

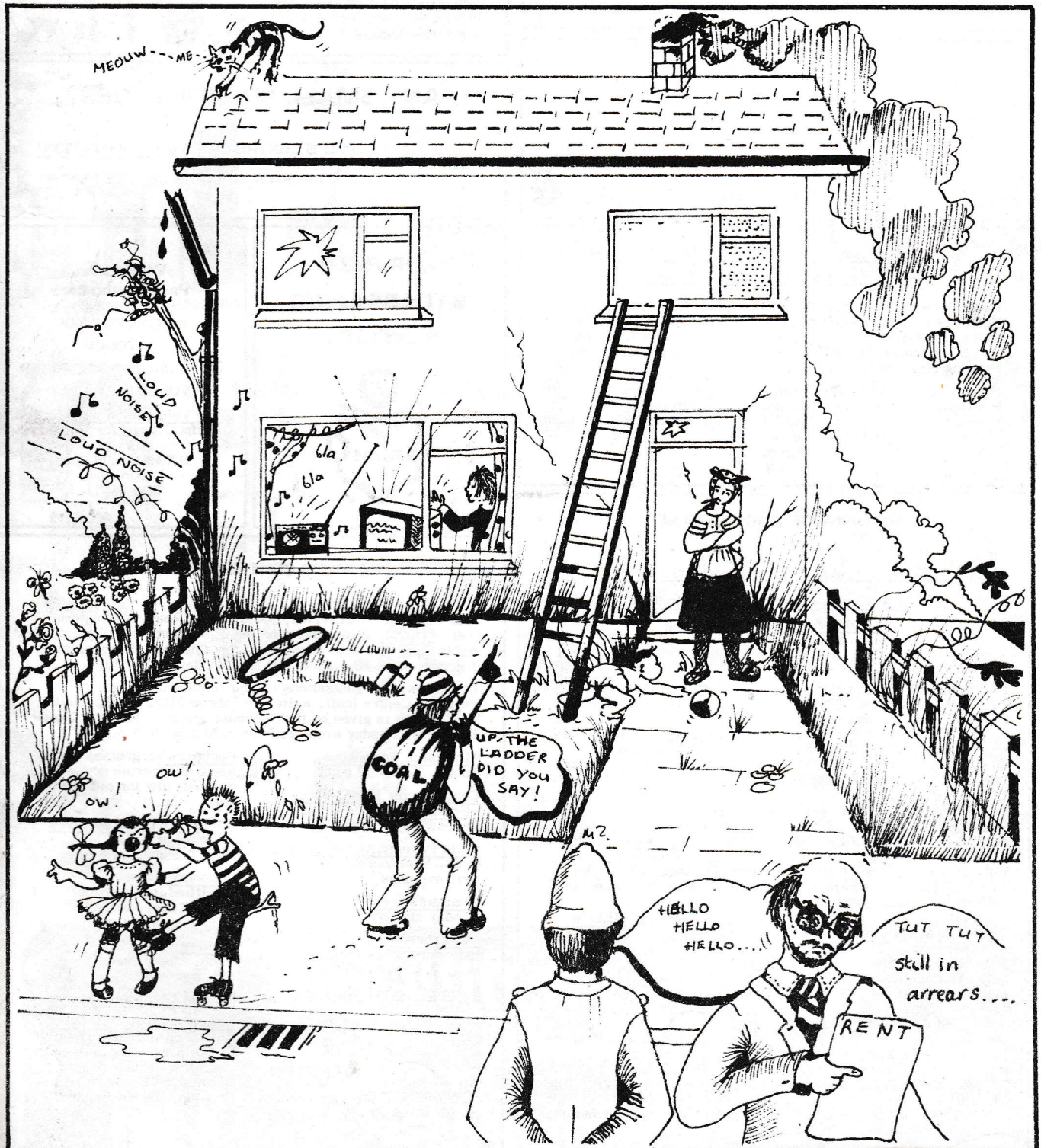
Nottingham Voice

NUMBER 22

OCTOBER 1975

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PEOPLE'S CENTRE DIRECTORY

THE PEOPLE'S CENTRE, 33 Mansfield Road, Nottingham (Tel. 411227), gives advice on legal, welfare, housing and other rights, and also acts as a centre for a number of organisations. It is open from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Monday to Friday.

The following organisations can be contacted through the People's Centre (call, write, or 'phone 411227). Specialist legal advice is given by the Response group on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings from 6.30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Alcoholics Anonymous
Thurs. 7.30 - 10 p.m.

Campaign for Homosexual
Equality
Thurs. 6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

Child Poverty Action Group
Weds. afternoons,
Fri. evenings.

Claimants Union
Monday afternoons.

Gingerbread
(one-parent families)
Mon. 7.30 p.m. - 10 p.m.

National Council for Civil
Liberties
Tues. 6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

Nottingham Community
Planning Group

Off the Record
(young people's problems)
Weds. & Fri. 7 - 9.30 p.m.

Pachwork (organises volunteers to decorate homes and do gardening for old and disabled people)

Refuge for Battered Wives
Campaign
Most Tuesdays at 8 p.m.

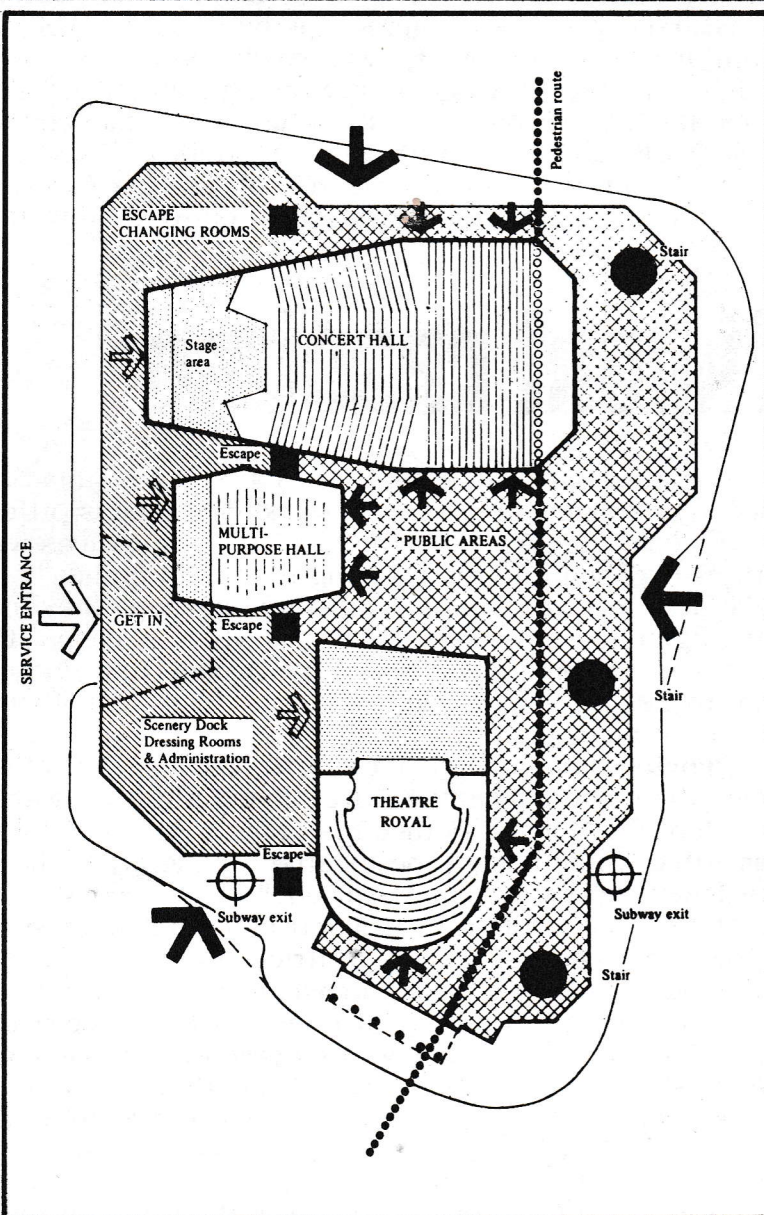
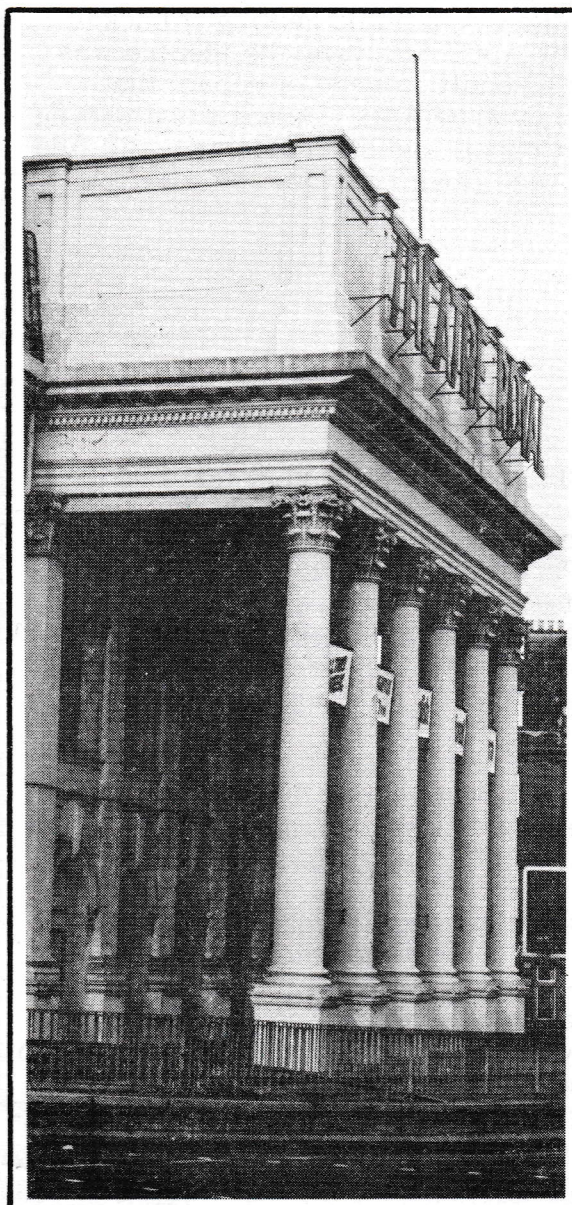
Response
(qualified legal advice)
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Shelter
Weds. afternoons,
Fri. evenings.

Student Community Action

Women's Liberation Group
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Fri. 6 p.m. - 8 p.m. Group
meetings: Thurs. 8 p.m.
Newcastle Chambers, near
Bell Inn, Market Square.

OUT FOR THE COUNTY!



IF THERE'S A CONSISTENT THEME running through the Festival Hall/Theatre Royal epic, it's the City Council's amazing ability to collide with themselves marching smartly in the opposite direction. Added to this is a destructive urge which apparently makes it impossible for them to plan any new building without first knocking another one down. The latest target is the County Hotel, a building which should clearly remain standing. But before looking at this in detail, a brief summary of the story so far.

First there was the Lace Market fiasco. It will be recalled that although the Council already owned two vast chunks of waste-land in the middle of the Lace Market (relics of the urban motorway planned in the sixties and scrapped in the seventies), it was decided that the only thing to do was to obliterate even more of the area by building the Festival Hall not on them but next to them - which, of course, meant buying up more land and turning out the businesses happily prospering there (thus adding the cost of compensation to the cost of land). This was described as "livening up the Lace Market".

Amid prognostications of economic doom from all sides, this policy was pursued with admirable stubbornness, until one day (when Len Maynard, Chairman of the Leisure

Services Committee and chief advocate of the scheme, happened to be on holiday) the Evening Post reported that the whole thing was off: at £3.6m it was too expensive in the present financial climate. (It would be nice to know what Cllr Maynard said when he got back and heard the news.)

Meanwhile, another swift about-turn was cooking at the Theatre Royal.

The Theatre Royal had been bought by the Council in 1969 from Moss Empires Ltd, a poverty-stricken subsidiary of Associated Television, who said the only way they could afford to keep the place going was by flogging it off to the Council and renting it back again at a knock-down £3,500 a year. Nevertheless, by April this year the theatre was in dire straits. It was not only losing money, but was so badly in need of repair that major touring companies were refusing to come any more. The Arts Council were willing to meet £40,000 of the £100,000 repair bill if the City Council and other bodies could find the rest, but John Carroll, leader of the City Council, and Hugh Lawson, the City's Director of Leisure Services, were quite definite that they had no money to spare.

Violent reaction

There was a violent public reaction - possibly Nottingham people had at last had enough of councillors, planners and developers pilfering their city. A "Save the Theatre Royal" campaign was launched, 25,000 signatures were collected, and a stream of irate letters dropped into the Evening Post's "Postbag". Perhaps Cllr Carroll and his friends were a little taken aback by all this, perhaps they suffered a miraculous conversion (a blinding vision of good publicity, maybe), perhaps it's election year next year - but soon we were confronted by a brand new Council production called "Stop the Theatre Royal, I Want to Get On", with hand-on-heart John Carroll in the leading role and supporting chorus of thousands.

Proving that Houdini lives, Cllr Carroll revealed that he had "always been concerned about keeping the Theatre Royal"; and while we were still rubbing our eyes Jack Green, leader of the Tories, joined his voice to the swelling song: "I was chairman of the committee which bought the theatre for the city," he carolled, "and it is good news to hear that it will probably be preserved."

Before the whole City Council rides off into the purple sunset, it might be a good idea to jog Cllr Green's memory a little. For the record, the agreement which Cllr Green presided over in 1969 as chairman of the Estates Committee was that an undertaking should be given to Bentrax Investments Ltd - the property wing of ATV and Moss Empires - that "in due course they will be given the opportunity of redeveloping the sites of the two theatres" (i.e. the Theatre Royal and its neighbour the Empire, since demolished) "and the adjoining lands . . . or alternatively the adjoining lands alone". Even more revealingly, the City Estates Surveyor and Valuer advised the committee that the price to be paid for the freehold of the theatres should have regard to its development potential: "with this acquisition the Corporation will own the whole of the property bounded by Theatre Square, South Sherwood Street, Burton Street and Goldsmith Street, with the exception only of the County Hotel and one other small property. In his view the time is not immediately ripe for any redevelopment here." (Estates Committee Report, April 24th, 1969)

In other words, Cllr Green's committee was not so much saving the Theatre Royal as opening the way for a lucrative development of its site - when the time was finally "ripe".

But back to Cllr Carroll, who in an astonishing theatrical coup now drew together three of the thorniest strands in city politics over the last two years: the "Theatre Point" office block would finally be abandoned; a feasibility study would be commissioned to see whether a Festival Hall could be built on the site instead; and the Theatre Royal would be preserved as part of the scheme. Thus neatly did Cllr Carroll wriggle off the Lace Market hook onto the Theatre Royal bandwagon.

Well, the performance may not have convinced everybody, but it was welcome all the same. Within twelve weeks a glossy feasibility report (cost £15,000) was in the hands of the press and a glossy leaflet in the hands of the public.

And a very nice report it is too. ("Bold, ambitious": Evening Post. "Excitingly simple": Artefact. "Interesting": Nottingham Arrow.) There is a rather dotty idea to

convert the Theatre Royal gallery into a row of private boxes (will people really pay a lot of money for the worst view in the house?), but the rest of the plan seems very sensible. The Theatre Royal will be renovated and will share facilities with a concert hall (seating 2,000) and a "multi-purpose" hall (seating 400). Exactly what Nottingham has needed for a long time, it would seem.

But the report has not been greeted with universal rapture. Press, politicians and public have all expressed reservations about two aspects of the scheme in particular - the cost (£5.6m is the official estimate: the Tory opposition suggests £10m is more likely), and the proposal to demolish the County Hotel. (The hotel is next door to the Theatre Royal, of course: someone 'phoned us and pointed out ruefully that the photograph in the Council's glossy pamphlet showed the theatre billing "Love Thy Neighbour"!)

The fate of the County Hotel is worth looking at in detail, since it demonstrates very clearly some of the reasons why the architecture of Nottingham has deteriorated so much over the past twenty years.

It shows firstly how ignorant councillors and their officials are of what people value in their city and what gives a city its character. After a minor political earthquake the message finally got through that Nottingham wants to keep its Theatre Royal. What did not get through, however, was the equally obvious fact that this is not simply because it's a theatre: it is also because Theatre Square (as it used to be known before it became a set of traffic lights on the Parliament Street thoroughway) is one of the few distinctive spots spared the ravages of Cllr Carroll's predecessors; one of the dwindling number of places which tell people they live in the same city as they did twenty years ago. The County Hotel is such an excellent complement to the Theatre Royal that, visually, its loss would be almost as great as that of the theatre itself. It shouldn't be necessary to point this out - city politicians and administrators should feel it instinctively, or at least have the intelligence and taste to work it out.

Abrupt dismissal

The architects who prepared the feasibility report, Renton, Howard, Wood, Levin Partnership of 22 Little Portland Street and 48 Queen Anne Street, London W1 (branches at Tower Hamlets and Edinburgh), have very little time for the County Hotel. Their abrupt dismissal of it should be quoted in full:

"The County Hotel is planned around a triangular light well, with many changes of level and splayed walls on plan to follow the shape of the site. Some walls on the ground floor have been knocked out in an attempt to create larger public spaces. Possible reuse could include dressing rooms and administration offices; this would involve considerable structural alterations, and would not produce a satisfactory result. The long curving sweep of the brick facade of the County Hotel is of five storeys, with the top floor set back. We feel that the combination of the greater floor to floor heights, and the manner in which it masks the original returns of the portico facade seriously affect the impact of the more sophisticated and pleasing elevation of the Theatre Royal.

"We therefore recommend that the County Hotel be demolished since its retention would seriously inhibit the proper development of the site."

Thus a firm of London architects dismiss after twelve weeks a building which has pleased Nottingham people for over a century.

We need not take their opinion too seriously, however. Notice, for example, how what was merely unsatisfactory in the first paragraph becomes, with the help of a dubious aesthetic judgment, a serious inhibition in the second. The aesthetic judgment is not only dubious but obscure and ungrammatical: what on earth is "the combination of the greater floor to floor heights"? Greater than what?

As for the final comment - this is merely standard developers' jargon for doing away with something people rather like (Drury Hill and the old Black Boy were packed off in much the same way). All it really means is that they can't be bothered to harmonise their grandiose scheme (the report speaks elsewhere of the need to "create a worthwhile complex on this site of national significance") with what has been handed down to them from the past. This is a besetting sin of modern architects, as a glance round Nottingham will reveal - a particularly relevant case is the Playhouse and the Albert Hall, especially when

viewed from Wellington Circus. For all their scorn of the County Hotel, will Messrs Renton, Howard, Wood, Levin really do any better? The Council should tell them that the County Hotel is to be preserved, and for the sake of something so pleasing in appearance should be prepared to put up with a little less than perfection behind the scenes.

Unfortunately, the County Hotel does not have the protection of being a listed building, though there are buildings less important to Nottingham's character which do (tucked away in Mapperley Park, for example). This omission is startling enough to arouse suspicion when you consider earlier plans for the Theatre Royal site. It would hardly have been possible to avoid listing the Theatre Royal - but what a lot of trouble has been avoided by not listing the County Hotel! It certainly makes it easy for the Council to knock down the hotel well before the new, improved Festival Hall scheme finally gets under way.

"The present tight money policy means that even if the Festival Hall plan was agreed this week work on it would not be started for a long time," wrote the apparently well-informed Municipal Correspondent of the Evening Post on May 14th - though Cllr Carroll has since revealed that "through good housekeeping the City Council has set aside a fund which has been earmarked for such a project as this". However, it is acknowledged that "there is no question of this fund being sufficient to finance the scheme totally", and that the project "would have to be carried out over a period of three or four years, during which it is hoped that the present economic situation would improve". And the completion of the scheme depends on such hopeful crystal-gazing! It would be a tragedy if the County Hotel were demolished to meet the demands of a project which is never carried out.

Suspicious confirmed

Suspicious are confirmed by the haste with which the £160,000 purchase and the running-down of the hotel are being conducted. Even the fixtures and fittings are being sold, making it virtually impossible ever to re-open it as a hotel. Cllr Carroll has refused to explain all this (it would seem more sensible to do nothing irrevocable until the whole scheme is finally confirmed), claiming mysteriously that there are "other factors involved", and that the hotel is linked with the future of the Theatre Royal now being discussed with Moss Empires (Evening Post, September 19th). It seems clear from the feasibility report, however, that the reason for the haste is the architects' recommendation that work on the whole scheme should start on the site of the County Hotel. This is scheduled to include new dressing rooms and plant rooms for the Theatre Royal, which would explain the need to negotiate an agreement with Moss Empires.

It would be a pity if the fate of the County Hotel were determined by a breathless rush to make a start on this first part of the scheme. It is unlikely that support will be mobilised for the County Hotel as it was for the Theatre Royal, but anyone wishing to protest should write to the Department of the Environment, 25 Savile Row, London W1X 2BT, suggesting that the hotel should be included in the list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. Inclusion in the list would at least restrain the Council until a decision has been made on grounds a little more substantial than the opinion of a firm of architects who have been offered the chance to redesign the site.

And a final point: before the City Council become too tender-hearted towards Moss Empires and their tragic poverty, it might be worth their while to glance at the following pronouncements from Moss's equally hard-up chairman Sir Lew Grade (who is also chairman of ATV and Bentrax), as reported by the Guardian after a recent 250,000 dollar ATV jaunt to Switzerland to publicise a new film, "The Return of the Pink Panther":

"He had enough money - he, Sir Lew, personally had more money than he needed - he had enough money to produce 20 major pictures a year. He would start with ten and they would have minimum budgets of five million dollars each. There would be no ceiling: the budget would ultimately be determined by the cost of the stars and the directors."

(Guardian, September 15th)

Why not ask Sir Lew (a kind-hearted man by all accounts) to make only 19 pictures next year and help Nottingham keep its Theatre Royal instead?

JOHN SHEFFIELD

Voice Review

PEOPLE'S CENTRE, 33 MANSFIELD ROAD, NOTTINGHAM. TEL. NOTTM 411676.

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NOTE: Nottingham Voice is affiliated to the People's Centre, 33 Mansfield Road, Nottingham, but should not be taken (by paranoid city and county councillors or others) as representing the opinion of the Centre, or other affiliated organisations, or of any other organisation.

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TENANTS POISONED BY HEAT METERS

COUNCIL TENANTS WHO ARE CONNECTED TO DISTRICT HEATING in Nottingham and many other cities are breathing in toxic fumes whenever they use their heating. This disturbing fact emerged after months of detailed research by a Voice correspondent.

All district heating consumers in Nottingham are metered by Clorius Meters who are also responsible for collecting the heating charges. The meters used by Clorius contain methyl benzoate which is used to measure the heat by evaporation. The greater the evaporation of the methyl benzoate the greater the amount of heat used. The principle the meters work on means that the evaporated methyl benzoate enters directly into the atmosphere of the room where the meter is situated (the tube containing the liquid is replaced each time the meter is read). And since all the radiators are metered with a separate meter most households will have about five meters.

Methyl benzoate is a toxic substance. One of the most authoritative works on toxicology ("Dangerous Properties of Industrial Materials" - N.I. Sax) classifies methyl benzoate at an acute systemic toxicity rating of three - the highest in the scale used in the book. Sax says that such a toxicity rating means "Materials which can be absorbed into the body by inhalation, ingestion, or through the skin and which can cause injury of sufficient severity to threaten life following a single exposure lasting seconds, minutes, or hours, or following ingestion of a single dose". Sax also states that the chronic (or long term) effects are unknown - and this is as important as the dramatic definition of acute toxicity.

The definition of acute toxicity refers to a larger dose than could be obtained from a

Clorius meter - although of course individuals differ in their sensitivity to toxic substances. Illnesses such as asthma and bronchitis could worsen the effects of any dose, as could extreme age or youth. Work carried out recently suggests that the acute toxicity of methyl benzoate is not as high as Sax would suggest, and in fact small quantities of methyl benzoate have sometimes been used in perfumes (although the soundness of this practice must be questioned).

However dangerous the immediate effects of methyl benzoate really are, it is still not known what the long term effects may be. None of the officials spoken to (Public Health, Dept of Consumer Protection, BIBRA, Factories Inspectorate) were even aware of the use of methyl benzoate in homes. However, to get some idea of the risks that may be involved we can consider the use of asbestos, vinyl chloride and benzene which are all substances used throughout the world for many years and which have only recently been found to carry appalling toxicity risks - all causing a different kind of cancer. The case of methyl benzoate is further complicated by the fact that it can be "hydrolised" (that is split up into simpler substances in the body) into methanol and benzoic acid. Methanol is known to attack the central nervous system and particularly the eyes.

The conditions in which methyl benzoate is released into the atmosphere in homes is ideal for absorption over a long period. The vapour is released when the heating is being used - consequently there will be little or no ventilation to disperse it outside the house. Heating is used for extensive periods of the year and people will breathe in the vapour whenever they are at home during this period - and of course all night long. Most people will in fact be in contact with the vapour for longer periods than they would be at work.

Long term effects of methyl benzoate are unknown. But the short term effects caused by a sudden increase in vapour are known - at least in their effect on the individual. Since Clorius meters are open to the atmosphere and are usually fixed to the radiator by a single screw it is relatively easy to break or invert the meters - thus letting the entire stock of methyl benzoate into the room in a short time. Some weeks ago a local paper in Manchester carried the story of how a mother of two small children found them coughing and choking for air after they had upset a Clorius meter. The mother is reported to have said that on entering the room she could hardly breathe.

It is possible that no long term risk will be found from methyl benzoate, but shocks we have had in the past from "harmless" substances like asbestos have resulted in the current attitude that no substance should be used where there is the slightest doubt unless there is an overriding industrial or social need. There is rather more than the "slightest doubt" about methyl benzoate, and there is no overriding social reason to use this substance in heat meters.

Nottingham Voice has questioned the whole district heating scheme in the past and particularly the cost to the tenant. Questions have been continually raised concerning the accuracy of the Clorius meter. Some of the practices of Clorius Meters are open to question - especially their practice of sending the Department of Health and Social Security details of all tenants who are in arrears with them - whether or not a particular tenant is on Supplementary Benefit. But far more serious than all this is the use of a known toxic substance, whose long term effects are unknown, in meters open to the air in virtually all rooms in dwellings using the system. The alternative to Clorius Meters is available in the form of a straightforward water flow meter. Let us hope that either methyl benzoate is shown to have no immediate or long term effects, or that the metering system of district heating schemes - including Nottingham - will be changed as soon as possible.

FOLLOWING LAST MONTH'S SHOCK REVELATION that private house owners might wake up one morning and find council tenants next door, a confidential report has fallen into our hands which reveals that this is only part of a wider Housing Department strategy for knocking the bottom out of the private housing market and turning the whole of Arnold, Carlton and Gedling into a vast council estate. According to this document, Housing Department officials calculate that, by a series of carefully planned purchases in the private market, they can lower property values in these areas to such an extent that whole private estates can be acquired at knock-down prices. The report also reveals that, as part of the strategy, officials have been carefully studying the correspondence columns of the Evening Post to ascertain the type of tenant most suitable for moving into

these properties. They believe that property values could be pushed down much faster if council tenants in private estates conformed as closely as possible to standard middle-class phobias (see cover for artist's impression).

SMILE WITH THE POST!

CITY PAPER IN SHOCK RACE RELATIONS AXE BID PROBE

READERS OF THE EVENING POST on Friday, September 12th probably thought they were suffering from hallucinations when they reached the "Postbag" page. There, before their very eyes, was a massive attack on the Post's own editorial column. And not only was the heading "'Racial prejudice' attack on Comment" blasted across seven columns, but the letter underneath it occupied a massive 34 column inches.

Is this a record? Yes, probably. The Post rarely publishes letters of more than six column inches - and doesn't often publish letters critical of itself (a simple reflection, no doubt, of how much this right-wing organ is in tune with its readers in this Labour city).

There may be a reason for the unaccustomed humility, however. Although this is not mentioned in the letter, the author, David Larder, has also made a complaint about the offending Comment column to the Press Council, as well as referring the matter to the Chief Constable as a possible case of incitement to racial hatred. (Comment had suggested that it was quite acceptable in times of economic stress for employers to give jobs to "locals" in preference to coloured workers.)

Interestingly enough, the Post is probably more concerned about the Press Council than the law, since condemnation by the Council would oblige it to publish the judgment in its own pages. Could it be that the Forman Street bosses hope to avoid this humiliation by grovelling in the correspondence columns instead? It should be noted, however, that the Post has still not published a statement of regret on its own behalf, and, moreover, has published a number of letters supporting its own point of view.

COUNCIL GRABS URBAN AID

THIS YEAR'S URBAN AID CHARADE is drawing to an exciting close. The Social Services Committee meeting on 1st October "considered" sixteen applications from various groups, four of which had been recommended by the Social Services Department for approval. Three of these were high cost (£90,000 plus) capital projects. Two were submitted by the Social Services Department itself and the third by the WRVS - as an adjunct to a service normally seen as being the responsibility of the Social Services Department, i.e. Meals-on-Wheels. The fourth was the People's Centre application for an action and research team. The cost-conscious Labour councillors were not slow to spot that the substitution of the Community Centre/Adventure Playground scheme at Mansfield Woodhouse for the People's Centre project could save them about £1,300 in running costs for a full year. So the People's Centre project was quickly rejected with little or no debate, although one Labour councillor did refer to the County Deprived Area Study (carried out by the Department of Planning and Transportation earlier this year) and muttered: "We don't need to know any more." No councillor had the guts to seriously question the other three projects which will cover an area of need where the Social Services Department already has a statutory responsibility anyway, e.g. intermediate treatment for adolescents in trouble.

There are some important points to be made here. In fact, voluntary self-help groups

who are encouraged to apply are being sold down the river. The local authority is abusing the Urban Aid Scheme by pushing through expensive Social Services Department capital projects in the hope of making up for some of the recent Government-enforced cuts. As Ted Culham, Social Services Director, observed at the meeting, a second, somewhat contradictory central Government circular was received shortly after the Urban Aid circular, warning the local authority not to increase expenditure next year. So, to get round this, they have come up with an excellent wheeze. The three £90,000 plus capital projects, if approved by central Government, would come under the key sector of next year's capital expenditure account (financed by Government-approved loan) and repayments out of ordinary revenue account would not begin to show up until the year after (1977/8). Thus they are complying with the circular not to increase next year's spending. Unfortunately, the Government is likely to see through this pretty quickly, and as they are known not to favour high cost capital projects anyway, Nottinghamshire will probably end up with virtually nothing out of next year's Urban Aid money.

MYSTERIOUS EAST

THOUSANDS OF NOTTINGHAM ELECTORS will be voting in new wards at the local elections next May. This was revealed by Cllr Mrs Betty Higgins at a General Management Committee meeting of East Nottingham Labour Party on September 23rd.

But the change is still not official. The Local Government Boundaries Commission has yet to confirm publicly the changes first proposed by the Labour-controlled City Council over a year ago.

Nottingham East Labour Party has already reorganised on the basis of the new boundaries, however. Mrs Higgins explained that this was necessary to prepare for next May's contest. The new ward parties would be electing officials later this month.

A political correspondent suggests there may be another reason for the haste - the chance to capitalise on the carve-up of wards most troublesome to the Labour establishment, especially to City Council leader Cllr John Carroll, and to Nottingham East MP Jack Dunnett.

The most conspicuous feature of the new boundaries is the transfer of parts of the two most "difficult" wards, Lenton and Market, to help make up a new Park ward. Overwhelmingly Tory in character, this will conveniently include the Victoria Centre, home of rebel councillor Stephen Evans (still appealing against expulsion from East Nottingham Labour Party), and may also prove an electoral graveyard for anti-establishment councillors Mairi Yuill and Peter Price.

In contrast, the new Lenton ward, which includes the Raleigh Street area and the Labour-voting parts of New Radford and Lenton, may prove a happy hunting ground for rising-star Mr M. Aslam, a Goldsmith Street accountant who is an increasingly close friend of MP Jack Dunnett. Recently elected to the panel of potential Labour councillors, Mr Aslam should be encouraged by the presence in the ward of some seventy Asian members of the old Lenton ward, recently recruited and mostly pro-Dunnett during recent internal wrangles.

The rest of the old Market ward finds a safe home in the new St Ann's, electoral patch of Cllr John Carroll, who should benefit from the portable Asian majority which was such an interesting feature of crisis-ridden Market ward over the last twelve months.

In Nottingham East, at least, the local Labour establishment has good reason to feel happy with the system which places local government boundaries largely at its disposal.

NOTTINGHAM SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT have denied responsibility for the death of 22,000 ants at Wollaton Hall Natural History Museum last month. "A social worker visited the colony and saw no signs of distress," said an official. "The ants were running round frantically in little circles, but I understand that is normal behaviour for ants. They are extremely small and 22,000 is a very heavy case-load."

CASH CRISIS DRAMA

FOLLOWING THE RECENT THEATRE ROYAL CRISIS, it has been revealed that another local monument, Cllr John Carroll, has financial problems. Although outwardly in good condition (the facade is crumbling but intact, and performances have continued as usual), Cllr Carroll is apparently in very poor economic shape.

This disturbing situation came to light during a correspondence between Cllr Carroll and the solicitors of Dieter Peetz, Nottingham University lecturer and long-standing political opponent of Cllr Carroll and Nottingham East MP Jack Dunnett.

The correspondence concerned remarks about Mr Peetz published by Cllr Carroll in his capacity as agent for Jack Dunnett at the last general election, when Mr Peetz stood against Mr Dunnett as an independent "Clean Up Labour" candidate.

A state of appalling poverty was revealed when Cllr Carroll's reply to Mr Peetz's solicitors arrived in an unstamped envelope with the following explanation: "For the record, my financial position is such that I cannot even afford a stamp for this letter and I have had to stretch my finances to provide the necessary stationery."

This situation is obviously of the greatest concern to everybody who cares for the quality of our political environment. Too many local monuments have been wantonly destroyed in the past after running into financial trouble (though, happily, one of the most colourful, Alderman William Derbyshire, has recently been re-erected elsewhere).

Unfortunately, Cllr Carroll's cash crisis has been partly brought about by his own mismanagement. It will be recalled that he is currently engaged in an expensive libel action against fellow party member and chairman of Lenton Ward Labour Party Chris Richardson. A spectacular opening is planned for this production in Nottingham early next year. A "Save John Carroll" campaign is unlikely, therefore, unless this lavish presentation is abandoned.

NOTHING BUT HOUSES

COMMUNITY FACILITIES, DESPERATELY NEEDED in various parts of the city, are presently under threat from various quarters, namely (1) the Festival Hall project, (2) the Government spending cuts, and (3) Councillor John Carroll (though not necessarily in that order).

(1) In the present economic climate there is not going to be much enthusiasm for expensive capital projects built in the name of community facilities. In fact, a report presented to the Nottingham Community Facilities Committee on September 3rd stressed the need to provide much more in the way of low-budget schemes, rather than concentrate the available money into a few glamorous and expensive projects such as the Bulwell Hall Leisure Centre. This is a step in the right direction: it is particularly relevant at the moment in the context of any decision to proceed with a £5.6m Concert Hall at the rear of the Theatre Royal, which would wipe out the locally determined sector of the local authority's capital expenditure account (a strictly limited sum of money which the government allows a local authority to borrow each year).

Therefore money for community facilities projects, which comes from the same source, seems to be out of the question at the moment. The City Leisure Services Department are willing to finance such projects on those areas of land already set aside for the purpose, but not for three years, because of the Theatre Royal development project (although temporary landscaping is a possibility in the meantime - this would at least mean that the land could be used for such things as adventure playgrounds).

(2) The Government spending cuts mean that, as far as capital projects go, only

housing escapes relatively unscathed. In other words, although there is theoretically no ceiling on capital expenditure in education, social services and housing, the necessary Government sanction required before loans can be raised is only likely to be forthcoming for housing projects. There is no money for such things as schools, old people's homes, and hostels for the mentally handicapped as well as community facilities. Oddly enough, though, there could be money for tenants' halls, which come under housing and are therefore eligible. It has been suggested that these could then be made ready for conversion to community facilities as soon as the money is forthcoming.

(3) The great temptation and danger, of course, in view of the present appalling homelessness situation, is that land set aside for schools and social services buildings, as well as community facilities, will get developed for housing, because in the short term there is no money and the land remains empty. There are indications that Cllr John Carroll is thinking along these lines, though the short-sightedness of such an attitude is clear: we should all know only too well by now the chronic problems thrown up by large residential housing estates with no facilities or meeting places for different groups (the cost in terms of vandalism, borstal and detention centre places, isolation, boredom, depression, psychiatric hospital care, and the time of social workers, probation officers and the courts is incalculable). There seems little point in having a County Deprived Area Study if Council policy perpetuates that deprivation.

One area under threat at the moment appears to be Top Valley where Rowlinson, the contractors, are currently working on Phase 3B, which is very close to the land set aside for community facilities. They could, therefore, easily switch their equipment, materials and manpower to constructing houses on this land, which is centrally situated and ideal for its original purpose.

The City Community Facilities Liaison Committee which met on 17th September considered a Joint Working Party Report on facilities at Top Valley. Recommendations for the provision of a community centre were put forward, but the exact location was not made clear. In other words, there is no guarantee that the centre will be built on the land understood to be set aside for that purpose.

However, at least there are some fairly concrete proposals for Top Valley and if progress can be made with these then John Carroll will have no excuse to take over the land for housing. Some other areas might not be so lucky, though. For instance, at Snape Wood, where building has not yet begun, there isn't likely to be any definite scheme for use of the community facilities land for some time.

The council is adding to the present difficulties by expecting community groups to pay a commercial rent or price for land they wish to use. Thus there is a very real danger that over the next few months land which should be reserved for community use will be developed for housing instead.

FAIR RENTS

THE RENTS REGISTRATION CAMPAIGN, undertaken by the People's Centre in August in the Hyson Green area of the city, has provoked plenty of response, despite its low-key nature. In effect, the campaign merely informed private tenants that, with some exceptions, they could apply to have a "fair rent" assessed by a local authority rent officer and also that they may be eligible for a rent rebate if their income is below a certain level.

There has been much criticism of the campaign, particularly in the Evening Post mailbag. Most of it has been ill-informed, many people wanting to either "have a go" at the 1974 Rent Act (which gives security of tenure to most furnished tenants) or the homelessness situation in general. Of course, one can argue that this Act has resulted in an increase in the number of people homeless, following the shrinkage of the amount of privately rented accommodation available. But this is really a separate issue.

The philosophy behind the People's Centre campaign was fairly simple. In a free market or laissez-faire situation, the appalling homelessness position could be ruthlessly exploited by any landlord wanting to get rich quick. To prevent abuse, the local

authority (not the People's Centre!) will fix a "fair rent", and this has caused much controversy. To many people it is synonymous with a low rent, despite the fact that the Rent Officer takes account of all the landlord's outgoings and allows a "reasonable" profit margin.

It is worth mentioning that landlord applications for a fair rent outnumber tenant applications by about one hundred to one in any normal month!

Last month the People's Centre received a threatening 'phone call from the mysterious PLA (Private Landlords' Association) threatening tenant harassment if the campaign continued. This, of course, amounted to an admission that many landlords were charging more than a fair rent. The campaign ran its intended month-long course, but there has been a very small response in the way of tenant applications.

However, the campaign has brought to light the activities of one old-fashioned, swashbuckling landlord by the name of J. Bucko, who owns various multi-occupation premises in the area. At one house in particular, where there are eleven flats, mostly single-roomed, five tenants applied for a fair rent. As soon as Mr Bucko heard of this outrage, he issued all of them with Notices to Quit. Although such notices were meaningless because he had no grounds for eviction, he nevertheless "persuaded" all the tenants (except one) to withdraw their fair rent applications by offering to withdraw his own worthless notices to quit.

It seems the withdrawals took the form of similarly worded letters, although we are certainly not trying to suggest that Bucko wrote them himself and then got his tenants to sign them. In fact, Bucko would be in contempt of court by setting foot on this particular property. He is presently charged with grievous bodily harm (on two tenants) and assaulting two police officers (with a hatchet!) shortly before the People's Centre campaign began.

On a more light-hearted note, I understand he was recently prosecuted for overloading his car with (you've guessed it!) second-hand furniture. The Tenancy Relations Officer (one of the handful outside London, based at the Housing Advice Centre on Parliament Street) is well aware of Bucko's unsavoury activities and future developments will be awaited with interest.

GEOFF METCALFE

LETTERS

HOUSING

Dear Sir,

Your report 'Housing: Who pays' was a fascinating piece of research. The only snag with Fred Broad's investigation is that his conclusions are no more valid than his powers of financial analysis.

We are at least agreed that the Housing Department is obliged to provide housing. Few expanding operations are self-capitalising, thus the rental revenues cannot finance capital expenditure for new projects. If the Department stopped, or halved its programme, I assume that Mr Broad's voice would be among the loudest to protest, for his bias is more than a little discernible.

If any commercial operation made conclusions like 'if the massive debt charges did not exist...', we might all dread the consequences. The fact is that if the debt did not exist, neither would the houses.

Whatever the value of the total debt, the fact that the rental income does not constitute 50% of the debt repayment shows a more significant aspect of the situation. Is it not reasonable that in assessing a fair rent for a property the authority should take into account the total cost of the provision of the service? In this instance the total cost is £19.5m against the rental income of £6.9m.

The only way a housing department can self-finance is to increase rentals until

economic, which sum together with the government subsidy would release revenue for capital expenditure.

To say that some tenants have paid for their homes several times over is to distort matters a little. Surely the cost of that home must include every cost relating to its provision. A twenty year mortgage holder will repay nearly three times the original cost of his home. If you add maintenance and finance costs to the building cost of a council home you should arrive at a figure comparing closely to the costs of private sector housing.

Three groups pay for council housing: the tenants, the tax payer in general, and the local ratepayer.

Yours faithfully, Gregor Mackie.

C/o Barker Gate House, Barker Gate, Nottingham.

(Fred Broad replies: My point was precisely that council rents are not fixed according to the actual cost of the house a tenant rents (even including interest). A mortgage payer is not expected to pay more and more for his house over the years because other people's houses are costing more, and he ends up owning a house which has probably substantially increased in value. The point is that I would consider a fair rent to be one which takes into account the provision of the house which the tenant actually occupies - a view Mr Mackie has about mortgage payers but not council tenants. I am glad my bias (or opinion) showed in the article - there wouldn't have been much point in writing it otherwise.)

KARNIVAL

ANYONE WHO HAS LIVED IN THE NOTTINGHAM AREA for any length of time will certainly have encountered Karnival in some form or other by now, and so will welcome with open arms and mouths (and pockets?) the news that, yes, folks, it's Karnival time again. The mascot this year, which we hope you will see frequently on posters, T-shirts and rag-mags, is a magnificent Panda, known from hereon as - PANDA!

The epic saga of Karnival '75 begins on Friday, October 3rd with a Balloon Race in Slab Square. It finishes on October 25th with the usual Grand Procession of floats and manic students, specially concocted for your amusement, followed by Karnival klimax at night, this year featuring Fairport Convention in the University Sports Centre. In between those two dates the students of Nottingham spend many hours of blood, sweat and tears (of anguish and laughter) as they tour the far-flung corners of our Empire selling "Chick", performing stunts of nerve-jangling audacity, or turn about-face and actually do constructive social work through our Karnival Aktion programme.

For all those who don't know, Karnival Aktion is the non-profit making, actively social working side of Karnival, where we do our best to help the needy, aged and invalids of the Nottingham area. This year's programme features the Paraplegic Games in the University Sports Centre (October 4th), our popular Hall Parties for the Handicapped (October 14th), the Nottingham Playhouse Trip for the Housebound (October 22nd), plus the perennial painting, decorating and coal delivering.

Our money-making side is more well-known and its success is evident in that Karnival '74 was the biggest rag in England last year, making £28,800. "Chick", the rag-mag, sold a world record of 145,000 copies. With 170,000 being printed this year, we feel that the elusive £30,000 barrier can be broken (you don't have to read "Chick", just buy one - or two - or five ...).

We admit that Karnival can, for us, be a great laugh, but it also entails a lot of hard work before all those magic notes start rolling in. If we can count on your support, we, and Panda, would be very grateful, so please help. Ta, and lots of love.

K.K. (and Panda)

CLAIMANTS UNION: We have received a considerable response to the questions raised in our last issue about the Claimants Union. For reasons of space we have decided to hold over a consideration of these until a future issue.

Impropaganda

HOW MANY NOTTINGHAM PEOPLE give more than a passing glance to the official "Nottingham Tourist Guide", published by the City Information Office and on sale in newsagents and bookshops for 15p? No reason why they should, of course - we hardly think of ourselves as tourists in our own city. But it's always worth looking at what your own propagandists are saying about you to the outside world - if only to avoid surprise when the outside world develops a low opinion of you, or impinges on you in slightly bizarre ways.

The other day, for example, a friend walking past the Forest was stopped by a puzzled-looking Southern European carrying a camera and a map and wondering where the Abbey was. After a certain amount of confusion it was established that the Abbey in question was Newstead Abbey and that the source of the delusion was the official Tourist Guide, which contains a map clearly placing Newstead Abbey in the middle of the Forest, rather towards the bowling green end. True, there is also a tiny little arrow pointing along Mansfield Road, but there is not much to link it with the neat little drawing of the Abbey, which seems more closely related to a black star with five points - revealed by a microscopic key at the foot of the map to be a public convenience.

Strange illusions

Wondering what other strange illusions might be floating through the minds of our visitors, I forked out 15p at Sisson's on Wheeler Gate for a copy of the Tourist Guide, "Fifteenth Edition: Reprinted in June 1974", and at the same time looked out a copy of the fourteenth edition bought a few years ago ("Nottingham Forest is in the First Division of the Football League ... Notts County is in the Fourth Division ..." Ah, nostalgia!).

Now, one thing can be said for the City Information Office: unlike the English Tourist Board they're not trying to convince anybody that this country is all Beefeaters, Cotswolds and Devonshire Cream Teas. In fact, edition fifteen contains a fair selection of the most boring views in Nottingham, including the Information Office itself. In this lavishly coloured booklet of sixteen large pages, almost a full page is devoted to ugly old Albert Street - the focal point of the picture is a gaping hole where the old C & A had just been knocked down - and another couple of pages are filled with some of the ugliest objects in Nottingham: the Broad Marsh Centre, the Victoria Centre, the Albany Hotel, the Bridgford Hotel.

It's all an interesting contrast with the previous edition, and worth looking at in some detail as one more example of a worrying tendency in our civic life: the increasing reliance on public relations techniques to "inform" people about Council affairs.

The prime example of this is the Nottingham Arrow, the Corporation's free official newspaper (which we will look at later) - but the Tourist Guide is more depressing, because here, distilled in sixteen pages, is the official vision of our city: according to September's Arrow, "a full colour tourist guide reflecting the history and culture of Nottingham". And what a vision!

Edition fourteen of the guide was informative, and simply and sensibly written. It contained a lot of detailed and necessary information, general as well as historical (the latter contributed by that excellent local historian Keith Train), and also included a walk which took in most of the interesting streets and buildings in central Nottingham. It was comprehensive, well illustrated and unpretentious.

Its successor, alas, is none of these things. Vast quantities of information have been chopped - some sections have been watered down (leaving in most cases nothing but

water), others have been transferred bodily to a whole tribe of free pamphlets available only from the Information Office: hardly convenient for everybody, and no use at all if the pamphlet you want is unavailable (six were out of print when I called in myself, including "Industrial Nottingham", "Nottingham Castle", "Robin Hood" and the "History of the City" - all adequately covered in the fourteenth edition but hardly at all in the present one). While most of these pamphlets contain more information than was included in the old guidebook, a visitor buying the official Tourist Guide is surely entitled to a reasonable amount of this in the guide itself.

More distressing, however, is the way in which the guide has been rewritten. In accordance with present Information Office thinking ("Public Relations has become an important activity in the Publicity and Information Office," says September's Arrow), the whole thing has been given the full PR treatment. Less text, less information, bigger (but fewer) pages, bigger (though less interesting) photos - but a plague of ad-man's flatulent clichés. We learn from this flabby little pamphlet that beyond the Castle gatehouse "a network of streets beckon the interested visitor", that Southwell Minster "echoes its history over a thousand years" (whatever that means), that several of our institutions are not simply famous but "renowned throughout the world", that Nottingham "views her future with a contemporary and forward looking eye" (a strangely cross-eyed sounding process), and that most of our places of interest are "strikingly beautiful", "impressive", or merely "attractive" (a limp adjective, but much in favour).

Lush soft-sell

And typical of the guide's priorities is that, while information which the tourist really needs is left out, extensive space is given to a lush soft-sell for the Victoria and Broad Marsh Centres - as if the Nottingham Tourist Guide's main job were to swell the profits of our shopkeepers.

It is interesting to note also that, while most of Keith Train's historical detail has been cut, the present edition introduces a highly dubious tale that Dick Turpin ("the notorious highwayman") may have stayed at the Salutation Inn. A useful clue to interpreting the rest of the guide, this. Nottingham as it actually is, with a coherent history leading to a recognisable present, has been replaced by a series of random commercial gimmicks - any story, any phrase will do if it helps sell Nottingham to the unsuspecting tourist; a shoddy public relations confection that should really be put on tape in the phoney American travelogue style of Peter Sellers' "Balham, Gateway to the South".

If this sad stuff is Public Relations' contribution to our outside reputation, then internally it's not doing much better - as evidenced by the Nottingham Arrow, which flops leadenly onto 106,000 doormats every month. Naturally, the boredom quotient varies from month to month - some of the September issue is rather interesting (articles on Brewhouse Yard, the Council House clock and City Transport, for example) - but it's usually pretty dismal, the general tone aptly summed up by the lugubrious advertisement we quoted some months ago (it still appears): "Wherever the Nottingham Arrow is delivered A.W. Lymn the leading funeral service is within easy reach".

To be fair to the Editorial Board, they were riding a milk horse from the start. The paper, for all its pretensions, was never meant to be widely informative about local government: its object has always been to tell people as much about the Council as the Council wants them to know. This explains why stodge is such a staple ingredient. The dreary "Down Your Ward", for example, plods relentlessly from one dull municipal fact to another and from one vote-conscious councillor to another.

"Bilborough Sixth Form College is one of three similar schools in the city," it drones. "Also in the ward are Hardwick School, Woodland School and Shepherd School, all for educationally subnormal children. Other schools are the big John Player Comprehensive, Glaisdale Comprehensive, the new Trinity Comprehensive for Catholic children which will open this autumn, Glenbrook Infant and Junior Schools, and Firbeck Primary School with its nursery unit. Mr Barry Neep, Principal Educational Welfare Officer for Nottinghamshire, commented: 'I should imagine this ward has more schools than any other in the city ...'"

And, a little further on: "Said City Councillor Bob Birch: 'I am watching the Nottingham Environs Transportation Study very closely. An interim document has already been published and this will be evaluated later in conjunction with the results and evaluation of the zone development ...'"

Councillor Birch isn't the only one in the Arrow to get bogged down in Town Hall jargon - another of the paper's faults is its tendency to hand over large chunks of its columns to civil servants who either can't write plain English at all, or feel obliged to retreat from the public gaze behind a smog of officialese.

Take, for example, the supposedly informative "Who does what in the local Authority", which in September dealt with the Chief Executive's Office - and, judging by its impenetrable legalism, could only have been written by somebody from inside that office. Does the following passage really say more than that the Chief Executive has to make sure everybody works together: "... it is his responsibility to secure the co-ordination of advice on the forward planning of objectives and services and to lead the Management Team in securing a corporate approach to the affairs of the Authority generally." Pompous generalities like this don't give the reader any idea at all of what the Chief Executive actually does, and there doesn't seem much point in publishing a column of "information" written in pedantic abstractions which make it virtually meaningless.

Even more unfortunately, the front-page lead, about the new Festival Hall project, is infected with the same disease. Alluringly headlined "City Festival Hall proposal", the story begins with a paragraph which is hardly calculated to grab the reader by the throat: "At a recent press conference held at the Council House, Nottingham City Council announced the findings of a report they had commissioned to look at the feasibility of building a Festival Hall on the site adjacent to the Theatre Royal and to examine the possibility of improving the Theatre itself."

And this is the main paragraph in the paper's main story. It seems elementary that a story should begin with what had actually been proposed rather than all the dreary preliminaries. In fact, the whole thing reads as if it had been lifted straight from an official report - fine for council officials perhaps, but hardly the way to get it across to the general public. (And like a lot of officialese, it sometimes gets so wordy that one word too many sneaks in - we are told at one point that "the site is sufficiently large enough".)

Election fodder

But more significant than what the Arrow does tell you is what it doesn't. The least you could expect of a decent council newspaper would be that it made a consistent attempt to explain council policy month by month and to report the most important council decisions (and not merely by selecting the best election fodder). This the Arrow dismally fails to do. If you wanted an overall picture of what the Council was up to, the highly selective pages of the Arrow would be the last place to look. Unlike its predecessor the City News, the Arrow does not give a summary of the main council and committee decisions during the previous month. Nor does it give a list of the times and places of council and committee meetings during the current month - in notable contrast to the County Council, which has no municipal newspaper, but at least advertises its meetings in public libraries (and, ironically, in the City Information Office!). It's clear, in fact, that the City Council doesn't want people to turn up to its meetings. It prefers them to learn about Council affairs through the Arrow instead.

Nor can you take at face value what the Arrow does report. A key example, which we pinpointed in our August issue last year, was the Arrow's treatment of the redrawing of ward boundaries - a rather complicated matter of direct interest to the electorate because it could have a significant effect on how they are represented in the future: and because it was susceptible to political fixing by the party in power. In our October issue, in fact, we pointed out that the Labour group's proposals showed signs of precisely this: precarious Labour wards were to be consolidated, the working-class fringe was to be stripped from unwinnable Tory seats and put to better use elsewhere, and at least a couple of wards were to be rearranged to the disadvantage of the Labour group's own rebel councillors.

The Arrow's contribution to this tortuous process was a baldly legalistic statement

that boundaries were being redrawn, that the Council's proposals could be seen at the Guildhall, and that alternative proposals could be made - a deadpan presentation which implied that the whole thing was simply an administrative formality, uncontroversial and of little general interest. And there was a map - a classic even by the Arrow's own uninformative standards - consisting of a full-size map of the City photographically reduced to a few square inches: as a result it looked like a dirty handprint and the only thing readable on it was the word "Nottingham". It doesn't seem too much to ask that the Arrow should explain the significance of the proposals - why changes were necessary, where the main changes were being made, and how they would affect electoral representation. With a readable map.

Of course, it is too much to ask. One reason is that the Arrow is edited jointly by the Town Clerk, Michael Hammond, and the City Publicity Officer, John Hartland - officialdom and public relations; the dead hand and the sleight of hand.

But the real reason is not so simple. The Town Clerk and the PR man are only twin symbols of a whole political system which sees the electorate not as participants but as objects for manipulation. The breath of controversy never ruffles the bland pages of the Arrow. You wouldn't think that any of these unctuously delivered policies could be the slightest bit open to dispute. The new Festival Hall proposal is trumpeted with the same smug self-assurance as the old Festival Hall proposal - and with no guarantee that it is any less fanciful. Nowhere is it suggested that the electorate should play more than a very distant part in actually making these decisions. They are merely told after a decision has been arrived at - and after the mighty duo of Hammond and Hartland has creaked into action selecting and snipping.

The Arrow, therefore, represents a fundamentally undemocratic way of thinking - the attitude which assumes that if people don't like what you're doing you don't change your policy, you improve your public relations. It is not that the Arrow doesn't contain useful information; the image of kind old Uncle Corporation diligently doing his best for everyone is relentlessly pursued. But there's nothing democratic about that - it simply shows that the Arrow is a paternalist propaganda sheet.

There is no doubt that democracy is in a bad way in Nottingham - to see that you only have to attend one of the Council meetings the Arrow so assiduously avoids mentioning. The miniscule group of Tories grumbles away disconsolately in one corner while the Labour flock bleats acquiescently whenever the sheepdog barks. The tiny public galleries are so thinly populated that even their sparse acreage looks like an empty football stadium.

The Arrow isn't to blame for this, of course - it merely encourages it. An expensive Council newspaper, to justify itself, should be getting people involved in local government - but that would make life a lot more difficult for those in power, and so naturally they avoid it.

The only cure for the Arrow is to hand it over to a group of professional journalists with the freedom to cover municipal affairs independently of the Council's PR machine. Until this happens, in most homes the flight of the Arrow will be the shortest distance between the doormat and the wastepaper basket.

JOHN SHEFFIELD

Rock Competition

IT'S TWO YEARS SINCE the last Black Sabbath album "Sabbath Bloody Sabbath". Their new album "Sabotage" is a far superior work: it leaves "punk rock" behind and shows the band have evolved a new style of medium heavy rock for our yearning ears. This month we're giving away two copies of "Sabotage". Answer the following questions and send your answers with your name and address to Nottingham Voice Competition, 33 Mansfield Road, Nottingham by October 25th: 1. Who is Sabbath's lead guitarist? 2. When was their first album released? 3. What was the title of their top ten hit single? Last month's winners were Peter Bench, 19 Ridgeway, Southwell, and M. Ford, 23 Acorn Drive, Belper.

DAVE BRETT

Pubs

THERE ARE MANY WAYS IN WHICH CERTAIN PUBS fail abysmally to provide decent value for money, and this is acceptable as long as there are alternatives. This, I think, is the case in most of Nottingham. There are some horrendous places in this city but generally there are other pubs that people can get to without too much trouble. Pubs have functions other than maximising the profits of brewers and landlords - their social function cannot be denied - and in some areas they are the only places where people can meet and talk (unless launderettes are counted). 'Pubs' is short for PUBLIC HOUSES where the public can relax, chat, play games, read a paper or just get smashed. If we accept this, then should we not also accept that the public should have a say in the sort of pubs that are provided?

How can free competition work when there is only one pub available in a community - be it a small village or a housing estate? The worst areas in Nottingham as far as consumer choice is concerned are the new housing estates. Presumably if there is an area or community in which there is no competition (i.e. one big boozier for several thousand customers) and consequently no consumer choice, the only thing left is community or consumer action. There should be much more consultation and participation when planning not only the number of pubs for an area, but also the type of pub and products on sale.

There are some obvious questions. Why do new estate pubs have to be so big and impersonal? Do efficiency and rationalization have to be the only considerations when making decisions? I would suggest that in many cases there has been a gross dereliction of duty by our elected representatives on the issue of pubs. The subject of participation in decisions is difficult to resolve but one thing is very clear: it is much easier for a local brewery to be responsive to local needs and tastes than it is for a large national company. Quite simply, the huge, bureaucratic, national breweries are incapable of relating to local communities - not only incapable but also unwilling. They want to produce uni-beer that is sold in uni-pubs. Bureaucracies demand rationality, which acts directly against the interest of the consumer.

What is the answer? Some would say nationalization, but that could produce an even worse situation as far as the consumer is concerned. I would suggest breaking up the national brewers into smaller units, locally based. There should be legislation on the maximum number of pubs that any brewer can have - a figure of 750 pubs might be about right (this compares with Bass Charrington's 9,000). Local monopolies must be broken and the Monopolies Commission must be given more teeth to arrest the rampage of the big nationals. Six companies dominate 80% of the industry.

These companies have succeeded in persuading the majority of the population that products like Double Diamond, Tartan, Red and E are vastly superior to local, traditional beers, so I would make one more suggestion. Let us have the same legislation on alcoholic drink advertising as we have with tobacco ads, i.e. none on T.V. This would seriously curtail the Big Six's activities and might push them into competing on the basis of price, quality and service rather than advertising and marketing.

CHRIS HOLMES

THE HEALTH GROUP runs advice sessions on Tuesdays at 6 p.m. in the People's Centre and nearby hostleries. There will also be evening meetings to discuss non-orthodox therapies, e.g. Acupuncture, Nutrition, Encounter, Homeopathy, and oppressive therapies, e.g. Aversion therapy. The next three evening meetings will be October 7th, 28th, and November 18th. All welcome.

Against the odds

AUGUST 2ND, 1975, AND ON THE FIRST DAY of the National Hunt season the last race at Market Rasen, a two mile steeplechase, was drawing to its climax. Pollock Fair and Cruiscin Lan, familiar names to local racegoers, were literally neck and neck heading for the final fence, a long way clear of the rest of the field.

Pollock Fair, an experienced campaigner, a nine-year-old winner of eight races, was ridden by Jimmy Nolan, who when he won at Sedgefield in May had ridden his first winner on the horse since a lay-off of about two years following a car smash. During the summer he had undergone a cartilage operation, and had won his first race of the new season on Persian King earlier in the day. Now he was looking for a double.

With the fence only a few yards away something happened. Pollock Fair veered sharply to the right and missed the fence. Nolan hit the wooden wings of the fence at about 30mph. Then the first of a series of hospital visits in which his shattered left leg was set, then reset. He hopes to be riding again by Christmas.

Pollock Fair's trainer, Jim Harris, explains: "He was squeezed for room. The horse thought that he hadn't enough room so he went round it. Clever old devil."

Harris had been a jockey himself for seventeen years, and a very successful one. He told me about his memories of a fall he had from Kalamata at Huntingdon in October 1972: he had tried to stay in the saddle. He was hanging onto the horse's neck. If he had let go he would have been alright. By the time he did hit the ground, it was into the path of another horse . . . Harris was cut in half.

The press informed the racing public that Harris had broken his back. It was as though the story was over and only the conclusion remained. Ladbroke's forked out for an electric wheelchair. The Queen Mother gave him a pat on the head. Mr David Hampshire, who managed the syndicate that owned Kalamata, started a fund, and then ran off with the money - a deed that earned him six months in jail. Harris spent five months in hospital planning volume two, a new career training horses from a wheelchair.

Harris states firmly that being confined to a wheelchair causes him no problems as a trainer. Within an hour of a new horse entering his yard, he is able to wheel himself in and out of its box at will. Even horses which the stable lads find difficult to handle are no problem.

The first horse to join Harris was Pollock Fair. Harris had partnered him in the horse's first steeplechase and had ridden him to victory five times, and they are still a winning combination.

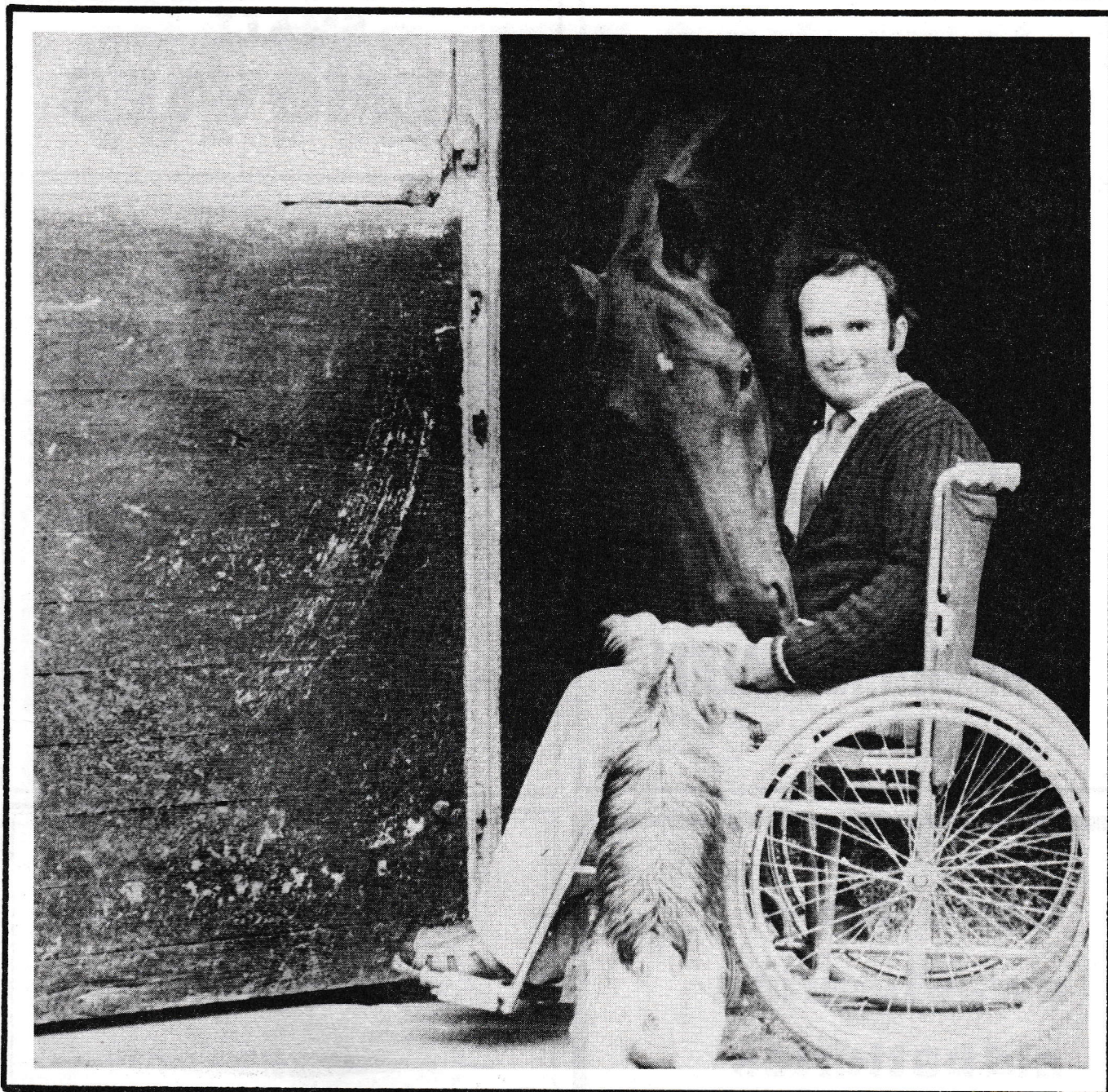
Two weeks after Nolan's injury, Pollock Fair was beaten by Cruiscin Lan, again at Market Rasen. One week after that he ran again, at Southwell this time, where he led all the way to win his ninth victory impressively. The third horse to finish was Amigris, who was second in the 1975 Topham Trophy Chase at Liverpool. Now Harris hopes to win the Topham Trophy with Pollock Fair.

Harris's first runners as a trainer were in August 1973. His horses, like Lampoon, Pink Elephant, Goliath and Dolben Lass, kept coming second and third . . . until on February 2nd, 1974 Goliath put an end to it by leading from start to finish in the Bishopthorpe Handicap Hurdle at Weatherby. Harris finished the season with nine winners from only ten horses.

Goliath's owner had purchased him for just £40 - his dogmeat value - after a vet had considered him a write-off. Harris worked on his legs for months before he was sound enough to race again, and he won twice again before the season ended. Last season he was hoping to win the valuable Joe Coral Golden Hurdle with Goliath at Cheltenham. Sadly this was not to be as Goliath's owner took him away and sent him to another trainer.

Another "write off" that Harris has won with is Creevelea, who used to refuse to race. With a little care and attention he was soon enjoying his training gallops, and when Harris found a way of starting him he won a race at Hereford in May.

Of course only a few of Harris's horses come to him as write-offs, though most are



real characters. None more so than Pollock Fair, who takes occasional delight in tipping him out of his wheelchair, then standing still as Harris climbs back up his legs!

Another character, Dolben Lass, has a habit of trying to bite chunks out of her stable door. She had accompanied Harris to Market Rasen on the opening day of the National Hunt season in 1973. On the first public day of Harris's training career, Dolben Lass, who had never seen a racecourse before, finished third in the August Maiden hurdle race (Division II). Later in the season she won a race, and she won three more times last season. In April she only failed by a short head to win the Elkes Cup at Uttoxeter, which Harris had desperately wanted to win as he had won it as a jockey. Dolben Lass is only small, but jumps fluently, and will go steeplechasing later in the season.

Harris also trains her half-sister Dolben Gem, who is out of the same mare, and Dolben Lad, who is out of Dolben Gem's grand-mare and is yet to race. The day after my visit to the stables, Dolben Gem ran for the first time over hurdles. "She'll need a lot of experience," Harris had said, and he warned me not to bet on her. After he had said that, I expected to see our young debutante struggle to keep up with the other horses. Instead she set off at a rate of knots and led for most of the way, jumping well and finally finishing a most promising third.

Jim Harris wore a broad smile as Dolben Gem was unsaddled.

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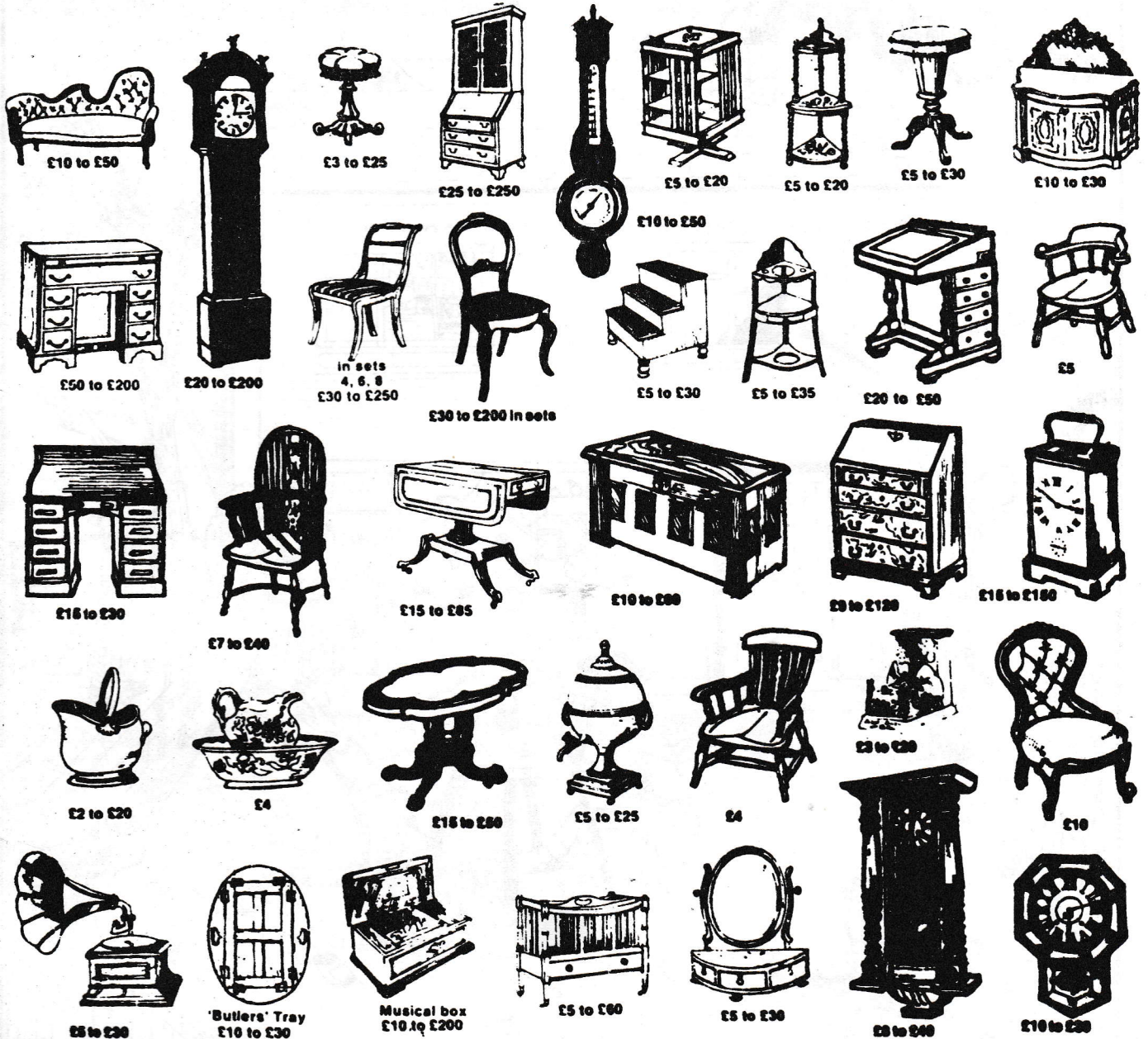
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