city, were it not for the hard core of bankers and city gents in the small smoke room.

And it's the only pub I know of with an excellent Indian Restaurant upstairs, and curries served as bar snacks.

Last Post



SLAB SQUARE. The Lions End. Noon. Pigeons drop in, drop, and drop out again. Some stay and drop off, risking the drunken grabs and slaps of hungry dossers.

Occasionally one succumbs to the reek of Strongbow and keels over into a waiting paper bag. A supper for someone.

Suddenly. A roar from the Bogs End of the Square. All eyes turn.

"Come on then! What about a little riot? Eh? Come on then!"

Have my hears eared right?

"What about a bit of a riot? Come on!" the voice repeats. The gentleman on my right stops seasoning his Pigeon-in-a-Bag with surgical spirit and hearkens harder.

The lady opposite seems quite taken with the notion of a little riot and adjusts her dress appropriately.

We pause expectantly.

Then we see him. At the top of the Bogs Steps, turning towards us.

"Come on then, you lot!"

Why don't we let it all hang out?"

A middle-aged lady averts her gaze. He pauses, follows her eyes, then adjusts his dress with some embarrassment. The lady opposite me, a little crest-fallen, adjusts her dress again. To no avail. He doesn't notice.

"Oh come on!" he insists. "Just a little bit of action! Surely you're not all County supporters?"

That does the trick. Two young lads stop ripping out a flowerbed and start chanting "Come on you Reds!"

"Triffic!" yells the Stranger. "Come on, the rest of you! Bit of a riot? Eh? Or are you all poofs? Eh?"

Two young men rise and leave, one of them adjusting his dress.

"Yer all chicken!" the Stranger bellows.

"Come on you Reds!" howl the Kop. The atmosphere is eclectic.

"Dahn wiv real ale!" quadrophonicks a rep from

8 Ferrers Walk, Paxton Gardens
St. Ann's, Nottingham Telephone: 0602 582958