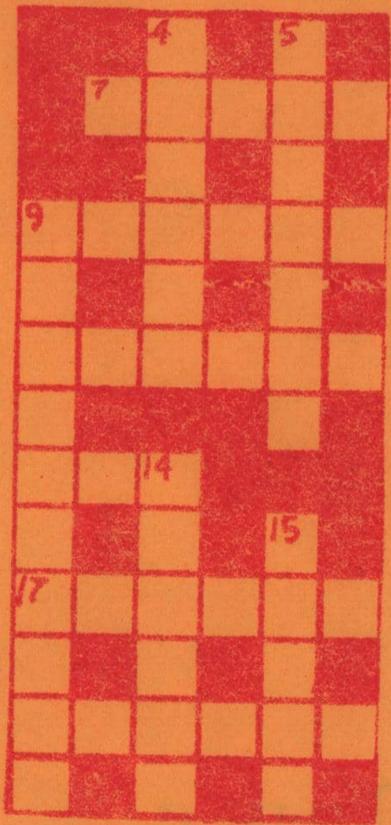
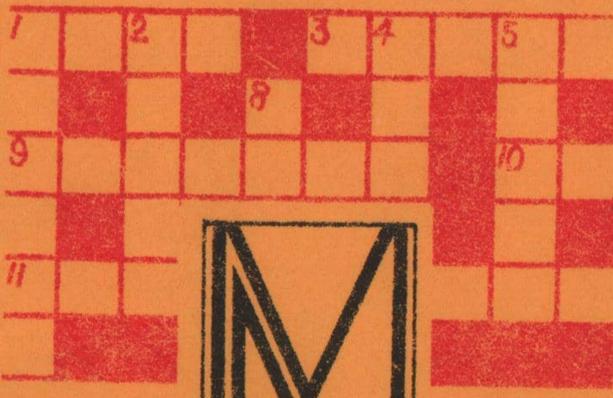


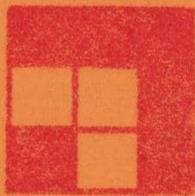
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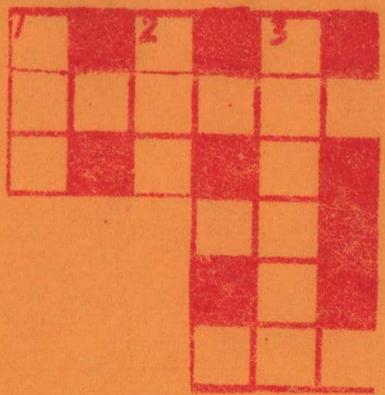
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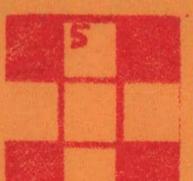
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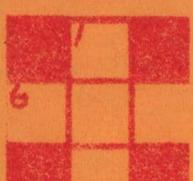
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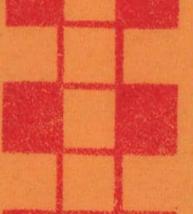
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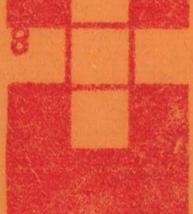
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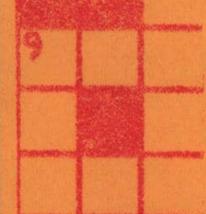
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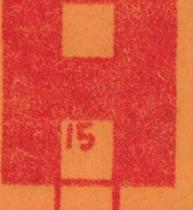
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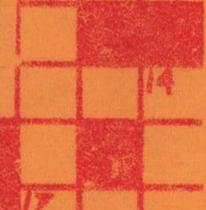
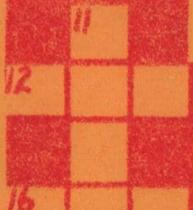
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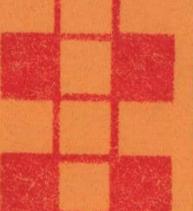
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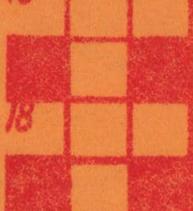
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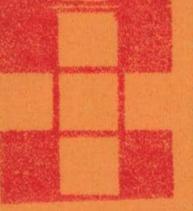
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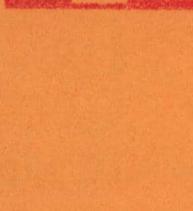
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NEWSLETTER FOR THE NOTTINGHAM, MANSFIELD AND DERBY CHE GROUPS

Here we are once more. Christmas is almost upon us. Time for old films repeating on TV and too much food repeating on us. Time to be nice even to those we can't stand - like and Time for pre-pubertal yowls of "Good King Ding Dong last looked out, on the feast of Knock Knock" at the front door.

Ah well! Let us cast aside this cynicism and, with a typewriter throbbing with emotion and 240 volts AC, wish everyone a happy Christmas and continuing happiness throughout the new year.

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 THE PROGRAMME

DERBY

THURSDAY JAN. 6th COFFEE EVENING at MARIAN'S from 8 pm.

FRIDAY JAN. 7th ROBIN'S BIRTHDAY PARTY.

Bring your own contributions to 19, Carlton Rd.

WEDNESDAY JAN. 12th DERBY PLAYHOUSE BAR from 8 pm.

THURSDAY JAN. 13th BUSINESS MEETING at JO and GLEN'S.
Starts at 8 pm.

THURSDAY JAN. 20th DISCUSSION EVENING at HEATHER and CAROLE'S
Starts at 8 pm.

FRIDAY JAN. 21st COFFEE EVENING at CHRIS'. From 8 pm.
The address is 12, Wild St. Then on to the
Club afterwards.

WEDNESDAY JAN. 26th GARRICK LOUNGE BAR 8.30 pm onwards.

SUNDAY JAN. 30th RAG MEETING.
Those interested in putting a float in the Rag
Week Procession to meet at Carolle's, 17, Twyford St. at 3 pm.

THURSDAY FEB. 3rd BUSINESS MEETING at JO and GLEN'S.
Starts at 8 pm.

FRIDAY FEB. 4th COFFEE at PHIL'S from 8 pm.
Then on to the Club afterwards.

WEDNESDAY FEB. 9th DERBY PLAYHOUSE BAR. from 8 pm.

FRIDAY FEB. 11th ? BOWLING at NOTTINGHAM.

FRIDAY FEB. 18th COFFEE at MARIANS from 8 pm.

WEDNESDAY FEB. 23rd GARRICK LOUNGE BAR from 8.30 onwards.

THURSDAY FEB. 24th DISCUSSION EVENING at CAROLE and HEATHERS
Starts at 8 pm.

MANSFIELD

EVERY WEDNESDAY Meet in the lounge bar of the White Swan in
Sutton in Ashfield.

 THE PROGRAMME

NOTTINGHAM

WEDNESDAY JAN. 5th LA CHIC from 9 pm.

Newcomers will find us in the upstairs Cocktail Lounge. You get to it by going up the stairs which are immediately on your right when you enter the club.

TUESDAY JAN. 11th There are a group of Nuts in the Nottingham Group who take a sado-masochistic pleasure from watching Mike take part in amateur dramatics. Join them tonight at the CO-OP Arts Theatre for a performance of 'Move over Mrs Markham.'

THURSDAY JAN. 13th COFFEE EVENING at TONY'S from 8 pm.

Bring a bottle if you want to. The address is Flat 4, 19a, Pelham Crescent, The Park, Nottingham.

WEDNESDAY Jan. 19th LA CHIC from 9 pm. (See above)

FRIDAY JAN. 28th One of the clergymen who took part in the recent Radio Trent programme with Richard and Carole is coming to talk with the group at the CVS. 8 pm PROMPT. (31a, Mansfield Road - remember to ring the bell to get in).

WEDNESDAY FEB. 2nd LA CHIC from 9 pm. (See above)

FRIDAY FEB. 11th BARRY KENYON CHE'S CHAIRMAN will be talking to the group at the CVS. 8 pm PROMPT. 31 a, Mansfield Road. (We'll probably go off to the club afterwards.)

WEDNESDAY FEB. 16th LA CHIC from 9 pm (See above)

FRIDAY FEB. 25th GRAHAM KNIGHT of RADIO TRENT'S OPEN LINE will be talking to the group at the CVS. The address is 31a, Mansfield Road. And probably off to the club afterwards.

WEDNESDAY MARCH 2nd LA CHIC from 9 pm (See above)

NB. The Nottingham group will have to discuss its next programme on Feb. 2nd at La Chic.

Another NB. The Nottingham Group's AGM will be on Wednesday March 30th at LA CHIC. So be ready with ideas and proposals and nominations.

 CONTACTS

Contacts for the three groups are as follows:-

MANSFIELD

Hilary and Pat. Mansfield 755000

DERBY

Heather (Joint Convenor) Derby 511651

Philip (Joint Convenor) Derby 752260

Fiona (Treasurer) Ripley 45579

NOTTINGHAM

Richard (Joint Convenor) Nottingham 74870

Tony (Joint Convenor) Nottingham 49137

David (Treasurer) Nottingham 216447

The publishable address for the Nottingham Group is:-

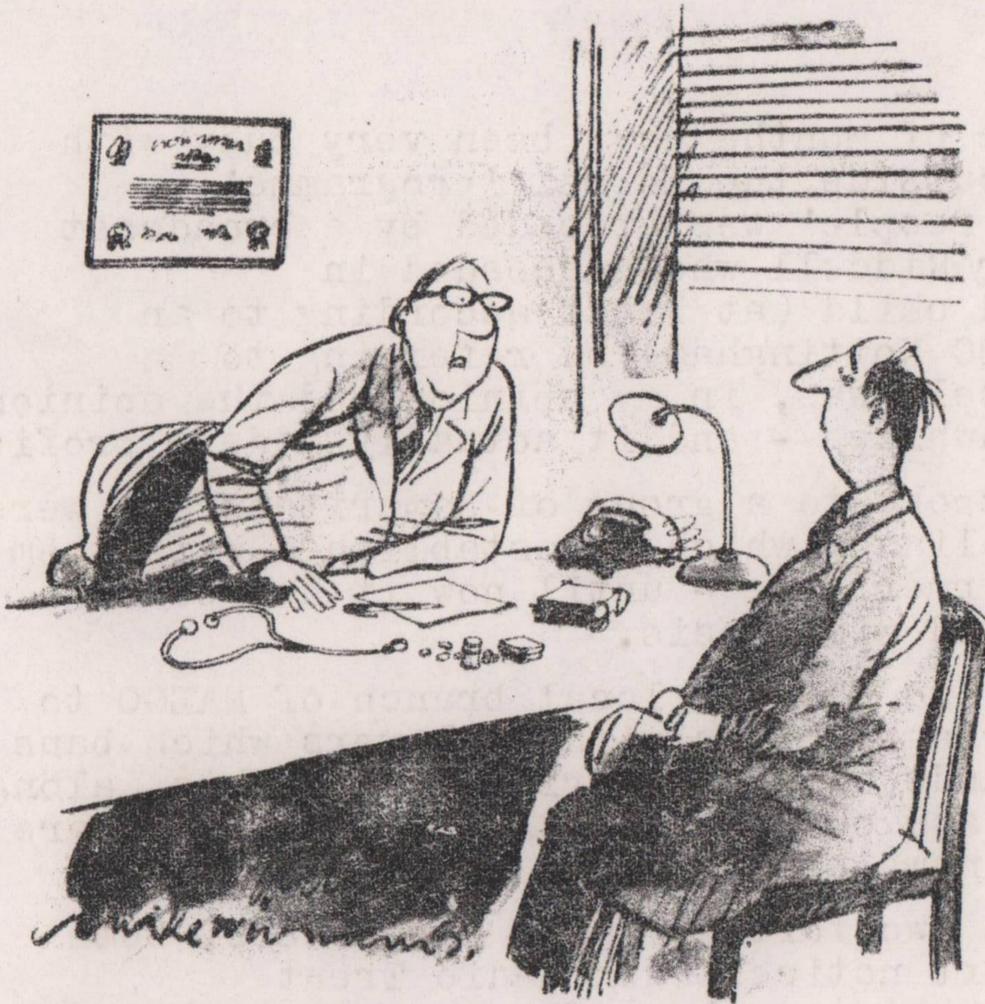
Nottingham CHE, c/o 31a, Mansfield Road, Nottingham.

Can I take this opportunity of reminding people in the Nottingham area that there are now information/counselling sessions being run on two nights a week. The details are:-

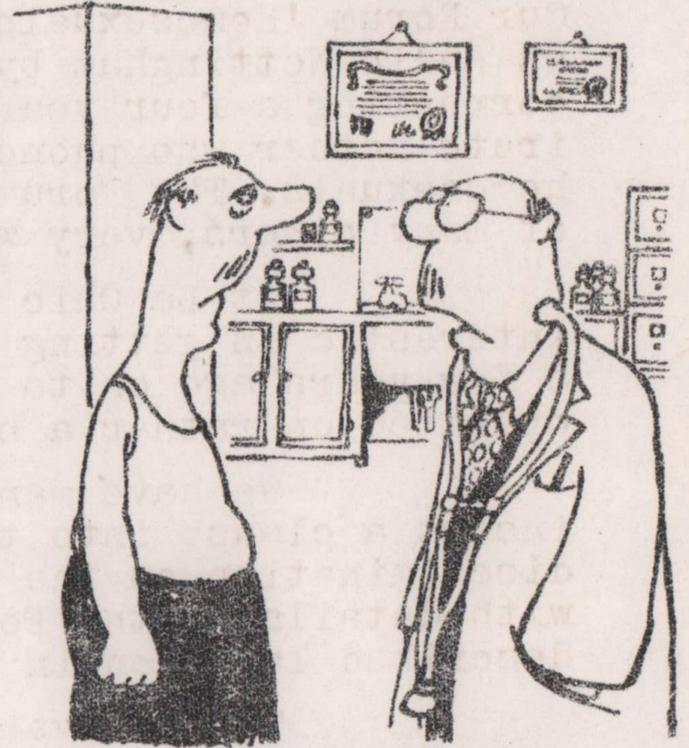
THURSDAYS 6-8 pm. The People's Centre, 33, Mansfield Road, Nottm.
Phone Nottingham 411676.

MONDAYS 7-10 pm. Nottingham CVS, 31a, Mansfield Road, Nottingham.
Phone Nottingham 47149.

If you know anyone who might benefit from knowing the two phone numbers given above then please ask them to give us a call. Similarly if any of you would like to help out at these sessions then feel free to call in - even if you can't help with the 'counselling' or feel out of place on the end of a phone it helps us to have someone to talk to.



"You're not really a hypochondriac. You only think you're a hypochondriac."



*"You urgently need a holiday, Mr Abthorpe—
Might I suggest Lourdes?"*



"Let me through, I'm an underpants salesman"

WHAT HAPPENED

NOTTINGHAM

The past couple of months have been very busy with many events taking place outside the formal 'programme'. Our Forum 'Homosexuals as People' was preceded by a broadcast on Radio Nottingham by Mary Riddell who succeeded in corrupting a four year old child (at least according to an irate mother who phoned BBC Nottingham) by referring to homosexuals. The Forum itself was, in my opinion and the opinion of many others, very worthwhile - and it actually made a profit.

At La Chic we spoke to a group of Samaritans who were interested in getting the liason which we established with them a few years ago on to a firmer base - until now it has been operated on rather a hit and miss basis.

We have managed to get the local branch of NALGO to insert a clause into their agreements with employers which bans discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. This, along with details of the Forum and our talks with the Samaritans are described later on in the newsletter.

There have been two further radio broadcasts, both assembled at extremely short notice. When Radio Trent broke the news that CHE's next annual conference was to be in Nottingham we had an instant outcry from one or two sources; this led to a personal invitation for Richard to discuss the situation with two clergymen on a Radio Trent phone-in. Carole joined him on the panel and both of them succeeded in remaining calm and logical in the face of some exceptionally irrational phone calls. This irrational, not to say violent, reaction by a section of the public should provide the answer to the 'liberal', the intellectual and the middle class people who are always asking us why there still exists a necessity for campaigning by gays. Certainly one and perhaps both of the 'antis' on the panel were caused to change their opinions as a result of their participation in the programme. The other radio programme was the one which the Nottingham CHE group had been asked to do for the Radio Nottingham series devoted to minority groups. We had exactly 15 minutes in which to do what we liked. It was recorded out of the studio by about 15 of us. We tried to get a balance between the formal and the spontaneous, the serious and the amusing and after about 4 hours spent in an increasingly alcoholic haze we thought we had succeeded. It was certainly great fun to do. (If anyone didn't hear the programme and would like to, then a copy of the programme on reel to reel tape or cassette can be made).

A few other things. Richard and Ian (Stewart) spoke to an N.U.T. group. We started our Gay Switchboard evening at the CVS - in six weeks we have had 17 phone calls, 12 letters and 7 visitors. We have also made applications to the Nottingham Students' Karnival Committee and Nottingham Social Services for grants to help finance this service. Finally, we still keep receiving anonymous donations through the post - the total now has risen to £24.

David.

 WHAT HAPPENED

WHAT HAPPENED IN DERBY - OR, NOTALOT.

Our brightest happenings were the two events in November in my opinion. Carole's 'happening' was certainly the most original and possibly caused the majority present to be more energetic than normal. Difficult to describe, but fun to do, she won't be able to lead another one 'til she's finished with exams in February. Keep reminding her though!

Phil's bonfire party was the other sparkle in the gloom of November. A fine display of fireworks lasting for ages, then a fine display of hot nosh inside which was more than welcome. I suspect his dustbin sported a fine display of empty beer tins and wine bottles next day too!

We have given up the Tiger Bar evenings and you may note, have moved back to the Garrick as our alternative to the Playhouse bar. Not much else to report apart from a trip that I made to the Retreat at Morley. Yes, it is a religious house, but I went to talk about CHE to a Social Workers 2 day Conference. I was accompanied by 2 members from Gay Workers and we had two hours of discussion for which it was rumoured that we would be paid. Sad to say, I think that this was pure rumour.

From Carole and I to all our friends from Derby group to all their friends, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year,

Heather.

REMEDIAL FESTIVITIES

The following recipe was left in the Cookery room after a recent lesson with the 1st form Remedial group.

MICE PIES

½ pond plan folr
 4 ooz margh
 1 tin mice meat

POLICE REACTION TO GAYS

Probably many of you are aware of the harrassment which has been a large part of my life over the last few months. It includes threatening phone calls, abusive language outside my house, paint on my car, damage to my car and a grand finale of being beaten up in a street in Nottingham.

The point that I would like to make is that should any one of you experience similar problems, don't put up with being put down. The temptation to act this way is of course very strong because you are gay and afraid of adverse reactions by the police and establishment to the circumstances of your victimisation.

My search for help in the initial stages of the saga was to go to a solicitor who spent at least an hour (for which, incidentally, the charge was nil) explaining my legal position to me. In the eyes of the law I had no case at that time, since until I was physically assaulted or badly slandered in front of witnesses there was little constructive help he could offer.

However, after the second 'paint on the car' incident I contacted the Ripley police who were all very helpful and very concerned for me. I had no witnesses and no proof concerning the culprit, but without giving details those policemen ended up with a confession to the crime and therefore I at least had a file on my case in an official establishment.

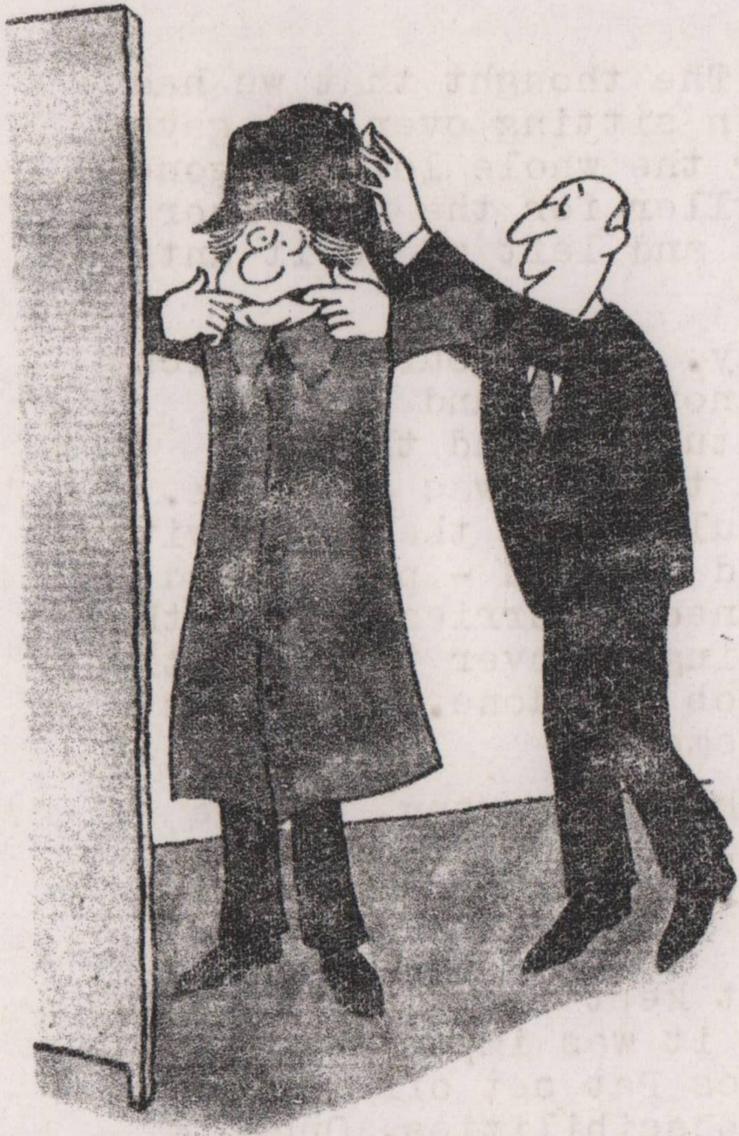
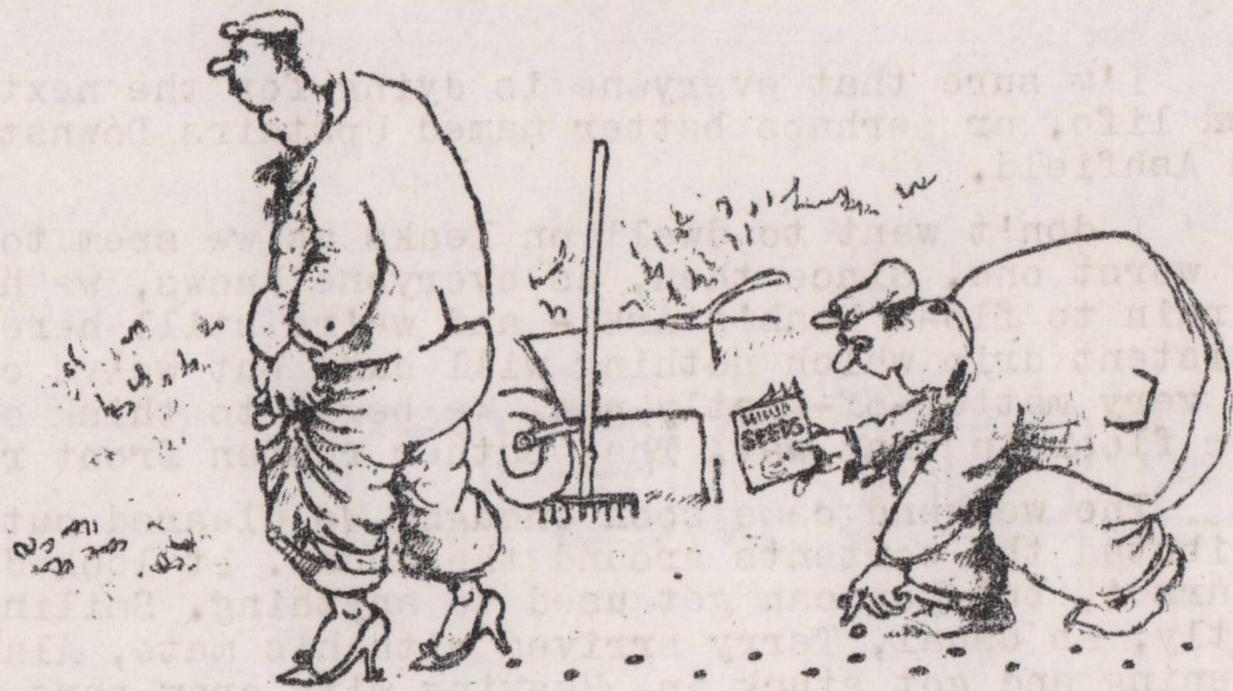
The Ripley police called on me regularly to check that I was OK and continued to fill my file with the anonymous letters etc. It was very reassuring to see a virtually daily check on my house for any signs of 'suspicious activity'.

The attack on my person took place in Nottingham so I was then involved with another Police force and this prompted further misgivings about reactions to my sexuality. However, I received nothing but sympathy for both my injuries and my problems thus arising from being gay. All the policemen who were involved in my case took every precaution to ensure that I was subjected to as little stress as possible.

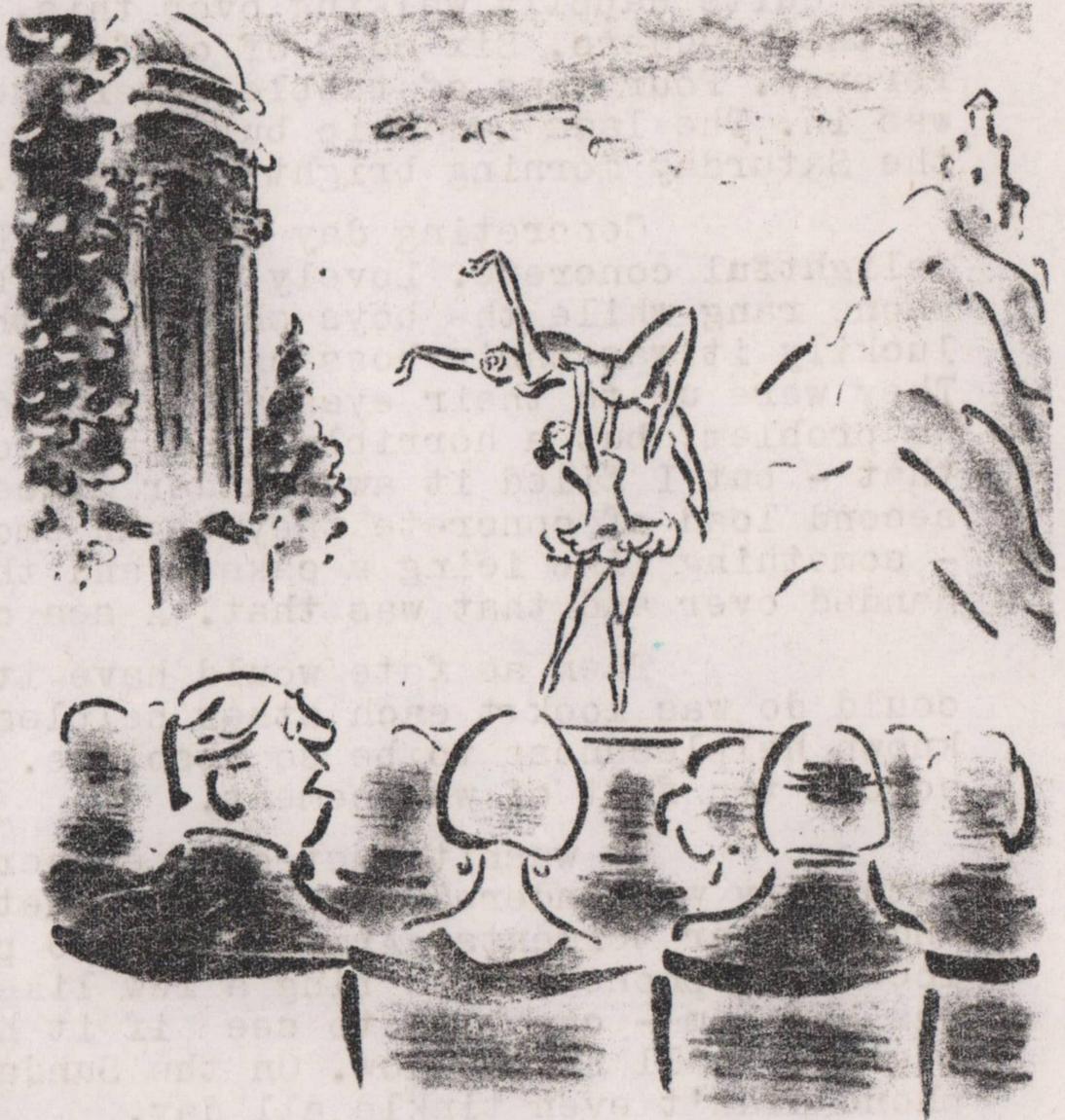
There is a case now pending; a charge of Assault and Actual Bodily Harm, Tampering with a Motor Vehicle and the theft of four wheel nuts.

I have no idea of what sentence will be passed but I am fully confident that although my attacker will almost certainly claim mitigating circumstances as a plea for leniency, the police will make every attempt to show that the attack was a coolly calculated crime and therefore should be treated as such.

Fiona (Derby)



"It's a useful hat, sir. It enables loonies to recognise one another."



"Sooner or later it was bound to come to this!"

UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS - KIRKBY STYLE

I'm sure that everyone is dying for the next episode of terraced life, or perhaps better named Upstairs Downstairs, Kirkby in Ashfield.

I don't want to dwell on leaks as we seem to have cured the worst one. Since then, as everyone knows, we have had enough rain to float Noah's Ark - and we're still here. There is a persistent drip which nothing will cure but we've come to regard it very matter-of-factly now. We began to think of the front room floor in that way. That rather rotten front room floor.

The weekend came soon enough. We cleared out the room and distributed the contents around the house. It looked like Paddy's Market, but you can get used to anything. Smiling benevolently, as usual, Terry arrived with his mate, Alan, on the Friday evening and got stuck in. Heaving with crow-bars the floor was soon out in the street - but no one would have guessed that it had been anything like a floor. The joists literally crumbled at a touch. I'd taken the afternoon off college so that I could see all of this, by the way, and I wasn't disappointed. It made one old fellah's day though. He hopped off down the street with an unexpected bundle of firewood.

The underneath was just mud. The thought that we had been quite happily walking over this, even sitting over it, gave me the shudders. Six cups of coffee later the whole lot had gone forever. Four tons of rubble later the filler for the new floor was in. The lads had chip butties for tea and left us to it until the Saturday morning bright and early.

Concreting day had come. D.Day. 0.800 hours. Squelchy delightful concrete. Lovely to watch but not to stand in. The phone rang while the boys shovelled the stuff around them and luckily it was their boss checking to see that it was going OK. They were up to their eyes already and could reach the phone with no problem, but a horrible thought crossed my mind - phones and that - but I filed it away under miscellaneous worries. After the second load of concrete they began smoothing it over to perfection - something like icing a cake - and the job was done. Money was handed over and that was that. A sea of cement.

Then as fate would have it, the phone rang. All we could do was look at each other helplessly. In fact I have never known helplessness to be so absolute. Staring at a ringing phone across ten feet of wet cement.

It wasn't just once either. It kept right on ringing. Naturally we wondered who it was, whether it was important or not, and similar torments. Armed with two pences Pat set off to the local telephone box to ring a few likely possibilities. Once it was her Mum - checking to see if it had been done and the other I guess we'll never know. On the Sunday it was drying well and the phone didn't even tinkle all day.

 UPSTAIRS, DOWNSTAIRS - KIRKBY STYLE (Continued)

Since then we have had the room decorated. The cement stubbornly refused to come off the walls without the wallpaper coming off too so we covered it with a nice emulsion and papered one wall. It looks great. It has taken quite sometime to get used to the idea that we can leap around the room all we like without going through it. The amount of water drying off in the room affected the front door rather badly and we have had to have a new pane of glass put in after Pat heaved it shut vigourously one night.

We've asked the same firm for a quote to put in a new front room window, but they haven't shown much interest so far. I'm not even asking them about when they are coming. If they have forgotten then that's OK by me!

Hilary (Mansfield)

 PRIVATE LIVES AND THE PRESS

What a threat Lesbianism is. Anyone would believe that we didn't exist sometimes, but the splash in the Daily Mail recently has aired some of the presses attitude to both it and feminism very well. They don't like it.

The Daily Mail first got interested in the MP concerned when requested that she be addressed in the House of Commons as Ms. She had been the first to do so. They assumed that it was a direct result of the break up of her marriage because it happened after she had left her husband in order to live with another woman. The other woman was a known feminist and activist. This was all the gossip columnist needed and an insinulative article appeared in the Daily Mail. It didn't actually say anything about the relationship but left enough information about them for people to draw their own conclusions, particularly mentioning and showing an illustration of Sappho magazine. The other womans name is mentioned a detailed description of a house warming invitation is given leaving very little doubt to the reader as to what is meant. Even the other woman's daughter is mentioned and some historical background as to who the other woman was living with before and who she had been married to!

A later short article on the subject is more forth-right as to why the MP concerned did not wish to talk to the columnist concerned. It reads like a fit of pique and adopts again the insinulative line about her now living with a contributor to the Lesbian magazine Sappho.

PRIVATE LIVES AND THE PRESS (Continued)

It really was below the belt stuff for the Daily Mail so the MP lodged a complaint to the Press Council over what she saw as an invasion of her privacy. The MP has lost her case on questionable grounds and as the editor pointed out when the Press Council's decision was made known, the case sets a precedent for future reporting into the extent that MP's private lives affect their public lives.

The editor justified the reporting on two grounds and these are well worth noting and discussing.

1) Where the circumstances of the break up are significantly different to make news in themselves.

2) Where the circumstances of the break up might have a direct bearing on the individuals work or social-political attitudes, particularly where such a person is in the public eye and their work should be accountable to the public.

Had she been an MP with no strong views on any major social, sociological or sexual issue of the day, the break up would have not been reported; nor if she had been an ordinary housewife. That is their words. What they did point out was that the MP did have strong views, and expressed them, what's more.

The Press Council's recent ruling declared that the publication of information about the private lives or concerns of individuals without their consent is only acceptable if there is legitimate public interest over-riding the right of privacy.

They consider her private life was of concern to the public because of her active involvement in the feminist movement. It was said that this was capable of affecting her performance of her public duties or public confidence in her views as an MP. Thus the public was entitled to know all about it.

However, the Press Council did condemn the publication of private details of the other woman concerned. The council considered that the methods used to obtain information constituted harassment of a serious kind and that part of the MP's complaint was upheld. The Press Council described it as gross intrusion which could not be justified on the grounds of public interest even in the terms set out by the editor of the newspaper himself.

The editor did not agree, of course, and described this part of the ruling concerning the MP's friend as illogical. The reason he gives is that the influence of friends, for good or bad, on public figures is what this case is all about. However, he did not want to argue about a peripheral issue in view of the major decision being taken in the newspaper's favour.

The issue of feminism we can assume is the one that gives cause for concern if the person expressing those views is in a position to express them positively and effectively as an MP for example.

 PRIVATE LIVES AND THE PRESS (Continued)

It reads very much to me that the implications of her having a lesbian relationship were used to attempt to discredit her as an MP and declare her unfit to do the job. None of this has yet been proved, yet the remarks and information given in the paper are very damaging and misleading. The precedent of this case is a bad one because it implies that anyone who does not hold the accepted views can expect to find themselves the centre of an exposé in the Press about their private lives which may have had little or no bearing on their political views at all.

The circumstances of the break up of this marriage were significantly different enough to make news in themselves and the harassment suffered by those concerned has been rightly condemned by the Press Council. As a lesbian I find the style of reporting disgusting and I don't think the lurid detail was in any way necessary to make the point that the two women were living together. To imply that the MP was under the influence of a feminist to pursue the feminist cause is hardly justification to make such intimate details of someone's private life so public. The feminist cause must be a cause to fight if it receives such interest. There must be something in it to use such gutter press reporting. Believe me, there is too!

Hilary (Mansfield)

 PREJUDICES

The following letter appeared in the Nottingham Evening Post.

In a recent court case it was alleged that a man was murdered solely because he was homosexual and that the accused wanted to teach him a lesson.

Many people may feel that homosexuals should be taught a lesson. Surely what really should be learnt from this case is that prejudice against minority groups can lead to unforeseen consequences.

I believe that people should look carefully at their own prejudices and consider what basis they have in fact because prejudice born of a lack of understanding can escalate to undreamed of proportions.

Ian Stewart (Nottingham)

 WHAT WASN'T IN THE EVENING POST

The NALGO Annual General Meeting at which so many people turned up to stop the Executive from negotiating a Trade Union Shop with Nottinghamshire County Council that many of them could not find room in the Council Chamber, made headlines in the Evening Post. The only other motion on the agenda did not. But that for me was the (I hope) ultimate experience in 'coming out' and it found me wanting, wanting very badly not to be there in front of my boss and my boss's boss and about four hundred other people.

The motion sought to instruct the union branch executive to insert in all collective agreements with the employer (my employer) a clause outlawing discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and to obtain a public statement from the County Council that it would neither practice discrimination nor allow its officers to do so. The wording, couched in 'official' language some of which I could hardly understand, was largely Howard Hyman's but I was the proposer. And I thought that I could do it until I actually stood facing that sea of local backwoodsmen. My voice took fright and I was left calling hoarsely for a glass of water. After that I am not quite sure what happened but I suspect that what started out as a rational argument for removing from homosexual men and women the fear of discrimination and victimisation in their jobs, became an impassioned incoherent plea and I do know that "homosexuals" and "gay people" turned almost without my realising it into "us".

I sat down stunned and could only remain in stunned amazement when not a single speaker came forward to oppose me. I was seconded briefly by a good friend in Social Services and then it was all over. I am told that only a handful of hands were raised against but there is no doubt that the motion was passed by a very substantial majority.

It is only a beginning. Those elderly gentlemen who lead the branch executive still have to be pushed to act. And though we know that the leader of the present County Council is behind us, we know too that not all his colleagues think alike. But at least we have proved that some bastions are made of paper and I hope that in itself does something to alleviate the fears of gay employees of the County Council less fortunate than me.

R. (Nottingham)

REPORT ON THE FORUM ON HOMOSEXUALITY

This is a copy of the report that was sent to the Executive of Nottingham CVS, to the Chairman of the Personal Problems committee and to CHE.

The overall outcome of the day was largely as expected. The facilities at 'La Chic' were, with an obvious exception (The state of the Women's Toilets), good and the lunch was excellent. The management of 'La Chic' were most anxious to enable the conference to succeed and were helpful in every way.

Obviously some sections of the programme worked better than others. The final panel and floor discussion moved on to political issues with the presence of a few militant gays. The problems of counselling gays and details of local resources will need more attention in follow up seminars which we hope will be arranged.

The audience was mostly made up of people in counselling roles from Social Services, Probation, Marriage Guidance, Samaritans, Student bodies, NCVS and clergy. There was no one representing Social Work Training, no psychiatrists nor lawyers, no magistrates and only one Councillor.

From the 110 questionnaires asking for feedback which were issued, I received approximately 40 returns; about half of these expressed an interest in follow up seminars. Nearly everyone said that the day met their expectations, from which I draw the conclusion that our publicity closely approximated the actual event. Most criticisms were of the size of groups - "Too large."

Report back on the group discussions was thought not to be fruitful and also the process of the panel floor discussions did not meet expectations. There was a variety of preference for focus. Perhaps group discussions based on topics might have been more useful in the afternoon. There were very few criticisms of speakers. Those I received suggested speakers went on too long, did not cover certain topics and perhaps the topic of the law could have been dealt with much more briefly. Although no one commented, I feel the lack of a bookstall was a major opportunity missed.

A total of 125 people were present.

Total takings were £224.

Expenses are estimated at £210.

An appeal made at the conference on behalf of the Gay Switchboard in Nottingham produced £6. I envisage the small profit being used to send out relevant information to groups which attended and a proportion to help advertise the gay switchboard.

Mary Riddell.

THE SAMARITANS, GAY CLIENTS AND CHE

We were not quite outnumbered at our informal meeting with members of Nottingham Samaritans on November 10th, but we were highly pleased that seven of them ventured forth to join us upstairs at La Chic. Lubricated by a few pints, the reasons why relations between them and us have been chilly in the past were honestly and good-humouredly explored.

On the Samaritan side there has long been a belief that everything we do, even in the befriending field, is politically motivated. Why is now ancient history. But it is worth noting that there are some situations in which a lecture on gay oppression is just not appropriate. Even those of us with strong feelings on the subject would never dream of thrusting it on someone in distress. It says something about the uptightness of some Samaritans that the myth that we are wild politicians has lingered on for several years.

The charge that the group is unwelcoming to newcomers is more serious. It is a complaint which has often been made not just of this group but of many others. In a less informal atmosphere we might have been more tempted to justify ourselves, for no one is more distressed than we are when after one or two meetings a potential member is not seen again. But in fact one of the best things to come out of the evening was a really serious discussion about how we can make someone who may be meeting other gay people socially for the first time feel at home with us. If we are to fulfill our potential as a supportive group it is imperative for all of us to make every effort to see they do.

It is also imperative that the helping agencies, of which the Samaritans are surely the most significant, make full use of us. If they have had feedback about 'exclusive' coffee evenings, we have had enough feedback of our own to make sure they don't. Of course we have shortcomings but we are still the only supportive group in Nottingham that meets regularly on a fully organised basis. Even the fact that at many meetings one could well believe Queen Victoria was right about gay women does not invalidate this. If we cannot yet retain many women in the group we can and do refer them to those whom we respect and whom we hope will come in with us in time.

We hope that after our together evening 'our' Samaritans know that, though like them we have our failures, we work just as hard at our jobs as they do at theirs.

One of the main complaints has been not so much about neglect of CHE but of the absence of any collective Samaritan will to help gay clients. It is less important that at a recent formal meeting neither the Samaritan Director nor ourselves knew who his (absent) liaison officer with gay groups was supposed to be than that Samaritans on duty have all too frequently fobbed people off with the names of clubs and pubs. We must be grateful that none of them, so far as we know, has actually suggested the cold bath or the brisk walk but too many callers have been given no real help at all.

 THE SAMARITANS, GAY CLIENTS AND CHE

This was a point our visitors were quick to take up, not defensively but admitting that it is all too easy to feel satisfied with the achievement of imparting superficial information. It was not us who asked the question "does someone really ring Samaritans just to find out where to sell a sofa?" But it was us who pointed out that to direct a perhaps desperately lonely person to a gay club or bar might infinitely aggravate their sense of isolation.

All Samaritans can disseminate information and we hope that from now on, when they see this is all they need do, we can be sure they are going to get it right. Our visitors felt it seldom is all they need to do and we could sympathise with their desire not to pass the buck. But are all Samaritans capable of coping with clients whose problems are related to their gayness? It is sad but regretably true that at present the Samaritans in Nottingham will find it easier to recognise their homophobic colleagues than to enlist the help of others who because of their own gayness could have the most to offer. To us, their first priority must be to ensure that a Samaritan who is unfit to counsel gays both recognises this and passes the client on to somebody who is.

What then? We discussed situations in which the next link in the supportive chain might not be CHE. In most cases it will be and it has to be as strong as we can make it. For many people even a CHE meeting is the deep end of the pool. The visitors seemed a bit surprised that not only do we make a point of meeting newcomers in advance, but that we would be only too glad if the Samaritan were to come along as well. But from there we don't necessarily go along to the next meeting hoping for the best. As one of our members explained to us, it may take more than that.

And by the way, when the need is urgent some of us are prepared to be called up even in the middle of the night. We can't all volunteer for that. But as David has said before to us, we all have a tongue. Next time you see a stranger at a meeting remember how you may once have felt and don't be afraid to use it even if all it manages to bring out is something bashful about the weather.

I would like particularly to thank Jed of the Samaritans who set this meeting up and our 'other' David who from his own experience helped us to help others better.

Richard (Nottingham)

DEADLINE for the next newsletter is SATURDAY FEBRUARY 19th.