

33 Mansfield Road,
Nottingham, NG1 3FB.
Tel: (0602) 411676



fotografix

photography and graphics
john birdsall 782463

NIGEL PERT
PHOTOGRAPHY

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



PIGEON POST

Festive issue - toys, food,
ghosts, Santa Claus



Nottingham Edition

No.2
25p
Dec. 79

Resisting the rubber stamp

WOLLATON PARK residents are gearing themselves up for a road inquiry whose result could affect the whole west side of Nottingham. On January 8th in the Albert Hall Institute, an independent inspector, Mr M. Wood, will open an inquiry into the Department of Transport's plans to turn the junction between Derby Road and Clifton and Middleton Boulevards into an eight-lane expressway with a flyover and underpass.

Although the Department argues that the work is necessary to cater for increasing traffic flows, opponents claim that the existing junction is adequate for the foreseeable future, and that the scheme would not only destroy the city's attractive boulevards, with their mature trees and broad grass verges, but would simply shunt congestion on to junctions further down the system, making similar schemes necessary for the entire ring road.

Misleadingly, the inquiry is being held by the Department of the Environment - although the Department of Transport is simply a twin of the Department of the Environment and any appearance of impartiality is illusory.

At least the inspector has been appointed by a genuine

third party, the Lord Chancellor. But suspicion remains that the Department is acting as judge and jury in its own case.

And it will be important for the inquiry to seem fair. Of all types of public inquiry, those into roads have fallen into greatest disrepute, provoking harsh words from Lord Denning in a recent Appeal Court judgment on a section of the M42:

"There has been a deplorable loss of confidence in these inquiries. It is thought that those in the departments come to them with their minds made up, and that they are determined to build the road, no matter how strong or how convincing the arguments against them. The inspector is regarded as the stooge of the department. He is just there to rubber-stamp the decision already made ..."

Confidence is indeed at a low ebb. It was not increased at a public exhibition of the proposals, when a representative of the Department of Transport was reduced to pencilling in a pedestrian crossing on an artist's impression of the new junction after it was pointed out to him that it showed no provision for pedestrians whatsoever.

CLAUS ANALYSIS

SANTA IS A MUST at Christmas for any self-respecting child, although what children make of the Yuletide mish-mash of myth, gluttony, self-indulgence, religion, messages from the Queen, not to mention some of the presents they get, it's difficult to imagine.

Surely parents lay on the annual charade of good will and bonhomie year after year only because it's expected. Who, after all, would have the steely nerves to ignore it all, buy only sensible, usable presents and keep the chocolate and tinsel firmly at bay?

Battleships

And this Christmas who would have the nerve to say no to computerised Battleships and yes to pads and pads of graph paper and pencils - which is how the game has been played for generations?

So a visit to Santa/Father Christmas/St Nicholas is a must - all those embodiments of generosity and kindness, those benign old gentlemen with rosy cheeks, big white beards crying out to be cuddled up to and mischievous chuckles like cosmic uncles.

We sampled three.

Santa's Grotto in the



Victoria Centre Lower Market was in the broom cupboard under the stairs. Well, at 40p and all for charity you can't blame the Market Traders' Association for not going berserk and actually pre-empting any useful trading space. Or for not providing any "ho ho hos" to precede the inevitable "And what are you having for Christmas, little girl?" ("I haven't a clue," came the deft evasion.)

It was that and three colouring books (the printer who discovered that colouring books could be produced in black and

white if you make them do-it-yourself must have long since retired) and a set of crayons.

Upstairs, the grotto was even less grotto-like with Father Christmas firmly sitting behind a wooden table surrounded by cardboard boxes of presents.

"You can tell he's not a proper Father Christmas. He's got brown hair," was the scornful comment. And sure enough the wig was so evident, the cheeks so unrosy, the ho ho hos so obviously left behind in the pub last night that only the totally naive could fail to spot the substitution.

We had the usual "And what are you having for ...", but if "Black Arrow" by Robert

Louis Stevenson is Santa's idea of a book for a six year old, then I'm a publisher's agent flogging off remainders.

Debenhams had tried to enter into the spirit of the occasion - "Gone to feed the reindeer: back at 2 p.m." read the sign. More grotto here, too, as befits an up-market Santa, although no more ho ho hos than before, just the customary "And what are you you . . ."

And Debenhams provided a needlework set with needles so brittle that the whole thing had to be thrown away shortly after getting home.

"Isn't Santa kind?" was the summary from our expert. It was the most generous gesture of the afternoon.

BABES AT ARMS

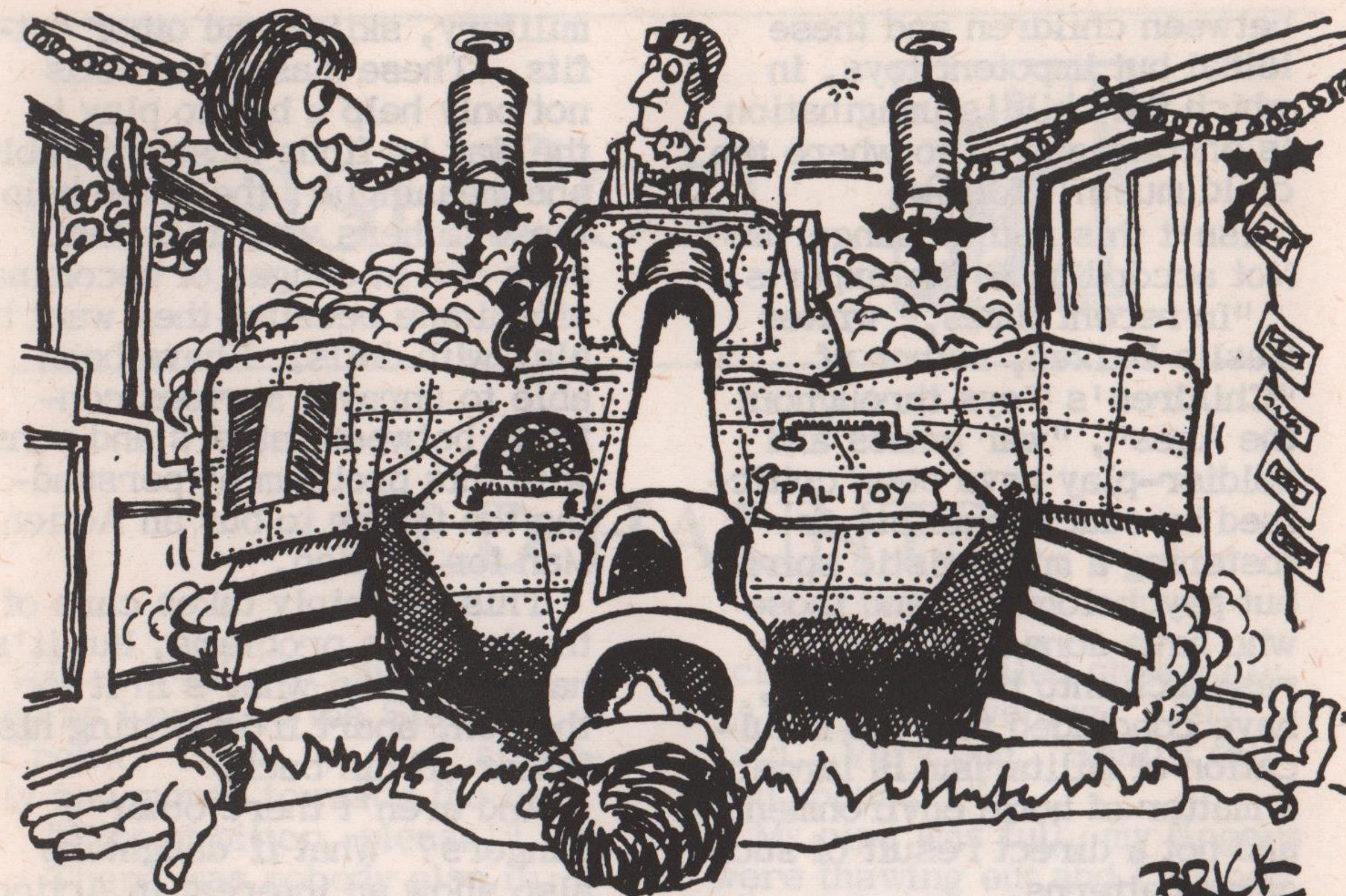
THE MOST STRIKING scene in the otherwise unexciting film of "Barbarella" shows an army of carnivorous mechanical dolls tearing bloody little chunks from Jane Fonda's legs with pointed steel teeth, watched gloatingly by their owners, a posse of angel-faced identical-twin children.

This is far more insidious than "Lord of the Flies". The latent savagery of children is more widely recognised than it was, but we still like to think of their toys as entirely innocent, however closely modelled

on the corruptions of the adult world. The dolls in "Barbar-
ella" are disturbing because
they really do hurt people,
whereas in real life even toy
weapons don't do that.

In fact, the more realistic toy weapons get, the more their makers insist on how harmless they are.

This Christmas, for instance, you can buy an Airfix Tommy Gun or an Airfix F.N. Rifle which look quite nasty enough to get you shot if you waved them around in the Pakistani Embassy or the streets of



"JUST 'COS IT'S CHRISTMAS, IT DOESN'T MEAN YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE YOUR BED."

Belfast.

But the Tommy Gun is labeled, "Adjustable Sling, Twelve Shot Magazine, Twelve Safety Bullets", and the label on the F.N. Rifle reads, "Adjustable Sling, Nine Shot Magazine, Flexible Safety Bayonet".

Interesting concepts, the safety bullet and the safety bayonet. They could have saved thousands of lives in two world wars. Will the safety hydrogen bomb also be invented too late?

Equally innocuous is the Tin Can Alley Electronic Rifle Range and Target - "For real rifle range action. Looks, feels and sounds like a real target rifle. Perfectly safe -

shoots only a beam of light".

This is even more intriguing than the safety bullet, suggesting a whole new genre of war books and films - "All Dark on the Western Front", "The Dam Illuminators", "Light up the Bismarck", "The Strobes of Navarone".

Strange, though, this insistence that the one thing which is the whole point of the original is the one thing the imitation won't do. Imagine selling a junior chemistry set with chemicals guaranteed not to react, or a silent tin drum (good idea, though), or a rubber duck guaranteed to sink in the bath.

Clearly, there is something odd about the relationship

between children and these lethal but impotent toys, in which the child's imagination is encouraged to go where the child mustn't follow.

Isn't this rather dangerous? Not according to the experts.

"In recent times," writes Leslie Daiken, author of "Children's Toys throughout the Ages", "war games and soldier-play have been criticised by educationalists as fostering a militaristic spirit, but psychologists, and those who have done special research into this question, have concluded that the inculcation of militarism is largely a matter of home environment and not a direct result of such game-patterns."

Peaceful place

In other words, as long as children continue to be brought up in ordinary, decent, non-militaristic homes, the world will remain the peaceful place it has been for the past few thousand years.

Just as reassuring is Hugh Jolly, author of the "Book of Child Care", who is especially impressed by Action Man dolls because they very neatly solve an age-old problem:

"Boys have always liked playing with dolls, and now the toy industry has recognised the fact and made it respectable. Manufacturers have produced the 'Action Man' which can be dressed up and equipped with all the latest astronaut,

military, skiing and other outfits. These masculine dolls not only help a boy to play in the way he finds most enjoyable and meaningful, they also help those fathers who think their sons are in danger of becoming effeminate because they want to play with dolls. I have been able to unravel serious conflicts between fathers and sons with this problem by persuading the father to buy an Action Man for his son."

This certainly takes care of the father's problems, but it's harder to see what's in it for the son, apart from getting his father off his back.

And aren't there other dangers? What if daughters also show an interest in Action Man?

Should they be diverted to the "Tiny Tears" doll ("Three times winner of the girls' toy of the year"), which is "just like a real baby - she drinks, cries and wets her nappy"?

This is as different as could be wished from Action Man, with his "new dynamic physique for more action poses", "moving eagle eyes" and "gripping hands" (shown on the box grasping variously a knife, a pistol, a rope and a hand grenade).

The only doubtful point about Tiny Tears is the typically female concern with realism (though why stop at wetting?). Not the least heroic thing about Action Man is that, for all his perilous adventures, none of his changes of costume includes a pair of underpants.

FOOD FOR THE THOUGHTLESS

IT ISN'T A JOKE, of course, that if you could sell plain air and water somebody would. Somebody does. Bottles of Highland burn water - the connoisseur's way to dilute Scotch; and cans of heather-scented Highland air - a pulmonary souvenir of Bonny Scotland. (Do you sniff it through two straws or just stick your nose in and gasp? And what about quality control in the manufacture? What if somebody farted?)

Plain food

Extreme examples, these, but the food industry will do a lot to avoid selling plain, simple food.

The reason is obvious. More profit. If a local farmer sells fresh sprouts in the local market, there isn't much in it for anybody else. If, on the other hand, you can deep freeze vast quantities of sprouts and persuade people they want semi-fresh sprouts the whole year round, then you have transformed a perishable food with limited sales potential into a marketable product which can be stored, brand-named, packaged, and advertised in the same way as any



other industrial product, like soap powder, carpets or cigarettes.

But this is the fairly rational end of the market. A packet of frozen veg. is still raw food, more or less - mucked about with but still recognisable, and obviously useful if you want to store it, prepare it quickly or eat it out of season.

After that, things get barmier and barmier. A trip round almost any supermarket reveals the British as a nation of lethargic culinary illiterates who would be hard pressed to unzip

a banana (no tab marked "pull") or break into an egg (no instructions saying "open other end") - and who find completely beyond them the subtleties of slicing bread, peeling potatoes, shelling peas, dismantling cauliflowers and chopping the fingers off fish.

Even less can they cope with such tricky dishes as omelettes, Yorkshire puddings, ginger cakes and sausage rolls.

Traditional

Instead, they gratefully overload their trolleys with Campbell's Omelette Mix ("just add eggs"), Findus Yorkshire Pudding Batter ("pour 'n' bake - dripping is used traditionally"), Candola Caribbean Ginger Cake Mix ("the cake you mix and bake in the box: ONLY ADD WATER"), and a few yards of Jus-rol uncooked sausage rolls ("cut to size and bake").

Or, even more sophisticated, there are what might be called the chuck-ins and the throw-ons: Homepride "Cook-in Sauce" (Sweet and Sour, Chilli, White Wine with Cream, Red Wine, Curry, Tomato and Onion); or Crosse and Blackwell "Pour Over Sauce" (Bolognaise, Sweet and Sour, Curry).

But the ultimate sign that our civilisation is doomed is surely the gradual disappearance of milk. Yes, you can find a few

cartons of pasteurised hidden away somewhere in most supermarkets, but they occupy a fraction of the space devoted to milk derivatives, whose relationship to the cow grows more and more speculative.

Admittedly, raw milk is pretty yukky stuff - a warm, thick, white, milky fluid which would probably make you vomit if they didn't refrigerate it and take out most of the cream before they sold it to you. But a bottle of pasteurised is inoffensive enough, preferable surely to the plastic bottles of dried skimmed milk now multiplying on the supermarket shelves (one brand announcing with understandable surprise, "New! It's good enough to drink!").

Will this anaemic white dust eventually replace the natural product altogether, as white bread has largely replaced wholemeal? After all, the economics are the same: by taking out all the cream and freeze drying what's left, the manufacturers can sell two products instead of one, just as bran can be separated from flour and sold as an entirely separate product - often, ironically, to cure the constipation caused by eating gooey white bread.

Perhaps it's only a matter of time before cream - and why not chocolate, white sugar and sticky buns as well? - is marketed as a health food, making up the dietary deficiencies of dried milk.

FOUR WEEKS



Council houses

IT SEEMS INCREASINGLY likely that the great council house "sale of the century" conducted by the city's 1976-79 Conservative administration was a financial disaster.

£18 million was raised on the sale of just over 5,000 houses (though most of this sum is still owed to the council as mortgage repayments over the next twenty years or so). But the long-term loss of income from rents could be as high as £75 million.

This conclusion was reached in a report published by a local housing group ("Where have all the assets gone?" by Jim Battle, Roger Critchley & Nigel Lee). It was immediately dismissed by former Conservative finance chief Bill Bradbury as "the biggest load of rubbish I've heard in my life".

Unfortunately for Cllr Bradbury, the local findings were almost immediately confirmed in their broad outline by a paper prepared for the last Labour government by senior civil servants at the Department of the Environment

and leaked to the Guardian (reported on 26 November).

The paper estimated that for every property sold between now and the end of the century, losses could vary between £8,535 and £2,735.

How do local Conservatives hope to refute these seemingly unarguable conclusions? Difficult to say, since their statements so far have concentrated mainly on avoiding the issue.

Cllr Bradbury insists on believing that the essence of the argument is that council houses were sold at below market value - and he is easily able to deny that this happened except in a few isolated cases.

As a natural extension of this method of defence, he also dismissed the authors of the Nottingham report as "left-wing extremists" who "think that everyone should live in a municipalised palace".

Similar tactics were employed by Martin Brandon-Bravo, the vociferous councillor for Wollaton ward, who

writes regularly to the local press from his residence at the Old Farmhouse in the commuter village of Barton-in-Fabis some two miles outside the city boundary, pontificating on inner-city housing problems.

Cllr Brandon-Bravo is convinced that the report is largely concerned with how much occupiers pay in rents as opposed to mortgages. He concludes not surprisingly that mortgages are cheaper, apparently believing their level is an act of God not government policy.

How much longer can the issue be dodged? The Comp-

troller and Auditor-General has decided to investigate and has sent for the Department of the Environment's private papers; and the authors of the Nottingham report are preparing a case to present to the district auditor.

Meanwhile, even Conservative local authorities are expressing horror at government plans to give every council tenant the automatic right to buy his house, since this would make the sensible and economic management of housing resources virtually impossible.

Laxton

WIDESPREAD DISMAY greeted the Ministry of Agriculture's decision to sell off its estates at Laxton, the north Notts. village unique in Britain, possibly Europe, for the survival of the ancient open field and strip system of farming (familiar to most people from childhood studies of the medieval village).

The proposed sale, from which it is hoped to raise over £2 million, is part of a government-ordered economy drive in which the Ministry is shedding 13,000 acres in different parts of the country.

The Ministry acquired the estate in 1952 specifically to preserve the old farming

system. It has never been very profitable - which is one reason why the open-field system died out - and the fear now is that any new owner will be tempted to maximise the investment by raising the rents to a level the tenants can't afford, or by enclosing the fields and selling the land in more profitable units.

A written House of Commons reply from Mr Jerry Wiggin, Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of Agriculture, insisted that "the sale is being treated as a special case and the estate will only be offered to those able to give the necessary assurances about the future of the

system and the welfare of the tenants", but this is unlikely to satisfy critics who believe that the village should be looked after by the state as part of the national heritage like Stonehenge or the Tower of London.

Protests have come from the tenants (who like the system and are proud of the interest it attracts), local MPs, the Notts. branch of the National Farmers' Union and numerous distinguished corres-

pondents of the Times, including social and economic historians.

But this seems to be another case where a government U-turn is not to be expected. The main hope is that the Ministry will be unable to find a buyer - there can't be many investors with £2 million to spend on an estate which, initially at least, is likely to remain stubbornly in the middle ages.

Festival Hall

IT STILL LOOKS as if the Festival Hall will be built, though carping continues. The city council has plainly been surprised (and who wouldn't be?) by the size and clamour of the indoor bowling lobby, which has taken the Festival Hall as a personal insult, believing that the enormous cost of the project (£8m and still rising) is the reason why its own pet project, an indoor bowling centre, has been shelved.

Len Maynard, chairman of the city leisure services committee, is clearly playing for time, insisting that the bowling centre has been delayed not shelved.

Meanwhile, the spherical lobby has been swollen by the indignant management and patrons of the Empire Billiard Hall on Goldsmith Street, who want the council

to provide alternative premises when the site is cleared to make way for the new hall. In support of their case, the management claim a number of Nottingham Forest players among their regulars, though the team's dismal form makes this of dubious value.

Inevitably, Conservative group leader Jack Green continues to tut loudly over the scheme. His latest complaint is that the Labour group is planning to thwart possible government restrictions on the use of receipts from land sales to finance the hall.

Among the cunning plots being hatched are setting up a trust, and paying for the hall in advance (though this would have the disadvantage of limiting claims against the contractors if any of the work was unsatisfactory).

Despite all protests, work

should start in May, and the plans are now on show at the city planning department. A casualty of the revised scheme is the small 400-seat hall originally planned. Everything is now staked on a single 2,500-seat hall (the Albert Hall holds 1,600), which the manager of the Theatre Royal, Barry Stead (who will presumably become

manager of the whole complex) thinks will make the hall more financially viable.

The hall will be at right angles to the Theatre Royal with its main entrance on South Sherwood Street opposite the Evening Post offices, and the stage entrance will be opposite the Mogul-E-Azam Tandoori Restaurant on Goldsmith Street.

Politics

THE MOST INTERESTING piece of local political news was that Jack Dunnett, MP for South Nottingham and chairman of Notts. County Football Club, has decided not to stand at the next General Election.

"My main reason for resigning," he said, "is that I want to devote more time to football. I believe Notts. County deserve more of my attention and I want to be in a position to supply this."

His decision to step down voluntarily will be a sad disappointment for left-wing activists in his constituency party, who have been hoping for years to give him a shove. Local politics will not be the same without the regular punch-ups between the Dunnett heavy mob, led by city council leader John Carroll, and a variety of optimistic idealists with strange ideas about the Labour Party being socialist and democratic.

There will be fond memor-

ies in particular of Dieter Peetz, eccentric Nottingham University philosophy lecturer, who was expelled from the party after the climax of his anti-Dunnett campaign, when he stood against the MP in the 1974 General Election, issuing leaflets and denunciations in solitary splendour in the Old Market Square.

Fond memories too of Chris Richardson, chairman of the party in troublesome Lenton Ward, whose complaints that he had not been told about a crucial re-selection meeting led to a libel action by Cllr Carroll which, after some public damage to the party's credibility, was finally settled out of court.

The root of Dunnett's unpopularity on the left has been a certain indistinguishability from some of his Tory opponents, perhaps not altogether surprising in a millionaire solicitor, Lloyds' underwriter and property

investor, and a certain lack of prominence in parliamentary affairs.

The Guardian, tipping him for the Football League presidency in 1981, commented on December 4th that "his parliamentary career has not been particularly colourful or spectacular. His great consistency, a solid record of votes for hanging, may nonetheless appeal to the football crowds, with their strong views on what should happen to certain players and referees".

Despite his low political profile, he has the reputation of being a good constituency MP. He may not leap colourfully to his feet in parliamentary debate, but he does know his way around, and many constituents have reason to be grateful for this. Betty Higgins, Dunnett's agent

and chairman of the city housing committee, was moved to comment on his resignation, "I'm sad because he's an institution."

It's hard to believe her sorrow will be widely echoed in the constituency party, but Machiavellian explanations for his departure seem misplaced. As he explained himself, he will be 61 at the likely date of the next General Election, by which time he will have been in parliament for twenty years (he was first elected for the old Nottingham Central constituency in 1964).

And, as a wealthy man, he will hardly be pushed to live on his pension, so what could be more natural than a happy retirement pursuing what he describes in "Who's Who" as his sole recreation: "watching professional football".

Traffic

A CONSERVATIVE-controlled county council means rule by commuter-belt politicians who see the city not as somewhere to live but as somewhere to drive in and out of - to work, to the shops, to the theatre and cinema.

Hence the county environment committee's chief policy for the city is to make it as easy as possible for the maximum number of private cars to pour into the centre, and to ensure that when they get

there they can drive and park virtually anywhere they want.

Public transport is seen not as a positive service, but as a safety-net for those, mainly the old and the poor, who don't have cars - and probably don't vote Conservative anyway.

So bus subsidies have been withdrawn, even (or especially) when the last Labour government was willing to foot a good part of the bill; roads are being opened to

through traffic wherever possible; parking restrictions have been scrapped even when supported for road safety reasons by the police (one of the rare occasions when harmony between the police and the party of law and order is less than absolute).

The latest target is the Meadows - a key area because it lies across most routes to the city centre from the densely populated urban villages south of the Trent.

At the moment, much of the Meadows is closed to through traffic. The county environment committee wants to open some of it up. But the city council is opposed, and was represented at the committee's meeting on November 8th by a three-man delegation led by transport committee chairman, Frank Higgins (a former chairman of the county environment committee, as it happens).

Buildings

FROM HAVING NO protection at all, apart from a hastily slapped-on building preservation order when half of it was already a heap of rubble, Lambert's Factory on Talbot Street (built in 1863) is now protected twice over - once as part of the newly declared Canning Circus conservation area, and again as a listed building, following the Department of the Environment's confirmation of the

Cllr Higgins argued that the proposals would increase accidents and traffic jams, and delay buses by as much as half an hour.

He was particularly against opening up the Victoria Embankment, even though the committee offered road humps ("sleeping policemen") and a ban on lorries weighing more than three tons unloaded.

But the Victoria Embankment is a special case, owned and therefore controlled by the city, and Cllr Higgins said he would rather see it completely barricaded off than opened to through traffic.

Many will agree. As one of the most popular spots in the city for a stroll or a family outing, the Embankment should obviously be protected. After all, it would no doubt be convenient for some motorists if they could drive through the middle of Wollaton Park or the General Cemetery.

preservation order.

The owners, Welhind Nineteenth Ltd, are being very poker-faced about it all. A spokesman for their estate agents, John E. Mitchell and Sons, insists that their original plans remain unchanged, though the chances of getting permission for redevelopment from the same planning committee which issued the preservation order seem distinctly remote.

'Who said?'

"THE AVERAGE council-house buyer is shown not to be a young couple but a family of 40 seeking a 25-year mortgage." (Guardian, 26 November)

"THE PRIME MINISTER'S reputation for fast-thinking repartee flourished when she was interrupted by a left-wing supporter. To his cry: 'I'm here as a Socialist', she quickly replied: 'Welcome, you will turn Tory in time.'" (Evening Post, reporting on the Conservative Trade Unionists' annual conference at the Sherwood Rooms on 19 November)

"THE PRODUCTION of revolutionary propaganda in bourgeois society costs money." (Leaflet published by the Revolutionary Communist Tendency)

"A NUMBER OF disabled people had vantage points in the park, and there was an unexpected thrill for three drivers of invalid cars who found themselves in the royal motorcade, wedged between Army Land-Rovers carrying VIPs." (Evening Post report on Princess Margaret's visit to Nottingham to open Colwick Park, 21 November)

"IF CHARGES GO UP it will

mean those who can afford to pay more will do so." (Cllr Herbert Bird, leader of Notts. County Council)

"IRA GUNMEN HELD VILLAGE FOR TV" (Main front-page headline across seven columns, Evening Post, 8 November)

"Panorama crew are cleared" (Bottom of back page single-column headline, Evening Post, 17 November)

"ONE HAS HEARD criticism of jury vetting as amounting to the abandonment of the random selection of juries. What nonsense! It widens the random selection instead of being limited to the first twelve." (Judge King-Hamilton in the trial of four anarchists at the Old Bailey)

"SOME OF THE wage settlements of the early '50s would make a modern trade union negotiator weep. We were all moderates in the old days and did not fight for more and more that would buy us less and less, penny for penny. We were embarking on what we hoped would be a new Elizabethan Age to rival the first. National Service was still with us and it could be that,

as a result, we understood each other better."
("Comment", Evening Post, 7 December)

"BEYOND THE WINDOWS was the cold, damp murk of Nottingham, a town for which November does no favours."
(Hugh McIlvanney, Observer, 18 November)

"CURSE THE BLASTED, jelly-boned swines, the slimy, belly-wriggling invertebrates, the miserable sodding rotters, the flaming sods, the snivelling, dribbling, dithering palsied pulse-less lot that make up England today. They've got white of egg in their veins, and their spunk is that watery it's a marvel they can breed. They can nothing but frog-spawn - the gibberers! God, how I hate them! God curse them, funkens. God blast them, wish-wash. Exterminate them, slime."
(D.H. Lawrence in a letter from Munich quoted in a New Statesman review by Tom Paulin of "The Letters of D.H. Lawrence", Vol. 1)

"WOODCOCK'S SPECIFIC job will be to do the fetching and carrying for Dieter Muller, an international whose talents stretch little further than taking shooting chances."
(Evening Post, 17 November)

"FORMER FOREST STAR Tony Woodcock ... starred in exactly the way the 'Evening Post' prophesied he would - by laying a goal 'on a plate' for

West German international striker Dieter Muller."
(Evening Post, 1 December)

"WOODCOCK MANAGED to nudge the ball down for Littbarski to strike the ball in."
(Sunday Times, 2 December)

"WOODCOCK KNOCKED it down for Littbarski to shoot home."
(Observer, 2 December)

"A BRIEF PERIOD of civilisation followed under the tutelage of that Old Merlin, Lord Butler, at Trinity, Cambridge, who introduced the Prince to romance with the aid of the Chilean Ambassador's daughter and the key to his Lodge. Indeed, the absence of long runs and arctic exposure seems to have been so liberating that Charles asked if he might join the University Labour Party. 'Hell, no,' said the Master of Trinity."
(John Mortimer, reviewing "Charles, Prince of Wales", by Anthony Holden, in the Sunday Times, 18 November)

"SOVIET MITE MENACES BRITISH BEES"
(Evening Post headline, 7 December)

"PERHAPS IT WAS the umpteenth television showing of 'The Adventures of Robin Hood' on Friday night that prompted some erring Erroll Flynn to throw a dart at the Arsenal goalkeeper on Saturday afternoon."
(Guardian, 3 December)

Food



I HAVE ALWAYS wanted to try a Rysteffel ever since I read of it in - I think - one of Conrad's novels. It is an Indonesian meal consisting of anything up to thirty different dishes eaten Chinese-style with rice. It has to be the South-East Asian equivalent of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding - a classic.

Perhaps it was this image of a gargantuan spread which was responsible for my feeling of anti-climax after a set meal (and the menu only offers set meals) at the recently opened Malaysian Restaurant, 131 Mansfield Road.

"Rysteffel's off." It was eight o'clock on a Saturday night. We hurriedly scanned the menu again. The other speciality of the house, "Steamboat", certainly sounds intriguing - small pieces of meat cooked at the table by the diners themselves with the aid of a large bowl of steaming stock. But twenty-four hours' notice was needed. It was too difficult, it was explained, to provide both these dishes at the weekend, although Rysteffel is available throughout the week.

We moved lower down the

menu's price range and ordered steamed fish, and beef with ginger. This set meal (£3.50 inclusive) began with homemade soup, which I declined, only to be rebuked, "It is homemade soup", as if this was such a novel idea that it was an offer I couldn't refuse. It was adequately "homemade", and as compensation for me a glass of chilled orange juice arrived unbidden.

There followed Satay - a kebab heavily spiced with coriander and chilli - accompanied with sauce and cucumber and onion.

I had ordered steamed fish largely out of curiosity - it takes a certain nerve for a restaurant to offer steamed fish even if it is enlivened with ginger and a strong stock. But with just plain rice, neither this nor the gingered beef stew could be described as over-exciting, although the attraction of Asian food, to my mind, should lie in the variety of tastes and textures.

And to end came smallish portions of ice cream and pineapple followed by instant coffee - that sour taste of technology.

The Malaysian Restaurant

falls rather unhappily between two stools. It isn't particularly cheap - but it doesn't really offer a comfortable "evening out" atmosphere. And if it's not particularly expensive either, nor does it offer a good cheap satisfying meal. And although it is nice to see a restaurant with a difference (there are no other Malaysians in town), the proprietors will have to do better than this if they want to catch on locally.

WHY DO sandwich bars in the city persist in selling egg and salad cream sandwiches as egg and mayonnaise? It can only be either they do not know the difference or they think we don't. Readers are urged to track down offending shops and complain or report them to the Trading Standards Office

(tel. 51919), who say they will prosecute if they are convinced there is a substantial difference between the description and the reality.

Mayonnaise ingredients: egg yolks, oil (olive preferably), lemon juice. Salad cream (from a well-known make): vegetable oil, vinegar, emulsifier, starch, lemon juice, colouring, saccharine.

If you're not confident of spotting the difference, buy a jar of each and taste them both neat - you'll never be in doubt again.

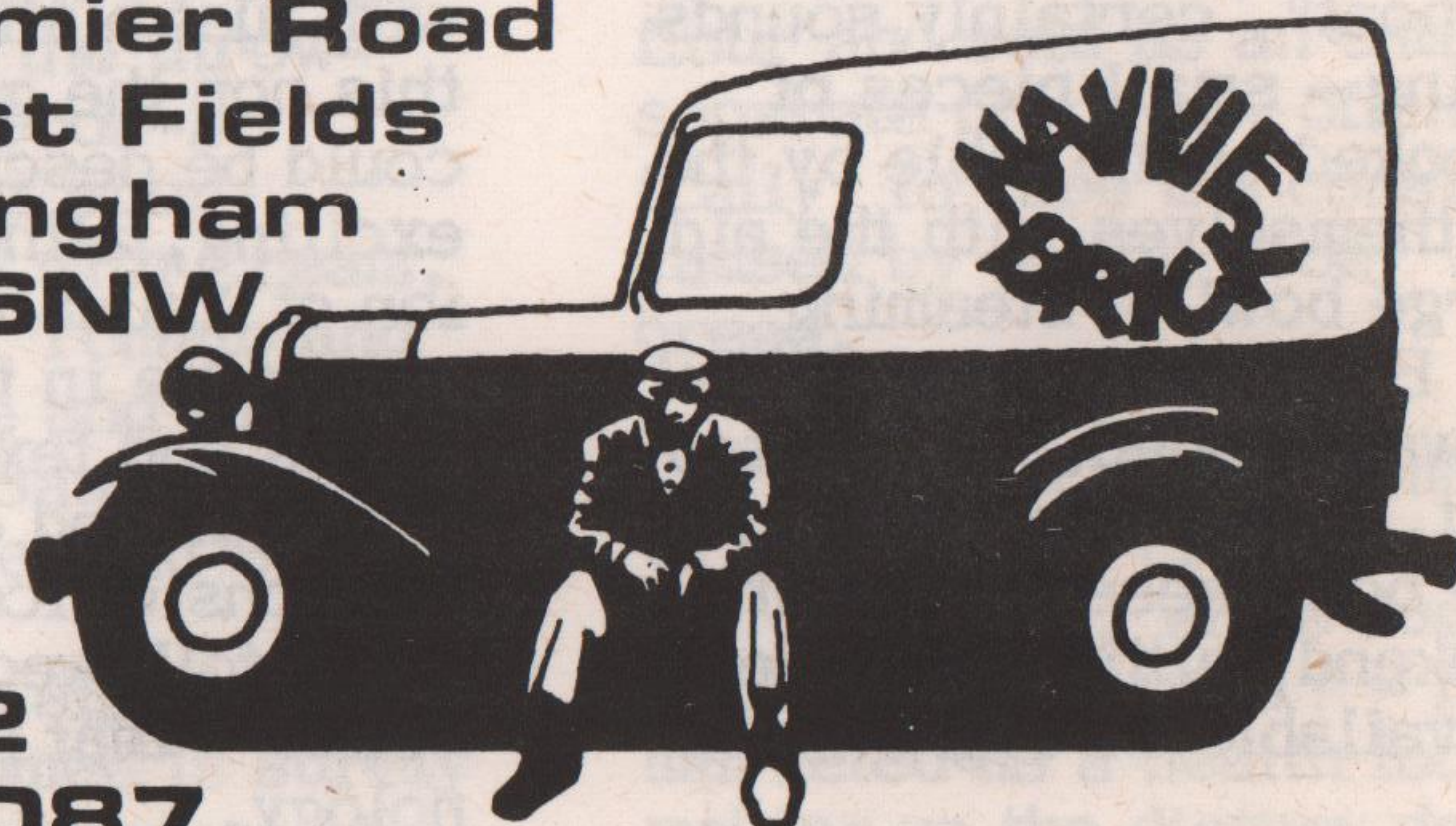
THIS MONTH'S bargain:
Tesco (Vic. Centre) Breakfast:
79p for orange/grapefruit juice, egg, bacon, sausage, tomatoes, fried bread, toast, marmalade, tea.

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



Last Post



OLD HAUNTS

THE LANDLORD didn't look up as I entered the Star and Crown. I shut the door silently and moved towards the bar.

"Pint of bitter, please!"

There was nobody else in the lounge apart from a middle-aged man sat on a chair on my left, smoking absently, and gazing into the middle distance. I smiled towards him.

"Chilly evening," I said, fumbling in my coat pocket for my pipe. "Very chilly. There's even frost on my moustache, you know. I can feel it."

My numb fingers had found my pipe by now, and I knocked it against my heel.

"The last time I remember that happening was years ago."

I looked across at the other customer. He let out a whorl of smoke and looked vaguely towards me. For a moment I thought I recognised him, but he looked away again.

The landlord was still polishing a glass and reading the racing pages.

"It was this very bar,

actually," I smiled cheerfully. "A very odd evening. Very cold. Very odd. Shall I tell you about it?"

My pipe was full, my fingers were thawing out and I dabbed the ice off my whiskers with my handkerchief. Things were feeling better. I wanted to talk to someone.

Bitterly cold

"It was a night just like this about, oh, six, seven years ago. Bitterly cold, but for some reason I decided to go out for a walk. Can't imagine why. Anyway, I got perished out in the lanes and decided to thaw myself out in the good old Star and Crown, though I hadn't been in here for several years. But that's another story.

"Anyway, I came in and got myself a drink and sat down around here somewhere, just where you are, now I come to think of it. Yes, the very

same seat. And I just sort of, well, thawed out. And I fell to thinking about my last thirty-odd years. Job, marriage, kids, and so on. You know the sort of thing.

"And I gradually realised that the only real regret I had was over having to leave Linda after more than twenty years of marriage. It all seemed such a waste. O.K., we'd had our disagreements, rows even. And I admit I was the cause, more often than not, mainly because of my, er, drinking habits.

Imbibing

"Yes, my imbibing. I used to live in the Star and Crown, she always said. Once or twice she kicked me out of the house, as a matter of fact, but we always made up again, because, well, we ... fitted. You know what I mean, don't you?"

I tamped my pipe down and looked up at my companion.

He seemed to be listening, but not very intently. I didn't mind.

"So, I was sat in your seat there, musing and thinking ... miles away, trying to understand what had happened to me and Linda. As a matter of fact, I seem to remember someone coming up and talking to me, just like I'm talking to you now, but I was too wrapped up in my own thoughts to pay attention to him. Actually, he look-

ed a bit like you, come to think of it."

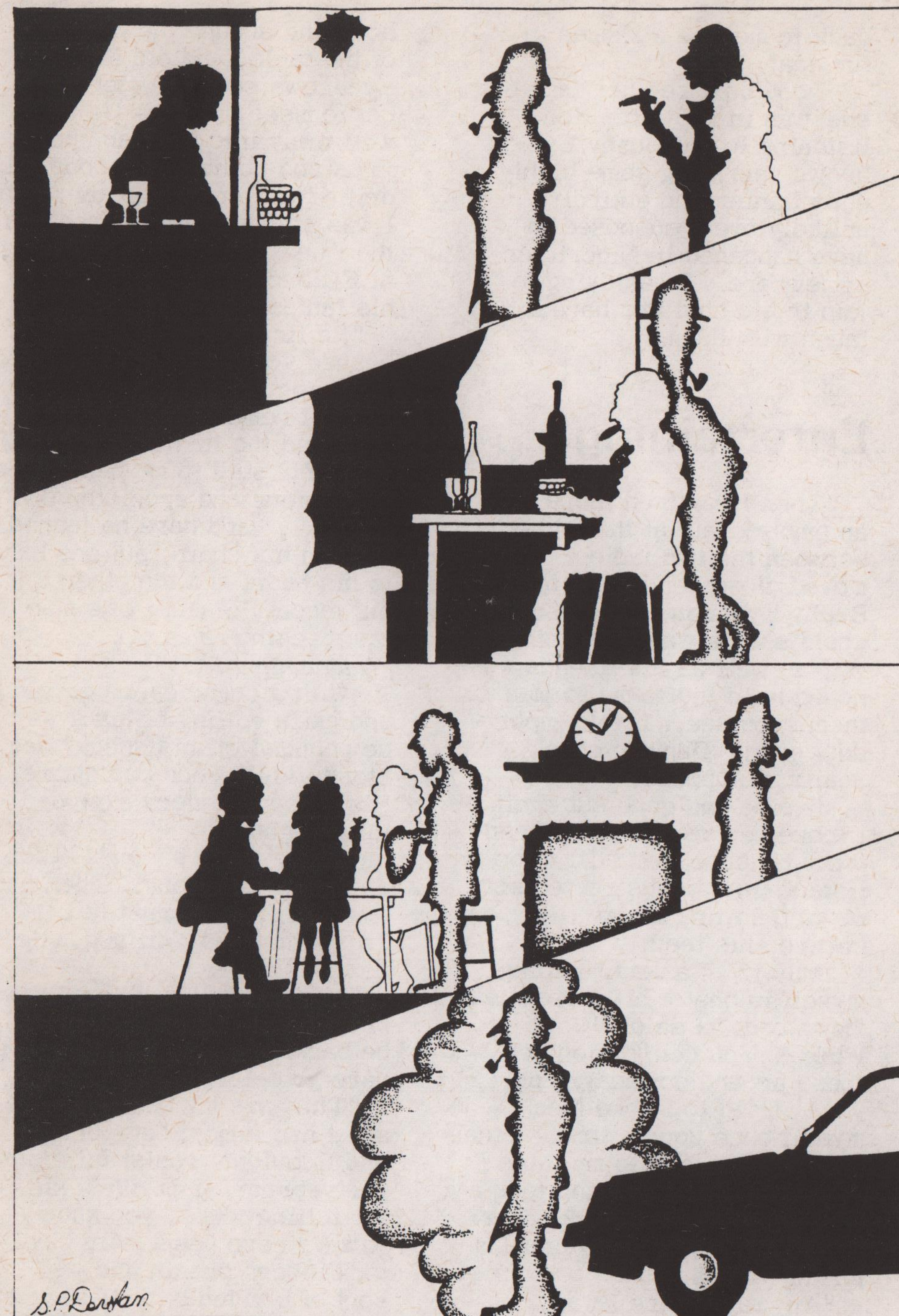
My pipe had gone out. I lit it again.

"This chap seemed to want to tell me something. He seemed to think it was important, but I really only noticed him vaguely. It crossed my mind that I knew him from somewhere, but we didn't actually communicate.

"Anyway," I went on, "after an hour or so the place began to fill up and I began to have an itch to talk to someone. It was Christmas, after all. Christmas Eve, in fact. White winter. But all the other customers were in couples, and I couldn't really barge in on them, so I had another pint or so and waited for things to liven up. It wasn't long. By ten o'clock the place was roaring, particularly in that corner by the fire."

With my pipe I indicated a group of chairs just beyond the Christmas tree.

"They were all having a good time, telling stories and what not. Ghost stories, actually. All trying to frighten each other silly with ghosties and ghoulies. I moved discreetly over so I could listen to them. I've always loved a good yarn. There were four people at the table. Facing me was a chap whose face was vaguely familiar; an old acquaintance of Linda's, I think he was. Big bushy eyebrows, he had. To his left and right were a middle-aged couple I'd never seen before. And with her



back to me was a woman in a fur coat.

"I couldn't see her face but she was in rapt attention, listening to old Bushy Eyebrows narrating some highly entertaining and entirely unlikely event supposed to have happened in Nigeria or somewhere. I was dying to join in, to chat and have a laugh with them.

Entertaining

"Then I realised there was an empty chair at the table, between the two ladies. I moved closer and tried to catch Bushy Eyebrows' eye, so he could see he was entertaining me, as well as his friends. I hoped he'd invite me to join them, you see. It felt important, even. Damned cheek, really, I suppose."

My pipe had gone out again. I looked across to my companion. He appeared still to be listening in an abstracted sort of way, letting smoke filter out between his teeth.

"May I?" I asked, helping myself to one of his cigarettes. "My word," I said, "Gold Flake! You don't often see these around nowadays, do you? Used to smoke them myself once upon a time, actually, before I took to my pipe."

I lit the cigarette and took a whiff. "In fact, I think I was smoking these on the night I'm telling you about.

"Anyway, there I was,

hovering around the outskirts of the table, and old Bushy Eyebrows seemed determined not to meet my eye. He was well away into lionmen and jujus and pointing the bone. I drifted closer and closer, until I was standing directly behind the Fur Coat, looking directly at Eyebrows, and listening to his fantasy.

"He finally wound it up in a hushed voice, with all ears straining to catch the punch line. I remember it well:

'... and the last thing Foggarty said to me before his mysterious and agonising death was,' and here he leaned back in his chair, put one hand to his heart and the other to his throat, in mime of a man's last breath, 'was ...

"Aaaaargghh!!!!!"

"With a comic opera gurgle and much rolling of his eyes he rounded off his shaggy dog story in hilarious pantomime. His three listeners exploded into laughter.

"It was some seconds before anyone could speak. Then Fur Coat said: 'You must tell Harry that one, Wilfred. He'd like it.'

"'Yes, I will,' Wilfred Eyebrows laughed. 'I expect he'll be back any minute. He can't have gone far.'

"This was my chance. The spell had almost been broken and I couldn't resist telling my party-piece. I'm like a kid for telling jokes, you know. Always have been. Anyway, I took a deep breath and just sort of blurted out, 'I say, do

you know the world's shortest ghost story? 'Meet my widow.'"

"I looked straight at Wilfred and, for effect, lightly touched the Fur Coat on one shoulder. She instantly swung round and looked up, and our eyes met. In shock, I recognised her. It was Linda. There was a look of terror on her face as she recognised me.

"At the same instant there came a scream of car brakes in the street outside, and a heavy thud. Then another scream that began at the back of Linda's eyes and forced up and out. 'HARRY!' she screamed and flew to the door.

Paralysed

"She must have pushed me aside to get there, but I didn't feel her pass. Just a sort of chill. I was quite paralysed by the shock of seeing Linda again. She didn't look a day older than when I had last seen her, seven years before. The shock was obviously too much for me on top of all the Crown's excellent bitter, because I don't remember anything else about that evening; how I got home, what happened to Linda, anything."

I knocked the ash off my Gold Flake and shook my head.

"Odd. Very odd. That's what comes of telling ghost stories, I suppose."

My companion was slowly looking round the bar, which had filled up quite a lot.

Obviously he was bored with my story and wanted fresh company. He had the look of a lonely man. Something around the eyes. Something familiar. I felt as though I had once known him well, and needed to tell him something.

I offered him my company again.

"I hope you don't mind me telling you all this," I said, with a faint sense of urgency. "But I can't help feeling I ought to tell you about it."

He didn't answer. He stood up and moved away, slowly past the Christmas tree, towards a group of four people in uproarious conversation round the table by the fire. One of them with bushy eyebrows had just started telling a far-fetched traveller's tale. I saw my companion move to stand behind a lady in a fur coat.

I looked away and let a whorl of smoke drift through my teeth, then suddenly looked at the clock.

Ten past ten. I had to go.

Outside, in the street, the freezing air hit me like a wind and made me squint my eyes. I felt light-headed and suddenly very drunk. I put my hand to my eyes to stop them stinging, and as I took my hand away I felt myself stagger uncontrollably into the road.

Then I saw the headlights speeding towards me, and heard a scream.

"HARRY!!"