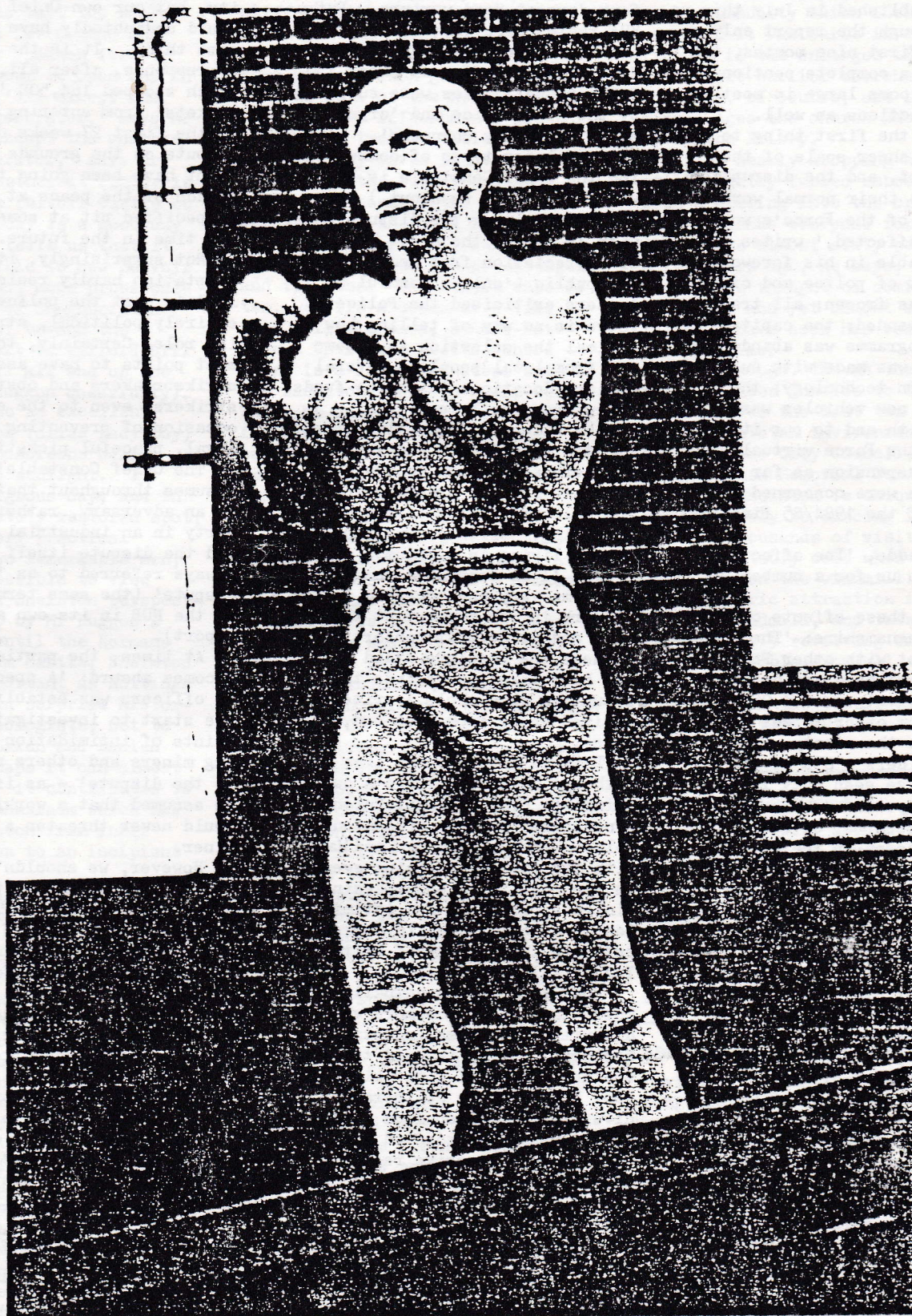


NOTTINGHAM EXTRA

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The Chief Constable reports

WHAT DID THE POLICE make of the coal dispute? For the official view, you could do worse than read the Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire's Annual Report for 1984, published in July this year. Although the report only covers the first nine months, the dispute has a complete section to itself and looms large in most of the other sections as well.

In fact, the first thing to note is the sheer scale of the police effort, and the disruption it caused to their normal work.

'No area of the Force's work has been unaffected,' writes the Chief Constable in his foreword. 'Recruitment of police and civil personnel was frozen; all training was suspended; the capital building programme was abandoned; no progress was made with our investment in technology; the purchase of new vehicles was not proceeded with and to put it in a nut-shell, the Force virtually went into suspension as far as developments were concerned for the whole of the 1984/85 financial year.'

And, he adds, 'The effects ... will be with us for a number of years'.

Nor were these effects confined to Nottinghamshire: 'The Mutual Aid agreement with other Police Forces was actioned and during peaks of activity over 3,000 officers from other forces were brought into the county. In all 100,000 officers - 85% of the service - have seen duty in the county this year.'

So seventeen out of every twenty policemen in the entire country helped to police Notts. during the dispute - a staggering effort.

Equally thought-provoking are the statistics which follow from this. In the nine months covered by the report, the catering service supplied over a million meals and four million drinks. In peak weeks, 57 transit vehicles and ten cars were hired. The press office dealt with 2,000 calls in the first month. 317 officers were injured (178 from Notts.), 56 of them at the May 14th demonstration in Mansfield. 2,377 people were arrested and 1,924 of them charged, 150 with 'offences arising out of intimidation'. 62 complaints were made against the police.

The fine detail is also worth noting, especially in communications, for which there was 'an extraordinary requirement'. Officers and vehicles of the

Force Communications Department were permanently sited at all twenty-five collieries and five power stations in Notts. A new Incident Control was built in four days at Headquarters. Extra VHF radios were installed in hired and seconded vehicles by Home Office staff. An extra 150 UHF personal radios were supplied by the Home Office and 'crystallised to emergency channels'. (And this excludes types of communication the Chief Constable is less willing to tell us about.)

The section on the dispute ends with 'a few of the many' letters of appreciation from members of the public ('only a handful of letters criticised the Police'). There is no way of telling how typical the selection is. Some are from local people. Several enclose donations to police funds. A few are overtly political.

'My wife and I greatly appreciate the efforts you and your officers are making to try and maintain law and order during the mob rule prevailing in the miners' picketing,' write an English couple living in Belgium.

And 'I am convinced that there are some very undemocratic forces at work in our country at this time and it is most comforting to witness the resolute stand that you have taken as regards the situation as a whole,' writes a retired Major from Sleaford, Lincs.

This is very much in line with the Chief Constable's own thinking: 'The National Union of Mineworkers' action presented the Police Service in England and Wales with the task of policing events in the coalfields encompassing violence, disorder and intimidation on a scale which is unprecedented in the history of British Industrial relations.'

Now, this is not actually true. There have been much more violent disputes in British industrial history. But it is hard to know whether the Chief Constable is a poor historian or deliberately diverting attention from what really was unprecedented in the dispute - the massive response of the police. As we know, from this report and elsewhere, normal policing in Notts., and to a significant extent in the rest of the country, took second place to ensuring that not a single miner who wanted to go to work was prevented from doing so.

At Cortonwood in West Yorkshire, the first strikebreaker was escorted back to work by

between 1,000 and 2,000 police. This ratio (the envy, surely, of many an East London Asian) was never seen in Notts., where working miners were always in a majority, but our own Chief Constable would undoubtedly have done the same thing. It is the same scale of response, after all, as that which stopped 164,508 'presumed pickets' from entering the county in the first 27 weeks of the dispute on the grounds that they might have been going to commit a breach of the peace at some unspecified pit at some unspecified time in the future.

Not surprisingly, it is a temptation hardly resisted on the left to cast the police in an entirely political, strikebreaking role. Certainly, they seem at most points to have assisted the strikebreakers and obstructed the strikers, even to the extent on occasion of preventing perfectly legal, peaceful picketing.

The Chief Constable's report assumes throughout that the NUM is an adversary, rather than one party in an industrial dispute, and the dispute itself is almost always referred to as 'the NUM dispute' (the same term as used by the NCB in its own annual report).

At times, the partiality becomes absurd: 'A special squad of officers was established at the start to investigate complaints of intimidation from working miners and others not party to the dispute' - as if it could be assumed that a working miner would never threaten a striking miner.

However, we shouldn't exaggerate the conscious political motivation of the police. The government, the NCB, the NUM and the media were all in various ways responsible for transforming the dispute, in the public perception at least, from an industrial conflict between employer and employee into a question almost entirely of law and order. And with the NUM identified as lawbreakers, the police could claim political neutrality with a clear conscience.

The Chief Constable saw plainly enough that the dispute was political, and his politics hang out fairly blatantly. But his own role in it he interpreted as pure policing. ●

NOTTINGHAM EXTRA is written & published by John Sheffield, 2 Weston Avenue, Mount Hooton Road, Nottingham.

How to sell a second-hand car

'SOUNDS LIKE a second-hand car salesman' is how a Tory parliamentary colleague described Martin Brandon-Bravo, Conservative MP for Nottingham South. This routine insult, with its echoes of Richard Nixon and more than a hint of snobbery, is perhaps more acute than it seems. Once we realise that the second-hand car Mr Brandon-Bravo is selling is himself, then it places his political technique very neatly. It should also warn us against underestimating him - the whole point of being a second-hand car salesman is that you actually do get people to buy second-hand cars.

Take the recent row over his comments in a House of Commons debate on immigration control procedures. Mr Brandon-Bravo suggested that complaints about racism came only from 'a minority of a minority', that Inland Revenue files should be open to immigration officials, that (quoting a former ILEA officer) 'the level of alleged racism in any given society will vary in direct proportion to the number of people handsomely paid to find it', and that, for questioning 'the endless outpourings of the race relations industry ... one fears for one's family and self'.

Letters of protest arrived from local branches of the Inland Revenue Staff Federation, the National Union of Teachers, the Transport and General Workers' Union and the Communist Party, and in due course the Evening Post devoted two thirds of a page to what it billed as a debate on the immigration issue.

Nothing very remarkable about all that, you might think. But there are one or two peculiarities.

(1) The feature appeared on July 9th, nearly seven weeks after the parliamentary debate on May 23rd - a fact the Post conveniently omitted, casting doubts as it might have done on both the topicality and the origins of the piece. In fact, the Post did not report the debate when it happened, although it did report a parliamentary question put by Mr Brandon-Bravo on the release from prison of two men convicted of manslaughter.

(2) Extracts from the four trade union letters used in the feature could only have come from Mr Brandon-Bravo - no trade union would send letters to the Evening Post while the long-standing NUJ dispute remains unsettled. (Did either the Post or Mr Brandon-

Bravo ask permission to use them?)

(3) The presentation is completely dominated by Mr Brandon-Bravo. There is a large photo of him at the top of the page sandwiched between extracts from his Commons speech and the letters of protest. Below, he is given four columns to reply, while Charles Donington of the Commission for Racial Equality has only two. Even that is not what it seems. The Post describes these two pieces as Mr Brandon-Bravo's 'defence of his views and a reply from the Commission for Racial Equality'. In fact, Mr Donington's article is clearly written as a reply not to Mr Brandon-Bravo's article in the Post but to his original remarks in the Commons debate, and since he confines himself to a defence of the CRE, it hardly qualifies as much of a debate. So Mr Brandon-Bravo has first and last word, and a very extensive one too.

And the Evening Post has been taken (not entirely unwillingly?) for a little ride, and another second-hand car has been sold.

But this is only one in a very large saleroom. How much more often do you see that alert billiard ball face staring keenly from the local papers than that of, say, Richard Ottaway, MP for Nottingham North, who speaks much more often in Parliament? And when did you last see a photograph of Michael Knowles, MP for Nottingham East?

Mr Brandon-Bravo seems to think that the racial issue is a strong card, where overt hostility to black organisations will do his electoral prospects no harm at all. A week after the Post feature, it was reported in the Nottingham Trader that he had refused an invitation from black groups to discuss his position, commenting, 'I wouldn't waste my breath on them.'

Not that the Trader is any more immune than the Post to Brandon-Bravo salesmanship. Its mildly humorous 'Outlaw' column recently, without a trace of satire, lauded Mr Brandon-Bravo for a Commons 'soliloquy worthy of Walter Scott'. What on earth had he said to earn such extravagant praise? This: 'I live in Nottingham, a most beautiful city, in the centre of this fair land.'

Apart from wondering about the Trader's literary taste, there are three points.

(1) He must have supplied this himself. No one seriously believes the Trader trawls Hansard for

three sycophantic paragraphs about Mr Brandon-Bravo.

(2) Was he really speaking to a completely empty chamber, or doesn't the Trader know what a soliloquy is?

(3) He doesn't live in Nottingham. He lives at Barton-in-Fabis.

Clearly, a self-publicist on this scale is something of a challenge for the Labour Party and its new prospective candidate for Nottingham South, Alan Simpson. But there is hope. Mr Brandon-Bravo's penchant for telling it how it isn't may turn out to be his Achilles' heel after all.

He was found out on July 1st, for example, when City Council leader Betty Higgins took him to task for his misleading remarks in the House of Commons debate on the controversial Transport Bill.

Labour councillors, said Mr Brandon-Bravo, had returned 'very chastened' from inspecting the Hereford experiment (a trial run of the Bill's proposals for competition on bus routes). 'The word in Nottingham is that the Hereford experiment is working and that the Bill contains many good things ... Labour councillors in Nottingham have come to realise that there is a lot of good in the Hereford experiment.'

'Fiction,' said Mrs Higgins, and 'a gross distortion of the truth.'

And it could hardly be any other. Quite apart from the Labour group's unrelenting opposition to the Bill, the Hereford experiment collapsed long before their visit. It would be hard to be impressed by something which doesn't exist.

But, as on previous occasions (see the last issue of Nottingham Extra), Mr Brandon-Bravo made his mark in Parliament where nobody knew he hadn't got it quite right. And there was that photo in the Evening Post yet again. No publicity is bad publicity ...?

Footnote on Mr Brandon-Bravo's use of language. Mr Brandon-Bravo is no fool, but he once said, 'This little can of worms is only the tip of the iceberg' (what a wonderful picture it conjures up!). Recently, notions of sexual equality have been attracting his scorn, even creeping, quite irrelevantly, into his Commons speech on immigration, where he referred to 'Nottingham where such people (i.e. the 'minority of a minority') revel in the inanimate title of "Chair".' This is very odd. He

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Monitoring the inner city

UNDER THE DRY title of 'Inner Area Monitoring Report 1985', the City Planning Department has produced a document which effectively condemns our whole way of life.

This is not its intention, of course. Like many other official bodies they've been doing this sort of thing for years. Its purpose is 'to assist with the formulation of the 1986/7 Inner Area Programme' by 'updating information on deprivation and disadvantage in the City' - the fifth in an annual series.

It is rather a technical, statistical document with a fair sprinkling of terms like 'variables', 'indicators', 'disaggregated', 'spatial distribution' and 'monitoring zones'. But, in its undemonstrative way, it presents an appalling picture of the lives of tens of thousands of Nottingham people.

First, there are the national comparisons. In 1981, according to the Department of the Environment, Nottingham was 16th in the league table for social deprivation. No Cannon Football League, this, though the names are familiar enough. In this league table, the higher, the worse, and only Liverpool, Manchester, Leicester and twelve London boroughs are worse than Nottingham.

A similar picture emerges from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, whose 1981 census data show 30%, or 80,000, of Nottingham's population living in 'deprived' wards (though this is not saying everyone in these wards was deprived). In 1981, the city was 'the 8th most disadvantaged area outside London'.

But comparisons can be meaningless as well as odious - it all depends on how bad the others are - and it is the local statistics that make the grimmest reading.

The report begins with unemployment. In March 1984, Nottingham had an unemployment rate of 19% - almost 27,000 people. In January 1985, 43% of these - over 11,500 - had been unemployed for more than a year and 7,000 for more than two years. The 1981 census showed that in the flats at Hyson Green and Balloon Wood (since demolished) the unemployment rate was 50%.

Within the general pattern, some groups suffer more unemployment than others, in particular older and younger workers, ethnic minorities, the disabled and the unskilled or semi-skilled: 'In September 1982, the ratio of registered unemployed to register-

ed vacancies was 200 to 1 for unskilled occupations, compared with 22 to 1 for all categories of worker.'

Ominously, unemployment in Nottingham is still rising and 'has continued to rise in excess of national trends'.

Now, the level of unemployment is a reasonably objective test of 'disadvantage' (a clumsy word used because it is thought less stigmatising than, say, 'poor' or 'deprived'). Despite the 'poverty trap' on the one hand and redundancy payments and 'golden handshakes' on the other, people without jobs tend to be worse off than people with jobs.

Beyond that, however, unless we were to tabulate in detail (if we could) everybody's health, wealth and happiness, how are we to identify people who are poor and need help? The answer to this, and what it implies, is the most devastating thing about the report.

That answer is 'indicators'. 'Indicators' are those signs of disadvantage which are readily available because someone has turned them into statistics. The technique is desk-bound, the opposite of journalism or the novel, where eyewitness accounts, subjective impressions, and individual people and examples are all-important. Compared with these, the use of indicators has an air of science and objectivity - partly spurious, because it is determined by two non-scientific factors: first, by what is available (or collectable) in statistical form, which may not be what you really want to know, and, second, by what you choose to define as disadvantage.

And here it becomes political, for to one way of thinking even unemployment signifies not disadvantage but an acute shortage of bikes, or of people willing to get on them.

The same applies to other indicators. There are those who might think that unhealthy babies, children injured by their parents, or juveniles in trouble with the police (three indicators in the report) show not families and children with problems, but families and children who are problems - a question not of social circumstances but of individual morality and responsibility.

On this point, the report is openly political, flatly contradicting the frequently expressed views of Mrs Thatcher:

'It is widely accepted,' it says, 'that there is a strong

relationship between unemployment, crime and physical violence. The incidence of crime among young people suggests that this age group is no exception. Research by probation officers has indicated that unemployed teenagers are responsible for 90% of crimes in their age group. After the civil disorders of 1981, police information has shown that two-thirds of those convicted following the troubles were unemployed.'

We might fantasise for a moment about what indicators this government might choose to identify those its rhetoric suggests are the truly disadvantaged. Top civil servants, judges and officers in the armed services, perhaps, whose salaries have slipped the odd ten thousand below their peers in the private sector. Businessmen crippled by extortionate rate demands from profligate Labour councils. Highly paid executives demoralised by penal taxation. Owner-occupiers struggling under the burden of a tax-relieved mortgage. Employers of cheap labour unfairly restrained by wages councils from giving their workers even less. Parents living on the breadline to give their children a better chance in life at a public school.

This is hardly a joke, for it is towards these that the government's sympathy and wherever possible its money and legislation are directed. And because there is such resistance to recognising the full awfulness of conditions in the inner cities, the categories of the Monitoring Report, opposed as they often are to government priorities, become part of a political battle for resources.

But there is a point to be made beyond the immediate political campaign, for not even the present government can deny most of the categories of need - it can only evade them. The most fundamental point is about the kind of society we have created from two centuries of industrialism. After such a long period of unprecedented material production, and after forty post-war years of equally unprecedented prosperity (Britain, for all its economic problems, is the sixth wealthiest country in the world, according to a recent report), isn't it profoundly humiliating that, in a society deluged with commodities, such massively common and innocent human conditions as those select-

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Bow Street still running

THE LAST THIRTY years have been a growth period for labour history - the history which concerns itself less with 'great men' and 'great events' than with the invisible majority which traditional historians tend to notice only when it causes trouble.

Labour historians have their own myopia, of course. They often assume, for example, that labour history is the same as the history of the labour movement (which many of them are members of), and they tend to concentrate on the radicals and activists who are the most visible but at the same time the smallest part of it.

The truth is that trade unionists, let alone members of left-wing parties, have rarely been more than a half of the working population; and many of the most active and politically sophisticated members of radical movements have not been working class. For that matter, most labour historians are not working class, and not many working-class people read labour history.

Nor are they likely to. It is a huge irony that, with honourable exceptions, a discipline which takes working people as its subject should display some of the direst examples of academic jargon at its most impenetrable. Indeed, a cynical view might be that labour history is just one more way in which the bourgeoisie has exploited the working class.

What would your average trade unionist make of this, for example?

'Thompson's concept of class consciousness still assumes a relatively direct relationship between "social being" and "social consciousness" which leaves little independent space to the ideological context within which the coherence of a particular language of class can be reconstituted.'

This is not entirely typical of the author, and so it would be unfair to identify him (a small prize of the next three issues of Nottingham Extra to anyone who can). But it does emphasise that labour history is not the same thing as popular history.

Fortunately, this is not the whole of labour history, and one of its most useful spin-offs has been an emphasis on local history. Past neglect means that a lot of local groundwork often has to be done before the more general histories can be written.

One of the most persistent debates, in which Nottingham has



Bow Street
Runner

an interesting and sometimes crucial role, has been over the revolutionary possibilities in Britain between the French Revolution (1789) and the 'Year of Revolutions' (1848). (With the doubtful exception of 1926, no one has seriously thought Britain was on the verge of revolution at any time since then.)

The traditional view, that talk of revolutionary plots was so much Tory scaremongering, has been challenged by more radical historians, who believe there really were revolutionary movements, though they were inevitably very secretive.

A fascinating study published in 1983 by the University of Nottingham Department of Adult Education examines local radicalism in the period of the American and French Revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century. (To get some idea of the feeling of the period, it should be remembered that the ideas of the French Revolution were at least as explosive as those of the Russian Revolution over a century later, and that many English people fervently supported them.)

'Riot and Political Disaffection in Nottinghamshire in the Age of Revolutions, 1776-1803', by Roger A.E. Wells, is subtitled 'The Origins of Nottinghamshire Radicalism'. Dr Wells argues that in this critical period a combination of revolution abroad and repression at home radicalised the local working population and created the tradition which led in a direct line through Luddism, Pentrich and the Reform Bill riots to O'Connor and 'physical force' Chartism. (And possibly, though Dr Wells does not say so, to the local activists of today.)

Crucial to the argument is that Nottingham was much more revolutionary than has previously been supposed, and that much of the evidence was consciously suppressed by an unlikely conjunction of a Tory local paper, the Nottingham Journal, which did not wish to damage the area's reputation, and a sympathetic Whig corporation which rarely communicated with the Tory controlled Home Office because it supported many of the agitators' demands and had no wish to become an agent of government suppression. Thus two of the commonest sources of information - press reports and Home Office papers - are not as helpful as might be expected.

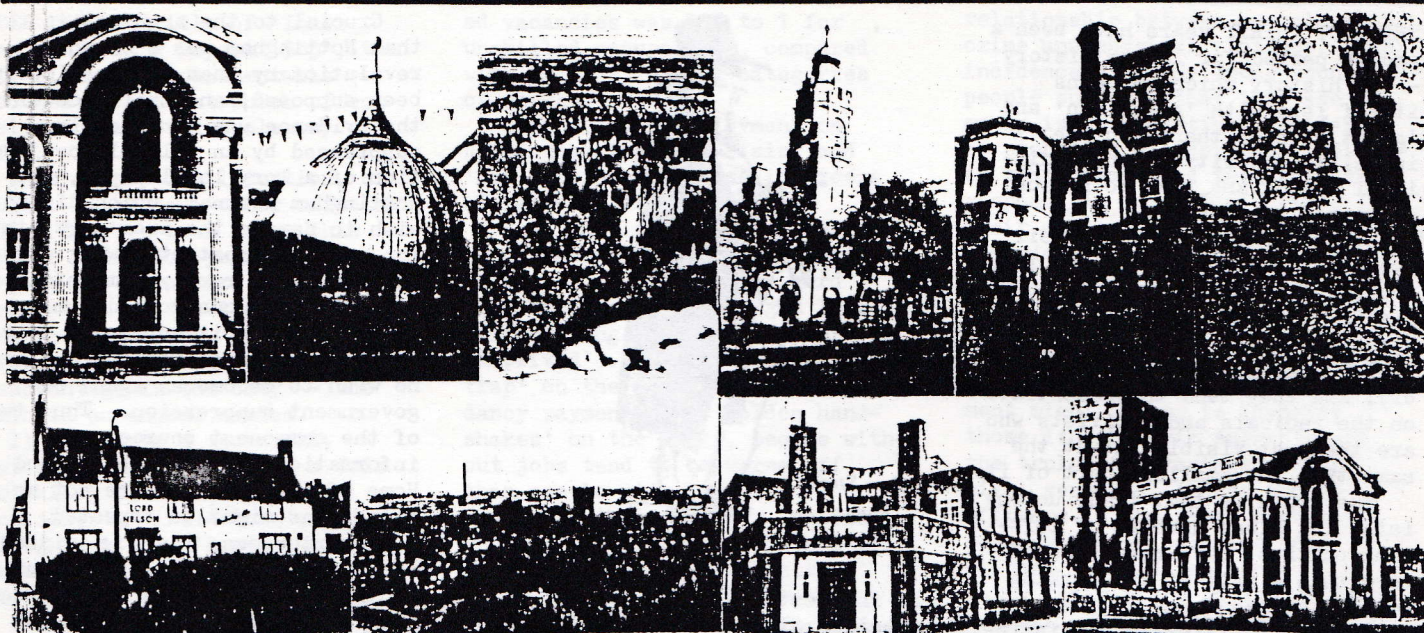
Nevertheless, there is evidence for extreme radical, even insurrectionary, movements in Nottingham in this period. One of the most fascinating documents quoted by Dr Wells, which has a resonance down to our own day, is a report from two Bow Street Runners sent to Nottingham in 1800 to infiltrate the local radical movement. They posed as shoemakers, political refugees from London, and were soon able to report that among 'disaffected persons' in the radical alehouses of Nottingham 'Conversation was always of the most seditious Nature ... damning the King ... the Government, the Church particularly, praising the French, and very much rejoicing at their Successes, and at the same time very much cast down and repining at any Success obtained by the British either by Sea or Land declaring themselves highly in favor of a Revolution in England and wishing for it immediately ...'

Not the least interesting thing about this episode is that it happened at all - that at this early stage, nearly two hundred years ago, an internal secret service was so well established.

But the most chilling comment appears in Dr Wells's footnote, where he reveals that the letter is available for quotation only because it was passed on to the Home Secretary, the Duke of Portland. There were other letters, but these 'are not extant and presumably disappeared into the secret political files of the Alien Department of the Home Office, and (were) never deposited in the Public Records Office'.

So not only will you never know what they've got on you - they won't even tell you what they had on people nearly two centuries ago! ■

Sneinton has always been there



SATURDAY 27th JULY. To Sneinton for the Sneinton Environmental Society's guided walk. But where is Sneinton? Not such a daft question. Like the British Empire, wider still and wider the bounds of the Sneinton Environmental Society are set.

Sneinton extends almost to Trent Bridge (Meadow Lane is in Sneinton); includes the former Midland Railway bridge over the Trent (converted into a road bridge by the County Council and named Lady Bay Bridge, but in the past always known as Sneinton Bridge); incorporates the newly restored London Road low level railway station (opened in 1857); reaches the bottom of Hockley (it includes Sneinton Market, of course, and the Victoria Leisure Centre); is bounded to the north by Carlton Road, where Sneinton Elements Post Office is; and to the east stops only at Colwick Woods (unless they used to be called Sneinton Woods).

The Lace Market and the city centre are not yet suburbs of Sneinton, but it could only be a matter of time.

Fortunately, the walk only takes in the central area, so no one need be put off by fears of tramping from West Bridgford to the top of Carlton Hill. It takes more than two hours even so, but this is because it is all very leisurely, with frequent stops for informative little lectures, and a well-planned tea break at the Hermitage caves.

We meet at 2.30 in Notintone Place under the statue of General Booth, bearded and declamatory. Our guide introduces himself as Tom Huggon. He is clean shaven

and slightly less declamatory, but almost as striking. He is small with untidy, flowing dark hair, glasses perched on an impressive nose, and twinkling eyes. He wears a two-toned bow tie in beige and light blue, a powder blue hessian jacket and non-matching royal blue corduroy trousers worn below the waist. He carries a tightly furled, multi-coloured golfing umbrella which completes the impression that somewhere in Sneinton there is a thriving Bohemia. The umbrella stays tightly furled all afternoon, for it is a day of almost tropical heat in Sneinton.

As a counterpoint to Mr Huggon, there is also Brian Jackson, Chairman of the Sneinton Environmental Society, impeccably turned out in a smart dark blue blazer and grey flannel trousers. He seems to have the job of straight man to Mr Huggon, who variously claims to be short-sighted, scientifically ignorant and historically amnesiac, and calls upon Mr Jackson to make good these deficiencies.

Nevertheless, Mr Huggon is entertaining and copiously well-informed. First he tells us about the origins of Sneinton. It was founded by the same tribe as nearby Snotingham, but resisted Norman attempts to drop the initial 's' and call it Notintone (after which the Place is named). A sort of low-key resistance to Nottingham influence seems to be a theme in Sneinton history.

At Notintone Place, the 1831 Reform Bill rioters, en route from pillaging Colwick Hall to burning down Nottingham Castle, paused to rip out the iron rail-

ings in front of the houses for use as impromptu pikestaffs. Mr Huggon implies that, though not quite such a landmark in the fight for democracy as Runnymede and Magna Carta, this episode places Sneinton there or thereabouts.

William Booth was born in 1829 in one of the three surviving late Georgian terraced houses which have been renovated as a museum at the centre of the Salvation Army's William Booth Memorial Complex. Mr Huggon explains how General Booth's mission began in the depraved streets of Nottingham and moved to the East End of London. For this, he refers us to Bernard Shaw's 'Major Barbara'.

We move on towards the famous windmill, past the back of the mellow early nineteenth century vicarage, through a car park where there used to be a school, past the school hall, now renovated at the urging of the Environmental Society into a much-used meeting place, and then up some steps and through lush shrubbery along a winding path. At the side of the path are several enormous cog wheels, mill machinery presumably, embedded upright in the earth as a decorative feature.

Mr Huggon plants himself and his umbrella on the thick green turf of Belvoir Hill with the windmill behind him and a huge stretch of the Trent Valley in front. The mill, derelict and burnt out until a few years ago, is now in splendid condition ('The jewel in Sneinton's crown,' Mr Huggon calls it), white cap gleaming on the top, wooden gallery circling the middle like

a quoit, recently opened museum buildings in spanking new brick-work round the courtyard at the rear.

Mr Huggon tells us the story of George Green, Sneinton miller and world-famous mathematical genius whose memorial the complex is. He explains that the sails will be on in a few months and refers us to Mr Jackson for whether the museum is open and in working order ('All except the Van de Graaff generator,' says Mr Jackson. 'All except the whatever-Brian-said generator,' says Mr Huggon), and whether it really is possible to see Belvoir Castle on a good day. Today is a good day and Mr Jackson tells us that it is indeed possible to see Belvoir Castle, and also, more prosaically, the towers of Loughborough University, just beyond the yellow field next to Wilford Hill ('Where we shall all end up one day,' says Mr Huggon cheerfully).

There is also an excellent view of Sneinton (alias Lady Bay) Bridge, car windscreens heliographing in the sunlight. It really is a gorgeous day, and in this affectionately restored spot, after seeing very practical memorials to two remarkable men, it is almost possible to view Nottingham in a Sneinton perspective - summed up by Mr Huggon's opinion that, until the Normans built Nottingham Castle, Sneinton was just as important as Nottingham. This would surprise historians and archaeologists, not to mention a few Saxon and Danish kings, but perhaps it can almost be swallowed if it contributes to the sort of enthusiasm which has converted Sneinton from inner city dereliction to an incipient tourist trap.

We descend into Sneinton Hollows and Castle Street, where there are some fascinatingly eccentric Victorian houses and an encouraging bustle of renovation. The most spectacular house is the recently restored 'Sneinton Castle', built, Mr Huggon explains, for a wealthy proprietor of Trent Carriers, who had a tower and turret put on top so he could see his boats sailing up and down the Trent.

A typical piece of Victorian ostentation, says Mr Huggon, 'and there,' he adds amiably as one of the present owners comes to the gate to be friendly to the tourists, 'is ostentatious Jean.' Mr Huggon has already explained to us that they are having a wedding reception, which is why there is a Union Jack flying from the tower.

At the bottom of Sneinton

Hollows is Sneinton Hermitage and the Bendigo pub, with a statue of Bendigo baring his knuckles on top of it (Mr Huggon refers us to Mr Jackson for Bendigo's proper name - William Abednego Thompson), and just along the Hermitage, at the foot of the gloomy blue brick cliff built by the London and North Western Railway at the turn of the century, is a low wall and some wrought iron gates guarding what is left of the Hermitage caves, where refreshments are waiting on trestle tables.

Like many caves in Nottingham, these were the back rooms and cellars of houses (the Trip to Jerusalem is the most famous), and until the railway came there was a picturesque row of cottages and two pubs. In between cups of tea, we file a dozen at a time into a little cave, candle-lit like a Christmas grotto, where there is a flight of steps cut in the sandstone down to a dip well. This, Mr Jackson says, contains fresh water - several of them have drunk from it - and also frogs, which sounds rather less appetising. Also cut into the rock are various troughs and channels, whose purpose remains a mystery. Brewing and tanning are possibilities - both were common in Nottingham caves.

Then it is up Lees Hill Footway, past a small Garner's Hill-style urban park ('Nice idea but prone to vandalism,' comments Mr Huggon), and along a typical backstreet to St Stephen's Church. After admiring the view towards Nottingham (St Mary's Church, the Council House, Trent Poly and St Andrew's Church, and, on a clear day, the University's Trent Building), we follow in Einstein's footsteps to George Green's grave in the north-east corner of the churchyard. The churchyard is enormous and has some superb mature trees. Mr Huggon says how lucky they are to have such a large open space in the middle of Sneinton, and tells more in sorrow than in anger how the County Council once planned a new road through this part of Sneinton, how there would have been a vast traffic island here, partly on the site of George Green's grave, and how, in a late postscript, the County Council were threatened with legal action by the City Council after demolishing the chimneys of the protected building on the corner of Manor Street and Dale Street which had been bought for the road scheme. Happily, the building has now been restored and is a halfway house for the mentally ill.

The tour ends in the church.

We sit on the medieval benches rescued in 1848 from St Mary's in Nottingham (but not, despite the stories, from Sneinton Market) while Mr Huggon tells us what a fine church it is, much grander than you might suppose from outside and amazingly grand for the small community which Sneinton was when it was built in 1839 (though it was enlarged in 1912). There were earlier churches on the site, of course, and in the Middle Ages the church was owned by Lenton Priory.

After nearly dropping his still tightly furled umbrella down a grating into the crypt, Mr Huggon thanks everyone for coming (there are almost sixty people). A few years ago, he says, no one would have thought of coming to Sneinton, and yet almost everything we have seen has been there all the time.

True enough, though that scarcely does justice to the efforts over the last ten years of the Sneinton Environmental Society, the City Council, the George Green Memorial Fund and others. Sneinton is unique and should surely be bracing itself for the thousands of visitors who will inevitably come when the sails are on the windmill. There is a mesmeric attraction in a working windmill, and those huge, magnificently revolving sails will be visible from all over the city and beyond, from Belvoir Castle, from the towers of Loughborough University, from Wilford Hill ...

INNER CITY continued

ed in this report should be reliable signs of poverty and want; that, if you are looking for the poor and the disadvantaged, you need only look for the old, the black, the jobless, the widowed, the divorced, the illegitimate, the crippled and the mentally ill.

SECOND-HAND CAR continued

obviously thinks that the English language never ever substitutes an object for a person, and that he has very cleverly put the feminists in their place. Now, apart from the fact that the Shorter Oxford Dictionary (the one in two large volumes) records this use of 'chair' in 1647, it all seems a bit much in a speech to a group of people who are constantly referring to themselves as a 'House'. And what did Mr Brandon-Bravo say next? 'We heard from the Opposition Front Bench ...'

Spot the railwayman

'TRAIN SPOTTING', the 1985 Nottingham Festival Exhibition at the Castle Museum, finished in mid-August, but the excellent catalogue, with over seventy pictures, ten in colour, is still on sale at £3.50. It can also be seen (reference only) in the Local Studies section of the County Library on Angel Row.

It is worth getting hold of, whether or not you saw the exhibition and whether or not you like trains, if only for the fascinating bits and pieces of social history, especially from the early railway age.

Did you know, for example, that a serious objection to railways was that they interfered with fox-hunting? Or that it was thought improper for a young man and a young woman to converse in a railway carriage while her father was asleep? (The artist felt obliged to repaint the picture with the daughter simpering silently behind her crocheting while her now wide-awake father talks animatedly with the young man - recostumed as a naval officer to emphasise his complete respectability.) Or that if your travelling companion had a seal-skin cap and an immobile brow, you were in trouble - these were infallible signs of low character and homicidal intent?

But, admirable though the catalogue is, at £3.50 it must have served as a 'keep-off' notice to the majority of the audience, a warning that deeper games were afoot than they could either afford or understand.

This exclusiveness was symptomatic. Just as the catalogue placed much of the audience at a distance, so the artists in the exhibition placed their subject, the railways, at a distance. For it is a curious thing that, wonderfully entertaining as the exhibition was, its subject seemed always at a remove. Rarely was there any sense that the artists had the slightest technical understanding of the railways - though they never doubted the capacity of art to incorporate them in its own philosophy and aesthetics. This is an interesting commentary on British culture: one more episode in its uneasy relationship with science and technology.

Beyond the jokey title was the more earnest subtitle: 'Images of the Railway in Art'. 'Art' was broadly interpreted to include cartoons, caricatures, topography,

posters, illustrations and photographs as well as more 'serious' paintings, and this widened the scope to allow all sorts of reflections on the social and psychological impact of the railway age.

Yet, despite the variety of genres, the viewpoint remained the essentially narrow one of the cultivated but technically illiterate bourgeoisie. And because few of these artists showed much knowledge of civil or mechanical engineering, the railway in the majority of the pictures became more a force of nature than man-made. Revealingly, the catalogue points out, Frith used an architectural draughtsman to draw the ironwork of the vaulted roof for his 'Railway Station'. His own interest was in the human drama (the seal-skin cap and the immobile brow), or rather melodrama, for which the railway terminus was as useful a setting as Derby Day on Epsom Downs.

It is hard not to believe that here, at the beginning of the machine age, a damaging split has already appeared between the practical, the technical, the scientific on the one hand, and the artistic, the cultural, the 'intellectual' on the other. And this was reflected in the choice of exhibits - no working drawings by the great civil and mechanical engineers, the Brunels and the Stephenson; no technical drawings of locomotives, bridges, tunnels, embankments, cuttings and engine sheds. The nearest was an engraving of a locomotive from a popular book, 'Diagrams of the Steam Engine', published in 1848.

Yet the engineers, whether or not they felt the romance and drama of the railways, were the men who made them and knew how they worked. Their drawings are aesthetically pleasing as well as functional.

In what seemed to be a gesture to science, there was a reproduction of Turner's 'Rain, Steam, and Speed', which the catalogue links with the higher, rather than the lower, physics: 'Like solar energy in other Turner landscapes of the time the power of the locomotive radiates through the painting. The transmutations of form and energy in these paintings have prompted the historian of physics Michel Serres to call Turner an intuitive "genius of thermodynamics".'

It is a great painting - but for all the physics (and meta-

physics), which imply that Turner in some way understood the innermost being of the machine, the picture gives not the slightest hint that he knew how it worked. It is an imaginative response, but, like so much in this exhibition, an alienated one. The machine has ceased to be a machine, a human artefact, and has become an aesthetic object out there, romantic, picturesque, alarming, enthralling, to be intellectualised, theorised about, made the subject of aesthetic, philosophical and sociological speculation. The railways were not made by us, any more than the sunset - so far is the artist divorced from the workings of the modern world.

But there was another silence in this exhibition, though it is hardly the fault of the organisers, since it is the silence of our whole culture - a silence occasionally broken by such books as Terry Coleman's 'The Railway Navvies':

'In 1845 there were 200,000 men ... working on about 3,000 miles of new line. In the eighty years from 1822 onwards, millions of navvies made 20,000 miles of railways in Britain, and thousands of miles more in Europe and the rest of the world ... the railway was made by navvies, not by machines. A piece of engineering like the Great Western Railway from London to Bristol - known as Brunel's billiard table because the mean gradient is 1 in 1,380 - was built with picks, shovels and gunpowder.'

As much as to anybody, the railways have belonged to the men who built them and the even more numerous men who for more than a century and a half have worked them. But with few exceptions, the railways in these pictures had apparently built themselves and run themselves. Apart from the tiny figures in the drawings by John Cooke Bourne, the railwaymen and the navvies were invisible.

Like our literature, our visual arts are a culture of the served and the waited-on, of the observer and the non-doer. To that extent, most of these pictures, fascinating as they were, were hardly more than educated guesswork, an outsider's view of something done by other people (except that these other people were curiously absent).

The frivolous title, with its suggestion of the exterior, the restricted, the dilettante, seems rather appropriate. ●