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NOTTINGHAM QUARTERLY

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Trogs at Matlock

RAY GOSLING





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Henry Kirke White

JOHN LUCAS



A SHORT AND, IT SEEMS, A MOSTLY unhappy life. A few years of posthumous fame which slope away in musty and very occasional dusty re-prints. Three poems in The Oxford Book of Regency Verse (the same number as Felicia Hemans and William Cullen Bryant, but what was he doing there, anyway?). And after that virtual silence. No appearance, not even the briefest mention, in the indices of the standard literary histories, no essays in exhumation, no rediscoveries. In Nottingham itself the very street named after him is knocked down.

Perhaps the question to ask is not why has he been forgotten, but why was he ever remembered? The blame, credit, responsibility - what you will - is largely Robert Southey's. It was he who wrote the Life, by way of an introduction to the Remains (in 1808), he who became identified with Kirke White's reputation. Why? Before we can answer that satisfactorily we need to have the facts before us.

Kirke White was born in Nottingham on 21st March, 1785. His father, John White, was a butcher, his mother, who had clearly married "beneath" her, came from a respectable family in Staffordshire. What little we know about her suggests that, like the mother of a later and much greater Nottingham writer, she wrapped her favourite son in a jealous and protective love, determined that he shouldn't go into "trade", especially not his father's. Accordingly, when he was six he was sent to the then best school in Nottingham, so Southey assures us, kept by the Rev. John Blanchard, where he learnt "writing, arithmetic, and French". Two tales of those years "prove the precocity of his talents.

When about seven, he was accustomed to go secretly into his father's kitchen and teach the servant to read and write; and he composed a tale of a Swiss emigrant, which he gave her, being too diffident to show it to his mother. In his eleventh year he wrote a separate theme for each of the twelve or fourteen boys in his class; and the excellence of the various pieces obtained his master's applause."

Henry is to grow into a scholar and man of letters. That is the mother's wish. The father's is very different. "Even while he was at school, one day in every week, and his leisure hours on the others, were employed in carrying meat to his father's customers." And the school career comes suddenly to an end because of a "dispute" between his father and his master. We are not told what the dispute is about, but it seems likely that money came into it, because it is at about this time that Mrs White opens a day school. The boy himself "was placed in a stocking loom, with a view to bringing him up to the trade of a hosier." John White no doubt did the placing, but it wasn't a success, and in May 1799 his son was taken out and "placed" in the office of "Messrs Coldham and Enfield, Town Clerk and attorneys of Nottingham". From there he writes to his brother, Neville White, who was then a medical student in London. (The letter was among the papers that the family handed over to Southey, and presumably both family and Southey "edited" all correspondence as they thought fit. But still):

A man that understands the law is sure to have business; and in case I have not thoughts, in case, that is, that I do not aspire to hold the honourable place of a barrister, I shall feel sure of gaining a genteel livelihood at the business to which I am articted.

As part of his training for genteel livelihood, White taught himself Latin and Greek, and then began to widen his interests. "Law, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, chemistry, astronomy, electricity, drawing, music, and mechanics, by turns engaged his attention; and though his acquirements in some of those studies were very superficial, his proficiency in many of them was far from contemptible."

How far Southey can be sure of all this I don't know. He corresponded with White - a point we'll come to later - but he never met him. On the other hand, it seems reasonably certain that White was compulsively drawn to study, and had something of that interest in sciences of the day (chemistry, astronomy, electricity and mechanics), which, for example, brought together the marvellous men of the Lunar Society, about whom White would almost certainly have known. (Their members included Erasmus Darwin, Matthew Boulton and Joseph Priestley, and they met regularly in Derby). It was an interest that was also, and more spectacularly, to be shown by Shelley a few years later.

While White was employed at the attorney's office, he applied for

admission to a literary society in Nottingham and, "after repeated refusals" - on the grounds of his youth - he was admitted. It is now that he begins seriously to write poetry, and by 1803 has enough verse put together for a volume. He apparently prepared this for the press at the suggestion of Capel Lofft. This is important. We don't know how he was brought to Lofft's attention, but we do know that Lofft was the patron of Robert Bloomfield, and was in the tradition that had been established early in the eighteenth century, of gentleman patrons (and for patron one should read "self-congratulatory discoverer") of poets of "natural genius". The tradition begins with Spence's "discovery" of Stephen Duck, "the thresher poet", and it includes, beside Bloomfield and White, non-starters such as James Woodhouse, "the poetical shoemaker", Anne Yearsely, "the poetical milkmaid from Bristol"; and a trio of great poets, Burns, Crabbe and Clare.

Lofft was a dilettante, who wrote two hopelessly bad sonnets on White's death ("Master so early of the various Lyre/Energic, pure, sublime!"), but who seems to have shown him some genuine kindness. At all events, he helped White to get the Duchess of Devonshire's permission to have the volume dedicated to her, although when it appeared "no notice whatever was taken".

By the Duchess, that is. White had, however, sent copies to most of the reviews, and one at least noticed it. The Monthly Review was perhaps irritated by White's prefatory note, in which he said that his inducement to publish was "the facilitation through its means of those studies which, from his earliest infancy, have been the principal objects of his ambition" (the tone is reminiscent of Burns' preface to the great Kilmarnock edition of his poems but doesn't have the tongue-in-cheek element which saves that earlier piece of bootlicking from being at best embarrassing). At all events, the Review savaged the volume. It not only took delight in quoting especially bad lines, and there were plenty to choose from, but it ended with the remark that the volume as a whole did not "justify any sanguine expectations".

White was hard hit by the criticism. Writing to a friend, he said, "this review goes before me wherever I turn my steps; it haunts me incessantly, and I am persuaded it is an instrument in the hand of Satan to drive me to distraction, I must leave Nottingham."

It is at this point that Southey comes on the scene. He had read the Monthly Review's attack, and he had also read White's volume. He wrote White a letter in which he said that most of the criticism was unjust, that he, Southey, had a high opinion of White's merits, and that he was quite ready to give him encouragement and advice, should he stand in need of either.

Not surprisingly, White was bowled over by the letter. "I dare not say all I feel respecting your opinion of my little volume," he wrote to

Southey, and went on to tell him his feelings, at great length. He also informed the poet that "Tomorrow morning I depart for Cambridge." Not to enter the University, but to find some means of support whereby he might seek entry. He found it, and he was enabled to become a sizer at St John's College. But by this time, symptoms of consumption had begun to show themselves. When he finally became a resident member of St John's, in October 1805, he was already an ill man. He probably did work himself to death, as Southey afterwards claimed. Here, in White's own words, is his plan of study for the day.

Rise at half-past five; devotions and walk till seven; chapel and breakfast till eight; study and lectures till one; four and a half hours clear reading; walk, &c. and dinner, and Wollaston, and Chapel to six; six to nine reading, three hours; nine to ten, devotions; bed at ten.

Not surprisingly, such a plan, which he appears to have kept to, produced two results: one, that he was pronounced an outstanding student; two, that his disease took rapid hold of him. By July he was haemorrhaging regularly and violently. "My laundress found me bleeding in four different places in my face and head, and insensible", he wrote to one of his Nottingham friends in the late summer. He died on Sunday, 19th October, 1806.

Soon after his death the family and Southey began to communicate about the possibilities of Southey's writing a Life. Southey agreed to do this, and proposed that it should be placed at the front of a full volume of Remains, prose as well as verse, and that the Life should be "as full and minute as possible". For such a life, Southey tells Neville White, "will be a lasting encouragement to others who have the same uphill path to tread; - and he will be to them what Chatterton was to him, and he will be a purer and better example." The Life was written, the Remains published, and the volume was, for a while at least, popular enough to go through several re-prints.

At which point we need to ask an obvious question. Why was Southey so interested in White? Did he really think him a natural genius, or ought we to suspect other motives behind his championing of the young poet? My strong feeling is that there were several factors at work when Southey sent White the initial letter, and that they were still active when he came to write the Life. In the first place, Southey had himself recently been savagely attacked in print. In 1802, Francis Jeffrey had published an extraordinarily vitriolic review of Southey's Thalaba, in the Edinburgh Review, and there is no doubt that Southey saw White as a fellow-sufferer from the blind fury of critics. In the second place, Southey was interested in the idea of the natural genius. Like his fellow poets, Wordsworth and Coleridge, he was obsessed by

the life and fate of Chatterton, and had indeed already written Chatterton's Life; and, like them, he saw Chatterton as somehow the victim of his own temperament, genius, and also of public indifference. (Coleridge's "Monody on the Death of Chatterton" sets the matter out almost schematically). And in the third place, yes, Southey was sincere in thinking White a second Chatterton, not simply because of his untimely death, but because he was potentially a mighty poet.

Nor was he alone in this. In his "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers", Byron showed himself a good deal kinder to the recently dead White than he was later to be to the recently dead Keats.

Unhappy White! while life was in its spring,
And thy young muse just waved her joyous wing,
The spoiler came; and all thy promise fair
Has sought the grave, to sleep forever there.
Oh! what a noble heart was here undone,
When science self destroy'd her favourite son!

And so on. It isn't very good, but it at least reveals a caution that Southey's praise lacks. Rightly so. For the kindest thing we can say about White's young muse is that it is one of promise rather than performance. This isn't meant as severe criticism, for after all what poet would want to be remembered by the poetry he had written before his twenty-first year? It does, however, mean that the poetry we have amounts to not very much, and that it consists largely of imitative, almost pastiche, work.

"Clifton Grove: A Sketch", is an obvious case in point. White's most substantial poem, written after the 1803 volume, it is, as its title makes plain, an exercise in the picturesque mode (both in painting and poetry the picturesque inclined to the sketch rather than formal perfection). As such it inevitably recalls poems by Dyer, Shenstone, Langhorne, Goldsmith, the early Wordsworth - oh, and a host of others. And really one could shuffle lines from all of them and come up with the kind of poem that White produced. In fact the most disappointing thing about "Clifton Grove" is that it could be about more or less anywhere. Except for one hazy reference to the distant town, "Where manufacture taints the ambient skies", the entire poem, of some five hundred lines, is a catalogue of specifically picturesque details that are, as always with the picturesque, remarkable for their lack of specificity.

And save when, swung by 'nighted rustic late,
Oft, on its hinge, rebounds the jarring gate;
Or when the sheep-bell, in the distant vale,
Breathes its wild music on the downy gale.
Now, when the rustic wears the social smile,

Released from day and its attendant toil,
And draws his household round their evening fire,
And tells the oftold tales that never tire;

"Clifton Grove" is an oftold tale that had frequently been better told (White dishes up some horrendous rhymes, of which smile/toil is by no means the worst example).

And one of the more frequently anthologised of his poems, "Genius: An Ode", limps along, far behind the great poems to which it touches its forelock.

And, oh! for what consumes his watchful oil?
For what does thus he waste life's fleeting breath?
'Tis for neglect and penury he doth toil,
'Tis for untimely death.
Lo! where dejected pale he lies,
Despair depicted in his eyes,
He feels the vital flame decrease,
He sees the grave wide yawning for its prey,
Without a friend to soothe his soul to peace,
And cheer the expiring ray.

It is clearly a remembrance of Chatterton, and it may even seem to cover the same ground as one of the very greatest of Wordsworth's poems, "Resolution and Independence". ("I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous boy, / The sleepless soul that perished in its pride.") But the differences are much more remarkable than the similarities.

Did Wordsworth know of this particular poem? He may well have had it in mind when, in 1812, he was recorded in conversation with his friend, Rough, by the diarist, Henry Crabbe Robinson. Wordsworth, Crabbe Robinson tells us, spoke of Kirke White. He considered him

a man of more talents than genius, and that the correctness of his early writings was a symptom unpromising as to his future works. He would probably have been rather a man of great learning than a great poet. He would not have been more than a Southey, said Rough. "And that would have been nothing after all," said Wordsworth, - "when speaking of the highest excellence," he added.



Six Hands in Tempo

CLIFF LEE

FORTUNES HAVE BEEN MADE by completely untalented individuals who have abided by the golden rule of popular music, which is loosely based upon the notion that the "in" thing is what the public wants. How else can anyone explain the phenomenal success of punk rock, an entertainment which is closer to musical aberration than any other cynical offering from the showbiz power machine? It seems all the more incredible, in the light of current trends, that a local trio, playing acoustic guitars and singing songs drawn mainly from the pre-1940 period, should succeed in taking the much-sought-after runners-up prize in last year's Melody Maker Rock/Folk competition in the face of opposition from eight hundred bands and solo artists from all over Britain. Moreover, the near-victory was achieved against the whole of current fashion in rock at a time when "heavy" sounds and light shows were the "in" thing. Indeed, the group who beat them into first place, Deaf School, have gone on to become one of the leaders in the "theatrical" school of rock bands.

Actually, there's a simple enough explanation which immediately becomes evident when Six Hands in Tempo begin their act. The qualities which shine through their low-key performance are those of polish and professionalism of a standard which is rarely found in semi-pro groups. Every song is sharpened in rehearsal until even the duller and most unresponsive folk club audience is able to appreciate its musical merits - although the ancient lineage of some of the material may surprise a few listeners. Dave Procter ("I came out of contemporary acoustic music"), Alan Harris ("from double bass in a jazz group") and Steve Bailey ("bashing guitar in a folk group") concentrate their efforts on a rhythmic, acoustic guitar approach to old-fashioned popular songs. As Dave explained, "We do very little after the Glen Miller period. The twenties and thirties produced such good tunes, really melodic, and there's some really unusual stuff such as the thing we're currently working on, a Jimmy Cagney production number called 'Shanghai Lil' - a superb piece of writing."

It was while Alan and Steve were playing trad jazz with the Ken Eatch Band that the idea for the group germinated. Dave had just broken up his own duo, Autumn Design, and was looking around for something fresh. After a chance encounter in a local supermarket, Dave suggested that all three should get together to develop some musical ideas, and a shared interest in twenties and thirties material was identified as a common factor. Both Alan and Steve were heavily committed at the time, but agreed to give it a try - just once. Alan recalled that first night. "We thought of

three songs and one of them happened to be 'Varsity Drag'. From then on we picked songs we liked, and it just happened that we all enjoyed the music from the twenties and thirties." That first meeting gave rise to Six Hands in Tempo.

Dave stressed the co-operative nature of the trio's approach to music-making. "I was very keen to do something along the line of arrangements of jazz and standards because I'd been going a little bit that way with Autumn Design, but the concept as a whole was very much a joint effort. There was one restriction. The music had to be strictly for three guitars - that was the purity of it. It would have been easy to have started out with double bass and banjo, but I think we would have become a Bob Kerr Vaudeville Temperance Band, and there are already plenty of those around." It wasn't easy at first. All three had to modify their playing techniques, and Alan had to make the biggest change from specialist bassist to plectrum guitarist. "I had to learn to use the plec properly," Alan admitted, while Steve found himself having to move away from the guitar strumming which had been his major role in a jazz group. Dave was probably the most advanced player at the time, but even he found himself reviewing his approach. "I had to look more carefully at such things as keys, because what I was doing was dominated by the mechanics of the guitar. Playing contemporary-style music allowed me to play a lot more open string chords, but playing with two other guitarists forced me to move into keys which are suitable for all of us, so I've had to extend my knowledge of chords and keys."

After the first rehearsal together, the three musicians set about the painstaking task of building a repertoire of carefully worked arrangements of songs. Steve told me how they operate. "We usually sit down, start at the beginning of a song and say 'What on earth shall we do here?' The first night we usually just about get through the introductory passage, the first sixteen bars or so, arranging for guitar and voices. Occasionally, somebody will come up with an idea for the whole thing, but nobody's produced a set piece yet."

Alan revealed something about the hard work that goes into the preparation of a song. "When you hear a song for the first time, usually on an old recording, there's a hell of a lot going on, so we tend to listen to different things. For instance, Steve has an ear for bass lines. We're not brilliant readers and we encounter problems where a knowledge of musical theory is essential and we find that this tends to slow us up. There are times when we can't find the next chord in a progression, or a particular chord which sounds right on a piano and may be technically correct just doesn't have the right sound when played by three guitars, so we rely very much on trial and error." He summed up why it is that Six Hands have a rather small - about forty to fifty numbers - repertoire of carefully polished material. "Our songs take a long time to produce. We might have a

new one ready and we'll go down to a folk club intending to play it, but we don't. And that might happen for three successive weeks. It has to be given that final polish before we perform it in public, and even then changes are made if we aren't completely satisfied."

All three admit to a liking for university and college audiences. Dave summed up their attitude: "Although the material we use may appeal to the older age group, our arrangements of the songs don't necessarily do so, because we tend to take a purist attitude. We have our own way of working things out which in a sense narrows our appeal, and we prefer a captive audience that's going to sit down and listen. We'd like to be appreciated in the same way that, say, the King's Singers are." Alan added: "We've found that universities provide the best audiences. Folk clubs vary, but so long as the audience isn't high-brow and narrow-minded we get along fine. If you're going to achieve a wide appeal, you've got to be a bit of an entertainer, cracking jokes and all that sort of thing, and none of us can do that. There's also the volume - we're not loud. We could be if we electrified, but it wouldn't sound right."

Working on the assumption that a group needs to progress if interest is to be sustained, I asked the members of Six Hands in Tempo how they perceived the future. Dave was the first to reply. "There's no sign yet of a change of outlook. As individuals within the group, we're able to pursue our own interests outside the group. I still plonk away at my own compositions occasionally and Alan writes a few things, but collectively we're still developing. The music is getting more complicated and we're beginning to find out what appeals to audiences, so we're able to capitalise on that in our new arrangements."

Evidently, Six Hands is at the beginning of a successful musical career. "There's still a massive amount of material to go at," Alan said. "I was in a shop in Norwich the other day where old 78 recordings were stacked to the ceiling. I went through one pile, and half of the songs I'd never even heard of." At this, he produced an eight-inch, much-played Billy Desmond recording of "Hello Bluebird" which had been rescued from junk-shop obscurity to be given a new lease of life in a version re-processed for modern ears, but retaining the original period "feel", by three Nottingham musicians who respect the original sound.

It reminded me of a remark I once heard from a collector of other people's cast-offs, a genuine junkman. "Somebody, somewhere wants all this stuff," he said. "There's a home for everything." That observation could equally apply to the music which Six Hands in Tempo is rescuing from obscurity, polishing to perfection, and presenting to a public which can't quite find a category to fit it into.

Trogs at Matlock

RAY GOSLING

THE MATLOCKS ARE REMARKABLE for being a British inland spa town that has come down-market, and become popular in the common sense, as rice pudding and amusement arcades. Isn't there a rock shop? Penny falls and pinball machines: seaside bric-à-brac miles from the sea - and the reason is simply The Matlocks are at the beginning of the Peak District, Great Britain's number one national park, that reckons itself accessible to seventeen million people, and Matlock is set in "scenery as noble as any you may find in Greece or Switzerland", said Lord Byron.

Now I've not been to Switzerland - but I did see the Sound of Music with my mother, who enjoyed it. Switzerland was so clean and colourful. Mountains yodelled, capped with Persil-white snow. People like Julie Andrews smiled with such white teeth. The sun shone brightly and wasn't there a rainbow? Oh how different The Matlocks.

Lord Byron wouldn't have told a lie: I'm sure it was like Switzerland when he was alive, and it may have been true when Sherlock Holmes was chasing Professor Moriarty, but Switzerland has developed in an entirely different way from Derbyshire, which has remained more faithful to Daniel Defoe's earlier description of it as a howling wilderness. I think of Matlock, today, as capital of a kind of British Transylvania.

Above the gorge a ruined castle frowns, a brooding, roofless ruin inhabited by lynx, wolves, ravens and rats, and vultures who got so cold in the snows of early 1978, two cuddled together so close the female vulture became pregnant. It was reported in the Matlock Mercury: "Cuddling vultures hope for happy event." The owners of this native British fauna reserve expected the first griffon vulture chick hatched in captivity to come from their Dracula-like ruin of a castle. They had previously done very well breeding polecats. It's all immensely popular, like Hammer's horror films.

When Daniel Defoe came in the seventeenth century, he found some old crones at Matlock still living in caves they worked for lead. Not much lead mining today, but lots of digging for fluorspar and limestone. Derbyshire is the biggest mining county in Britain, taking an explosive lead in fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah that every hill shall be made low and the valleys exalted. They've flooded valleys not only for reservoirs but slurry waste. The narrow lanes choke with trucks of roadstone and Tarmac, and ICI have juggernaut tankers now to carry Derbyshire limestone away to the china kilns, steelworks, docks. Behind dry stone walls, red flags warn of explosions.



In my decade, when young people did their thing conspicuously, in the 1960s - when so many young, so loudly, rejected, said they rejected, established society and became beatniks and peaceniks and wore flowers in their hair - a well-reported national British phenomenon was the migration of hippies to Cornwall for the summer: swarms of them went to St Ives and sat on the wall in the sun beside the sea and admired the beaches.

At Matlock Bath, there was, at that time, a lesser-reported similar movement, of a rather darker, damper, more macabre kind. I would not like to see it forgotten. To begin with, it was just a few rambling lads who didn't bother to trek back home after hiking, but stayed, with their sleeping bags, squatting for free in the caves, in the crannies and crags that honeycomb the heavily wooded gorge above Matlock Bath. I don't know whether Julie Andrews had the same kind of visitation in Switzerland, but by the spring of 1966 there were droves of troglodytes, they were called, who came as if to escape the sun.

They could be seen peering, all hairy and sodden, on some craggy perch above the High Tor Gardens. At certain times, they came out of the grey, tree-matted cliffs for food and air, and then retreated back as much as a quarter of a mile deep. They were in the Royal Cumberland Cavern, where they revanched upon society, ate out of tins, smoked hashish and drank out of bottles, breathing the dank air and listening to the dripping Derbyshire waters on their way to the Petrifying Well, and considered their karma and the astral plane.

A few were converted to, of all things, the Jehovah's Witnesses: that tribe having at that time also, and maybe for similar macabre reasons, established their evangelical high command at Matlock. The JWs did a crusade, and a survey in the caves in which it was alleged there were five hundred trogs. Matlock's residency became alarmed. Chip shops stuck notices in their windows - in addition to no rucksacks, no hawkers, no circulars, no gypsies: no trogs served here. The manager of the Matlock public wash-house said he would not let trogs wash, as they paid no rates. It was alleged some trogs left the caves for weekend nature rambles that ended in love orgies, not always back at the cave. Some were indiscreet enough to use local farmers' barns, and did it in the woods. Rumour reported black magic, and hearsay about mock marriages was reported in the Sunday Times. One trog was known to have an Alsatian dog.

In 1966, a specially convened town's meeting was held, and a boycott of trogs organised by local traders. The Manchester Guardian wrote facetiously: "People will not want to take the waters there, if they think the caverns from whence the waters come are full of troglodytes and their Alsatian dogs singing, 'Ten green bottles sitting on the wall.'" But, said the Guardian, "living in a cave is not illegal, nor is an orgy an offence."

I don't think that report helped. The idea of polluting a well in Derby-

shire is a serious business. Remembering the plague of 1665 is an annual ritual at the village of Eyam. All around Matlock, villages annually bless their wells with flower petal decorations - so the idea of troglodytes was terrible, blasphemous, sacrilege. The residency's decency was all steam-ed up and the police constabulary seemed incapable. Is it any wonder the locals engaged the army, taking a leaf from Queen Victoria who, when worried about starlings in the roof of the Crystal Palace, called in the military Duke of Wellington, who said so simply, "Sparrow-hawks, ma'am." The army said blow 'em up: lure the troglodytes out, set explosives and blow up the entrance to their caves, and that they did.

It is some measure of the commercial progress of Matlock that in the 1966 town boycott all the publicans joined, sticking no trogs served here notices in their bars. For I know an old lady who nearly took the Fishponds Hotel, opposite the Grand Pavilion, in the 1920s, and when she looked at the account books they showed a busy summer trade - but what do you do in the winter? she asked. Well, said the landlord, we go to bed early in the winter with a good book, and, should any customer call, they can knock on the door and we get up to let them in.

In the 1920s, there were more hydropathic establishments open than pubs. Matlock was then the metropolis of hydropathy, and "the quality" took the cure, often coming and staying for weeks at a time, but "the quality" was mainly Midland chapel folk.

The number one institution was Smedley's, up on the hill, founded by an eminent Victorian, whose father had been in lead mining and whose mother was in textiles with a mill at Lea, a few miles outside the town where Florence Nightingale lived. He went abroad, but returned not thinking how marvellous abroad was like Byron; but he came back from the continent feeling ill. Spanish tummy led to depression which led to remorse, and, in a conversion like St Paul's, he switched his allegiance from the ever-lax Church of England to more primitive, strict and particular basic chapel religion. He had built nine chapels in Matlock, and a great hydropathic hotel on the hilltop above Matlock Town.

Smedley's Hydro, where the food apparently could be a very tidy do, ambrosial, but discipline was rigorously teetotal. Let alone gaming: Good Lorks, you were expelled for drinking without a doctor's note, and fined for smoking. Hydropathy was hot gospel, mustard, chilly mud packs and the water cure. Some folk do well out of everything they touch, and Smedley did well out of hydropathy. The strict régime was amazingly popular. The hydro lasted a hundred years, declining finally, like all spa institutions, with the introduction of the National Health Service.

When it eventually closed, it was bought in 1958 by Derbyshire County Council, who moved their headquarters up from Derby to the former hydro building, and with it dominating the town, people began calling it the Kremlin.



Don Chaffin: the memory lingers on

AL ATKINSON

DON CHAFFIN'S PAINTINGS are mainly concerned with celebration - a celebration of childhood, of family, friendship and the spirit of place. The paintings often include the figure of Don himself as a child, and revolve around a specific incident remembered or a landscape that evoked a strong response in him as a child. An only child, he seems to have spent most of his early years in the company of adults, his mother's family especially, who all lived within shouting distance of each other in the Carlton area. He remembers this childhood as a magic period when everything was new, a lot of the magic coming from his misapprehension of the adult world - words wrongly overheard and misunderstood, giving him an oblique view of the adult world. These mistaken insights, if continued for long enough, eventually become valid in their own right in the way that stories that may not have been true in the first place become so after years of telling when their actual origin has been forgotten.

Family stories, family celebrations and neighbourhood festivities are an important source for him - he has vivid memories of childhood parties, of long hours spent sitting outside pubs with a packet of crisps and a lemonade, of Coronation Day street parties with the streets adorned with flags. Although it's harder to maintain your enthusiasm for such events as time goes by, they still mean a lot to Don, particularly Christmas, Goose Fair and Saturday night in Yates's - a gathering of old friends which has a sort of ritual performance aspect to it. Some of the friendships go back twenty years to student days at Nottingham Art College, some of them so close and long-standing that the participants have almost become part of each other. These friendships are celebrated in the paintings, particularly in the series of gouaches of four years ago. In these small works, Don was trying for a new technique, a freer, less meticulous style of painting suiting the snapshot nature of the images used - friends on days out, picnics and visits to the East Coast. There seems to be a ritual element in these outings, as in the Friday night drinking safaris, ending up at Greasy Lil's for a pre-dawn breakfast (or was it last night's dinner?), the Saturday morning parade at Sneinton Market prior to the assault course of jumble sales throughout the day. It takes great dedication to be a member of one of his picnic parties to the Strelley rainforests in the monsoon season. Don Chaffin seems to inspire such devotion.

This ritual aspect of enjoyment, combined with Don's taste for the theatrical, explains his love of the sort of man-made landscapes that have been brought into existence explicitly for pleasure - funfairs, piers, orna-

mental gardens and seaside illuminations. All the bric-à-brac of the seaside holiday seems to have a fascination for Don - postcards, souvenir ash-trays, bizarre decorative crockery, badges and ornaments are all collected, and often find their way into his paintings. In earlier years, they would have been physically incorporated into his constructions - exquisite boxes encrusted with seashells, butterflies and artificial flowers, usually grouped like votive offerings round a photograph of a relative or hero. One of my favourites amongst his paintings deals specifically with a seaside resort - a holiday spent at Newquay in South Wales. The town, as seen in the painting, was reconstructed from postcards bought on the spot, and a few liberties have been taken with the topography in the interests of the composition. The theme is that of people on shore waiting for their loved ones to return from the sea. As in most of Don's paintings, the overall design comes over strongly at first with the smaller details becoming apparent gradually as your eye works down in scale. The harbour wall has been rearranged to offer a sheltering arm to the returning sailor, who is riding home in a cloud of stardust on a seashell borrowed from Botticelli's Venus. The guardian angel overhead keeps an eye out for sea monsters, and the candle in the window is a beacon to the wanderer. This painting was started immediately on Don's return from the holiday. Ideally, he would like to work off all his recollections of times past, to fix them permanently before they disappear, but his slow rate of production and the necessity of making a living conspire against this.

Don has worked for quite a time in the theatre, both as a stage designer and as a scene painter. His design work started with a short stay on the Theatre Design course at Wimbledon, followed by spells of work at Nottingham Playhouse and Glasgow Citizens' Theatre. The scene painting was a bit more mundane - thirty-hour non-stop spells of painting scenery in a warehouse in the Meadows, knocking off backdrops for Carousel and Maid of the Mountains. This work gave him a good grounding in the manipulation of paint - the simulation of textures and special illusory effects, although the difference in scale from his own work could hardly be greater. His work is almost that of a miniaturist and, even working on the constrained size of most of his paintings, he puts in so much meticulous surface detail that weeks and weeks of work are consumed before any appreciable results are seen. Don would love to be able to work to a larger scale, to free himself up and paint in a bold, gestural manner - in fact, he even has a large canvas ready primed in his studio for when the day comes.

Don's work starts with a lot of preliminary sketches, usually very roughly laid down - lines dividing up the space into zones and the elements of the composition swapped around freely to find the best distribution. He sometimes makes a kind of shopping list of the "props" to be included in a painting. These are then researched: photos, postcards, old magazine cuttings gathered; visits made to the site, if possible, to check details, as

veracity is of the utmost importance (he gets a bit upset if the original situation cannot be reproduced). The initial sketches gradually solidify into a finished composition, and then the separate areas are worked up as detailed pencil drawings, usually worked directly from the photographs. Often, his paintings are painted in area by area from the top of the picture to the bottom, the white background gradually receding as it is replaced by areas of highly finished detail. This method demands the nerve and control of a tightrope walker.

To those familiar with Don's work, it will be no surprise to learn that the chief influence upon his painting has been Samuel Palmer. Seeing Palmer's work, as a student, made a tremendous impact on him. As with all true Palmer converts, there was an initial shock, a feeling of déjà vu, as though recognising scenes already present in your own mind, and also the feeling of entry into a secret and self-contained world. The richness and exuberance of these works and the precision and intricacy of the preliminary sketches have had a lasting influence on Don's work - an early painting, done while he was in Glasgow, is of Robert Burns standing in a sort of fairy landscape under what might have been one of Palmer's "Magic Apple Trees", the whole atmosphere of the piece pure Shoreham twilight. Don also has admiration for the Pre-Raphaelites, mainly for their technical facility and their ability to present fragments of reality with total freshness and accuracy. Another admired painter is Richard Dadd, although he has reservations about this painter's fanatical pursuit of minuscule detail, as well as the bizarre subject matter of most of Dadd's work. In fact, this accretion of detail can be a drawback in Don's own work - the mass of surface pattern can cause a sort of petrification to set in, with the whole picture surface seizing up under the weight of small-scale detail.

Don treads rather a fine line as regards content. In conversation, he comes over as absolutely serious in intent, trying as deliberately as possible to find pictorial equivalents for feelings remembered from back in his childhood. The very fact that he is dealing with childhood brings into his work a lot of imagery that many would regard as sentimental or whimsical. Clothes, toys, children's books of his childhood are all used to recreate the past. The settings are very homely - glimpses of life around the terraces of Carlton, allotments, gardens, and the fields and lanes round about where the suburb fades off into the country. If it is sentimental, the work is honestly so. His current painting, "Violets in the Sky", features the phenomenon of "raining violets" quite literally, again harking back to a line of a song heard as a child. It's all to do with what Noel Coward called the potency of cheap music. It certainly works on Don - he reckons he was once led out in tears from the Rifleman on Ryehill Street because some old dear had sung "My Old Dutch". I hope this particular epiphany eventually becomes a canvas. It has so much of the archetypal Don Chaffin.

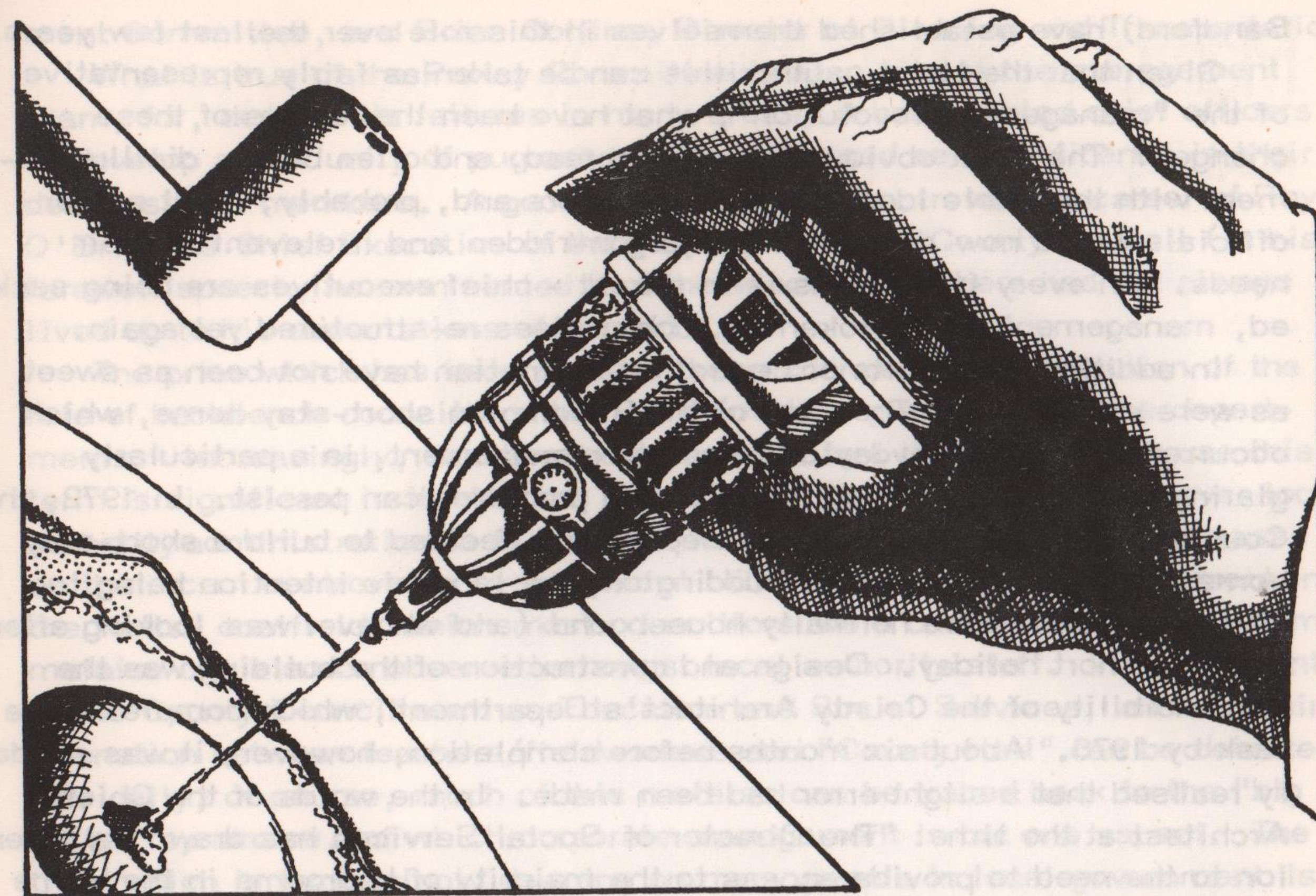
Managing the local council

SAM PEET

SINCE A FATEFUL DAY IN 1975 when Anthony Crosland, then Secretary of State for the Environment, announced that "the party is over", local authorities have been living under a cloud. The dreams and hopes of the expansionist sixties and early seventies have wilted before the harsh realities of expenditure cuts, rate rises and public disillusionment. Gone are the days when local leaders such as T. Dan Smith could boast of making Newcastle "the Brasilia of the North" with reasons more substantial than endearingly South American backhanders or the inability of Malcolm Macdonald to become its Pele. True, by the 1960s local government was "ripe for re-development", a motley collection of councils whose dusty offices (and officers) betrayed their Victorian origins, sinking beneath the problems of new services like planning or social welfare which they had acquired in the forties and fifties. The answer, it seemed, was to make local government more efficient by introducing modern management methods and new forms of organisation, and to create a new breed of local authority which, instead of merely providing services such as dustbin collections, would be much more active and "responsive" to the needs of the community it served.

Part of the answer seemed to be provided by the Civil Service, where the same complaint had been diagnosed and a process of "modernisation" initiated, culminating in the Fulton Report of 1968. In turn, these changes were largely based on the techniques and theories which had been developed in business management, especially amongst the large multi-national companies, with their problems of control and co-ordination. Local government also chose, with almost lemming-like unanimity, to adopt the private sector as its model, encouraged by the recommendations of the semi-official Bains Report, published in 1972 to influence the outcome of the pending re-organisation. These recommendations were unsurprising, for the working party was largely packed with representatives of bodies which either supported or had introduced such reforms, and were narrow in vision, taking little account of the political or social effects of these measures.

One result was the wholesale introduction of techniques such as Operational Research, Network Analysis and Output Budgeting, which were incomprehensible to most outside observers. Most authorities have chosen to concentrate their practitioners in specialist management service units: the attendant dangers of lack of communication with other parts of the authority have often been incurred. Another result was the introduction of a new philosophy: that of "corporate management", with attendant changes in the internal organisation of authorities. Like most of local government, the



Nottinghamshire authorities swam with the Bains tide. The Report recommended that the numbers of council committees should be reduced and that they should be functionally based, i.e. that all services with similar objectives should be grouped together. Thus libraries, parks and museums can all be said to be concerned with leisure, and so most authorities have put them under the control of a Leisure Services Committee. This policy was followed by both the Nottingham District and the Nottinghamshire County Councils, the latter ending up with committees for Education, Environment, Finance, Leisure Services, Police, Public Protection, Resources, and Social Services. The Policy Committee was another Bains recommendation, intended to give some central co-ordination and control by acting as a kind of cabinet.

Parallel with these changes amongst the councillors have been changes amongst the officers. First, there has been a reorganisation of departments to match the new committee structures. Second, there has been the introduction of the management team, consisting of all the most important departmental heads, and intended, like the Policy Committee, to produce better co-ordination. Finally, the new post of Chief Executive was created - a position free of departmental responsibilities to enable him (there aren't many hers) to concentrate on co-ordinating the work of other departments, and to act as the "head" of an authority. Both Michael Hammond at the city and Ray O'Brien at the county (recently replaced by Arthur

Sandford) have established themselves in this role over the last few years.

Given that the Notts. authorities can be taken as fairly representative of the "management revolution", what have been the results of these changes? The most obvious is a widespread, and often bitter, disillusionment with the whole idea. Most councillors and, probably, most senior officials would now dismiss it as jargon-ridden and irrelevant to their needs. On every front Bains is in retreat - chief executives are being sacked, management units broken up, committees re-structured yet again.

In addition, the fruits of central co-ordination have not been as sweet as were anticipated. The case of the Ruddington short-stay home, which occurred during the heyday of corporate management, is a particularly glaring example of the way in which old problems can persist. In 1972, the County Council Social Services Department decided to build a short-stay home for the handicapped at Ruddington, the laudable intention being to give people who were normally housebound (and whoever was looking after them) a short holiday. Design and construction of the building was the responsibility of the County Architect's Department, which completed the task by 1976. About six months before completion, however, it was suddenly realised that a slight error had been made. In the words of the Chief Architect at the time: "The Director of Social Services has drawn my attention to the need to provide access to the majority of bedrooms in the Home for non-ambulant persons. Due to a misinterpretation of the original brief by my Department, the majority of doors are the normal domestic width for bedrooms (2ft 4ins) and only a small number of bedrooms (7) were designed specifically for access by handicapped persons." This was despite the fact that regular consultations between the departments took place, and that councillors from the Social Services Committee had drawn attention to the mistake after an earlier site visit.

Yet, beneath the surface disillusionment caused by such episodes, there have been many lasting effects. Politically, a great impetus has been given to the development of a new power relationship: the committee chairman/chief officer coupling. Both sides have benefited from the centralised decision-making which corporate management implies, and in harness they are a formidable combination, each protected by the other on his most vulnerable flank. Chief officers have, of course, always been powerful figures. The most significant factor in the rise of this new bloc is the tendency of committee chairmen to become full-time, especially when councils are Labour-controlled (all chairmen were full-time in the 1973-77 Labour County Council). They are thus better able to get on to equal terms with their senior officers. Their power is also reinforced by the existence of the Policy Committee, on which all of them sit, giving them central control of the authority's business and providing them with a certain "esprit de corps". The best local example of this tendency was the introduction of the controversial Zone and Collar scheme by Frank Higgins, Chairman of the Environ-

ment Committee, and Brian Collins, Director of Planning and Transportation.

What is true of the Policy Committee is also true of the management team, for, despite its failures in many areas, it has enabled chief officers to develop a new unity of purpose and an increased self-confidence in their dealings with members. A good example is the controversial career of Ray O'Brien as Chief Executive of the Nottinghamshire County Council (in his farewell speech, he commented that the elected members had not always lived up to his expectations of them!).

The price which has been paid for these changes is a diminution of the role of backbench councillors and junior/middle-grade staff in the departments. Increasingly, backbenchers (and the fact that people now use this term is significant in itself) feel frustrated at their lack of control over local authority administration, a frustration which manifests itself in such cases as the recent controversy over a secret NCB report on future employment in the Notts. coalfield, which most councillors were unable to see. The same malaise can also be observed amongst local authority staff. In departments of the County Council such as Education and Social Services, an increasing alienation between teachers/fieldworkers and "County Hall" can be detected. Basically, of course, much of this malaise can be traced back to the "big is better" syndrome, of which corporate management is but one aspect. The truth which is increasingly dawning on many people in local government is that authorities the size of the Nottinghamshire County Council, which has an annual expenditure of about £200 million and about 38,000 full-time and part-time employees, are simply too large to function efficiently.

Beneath this is the problem of how expertise can be reconciled with democracy, or how people can have a say in technocratic decision-making. The Bains Report completely ignored this (or any other political dimension) when it reached its conclusions, and the whole corporate management movement is now paying the price in terms of hostility and misunderstanding. In many ways this is a pity, for the "corporate" approach has much to recommend it - after all, what could be simpler and more beneficial than the idea that people should work collectively rather than individually? But, at least temporarily, the siren calls of jargon have been silenced - and there are few better bases than that for the construction of a local government system which is both efficient and democratic.

Hand frame knitting

MALCOLM MACINTYRE-READ

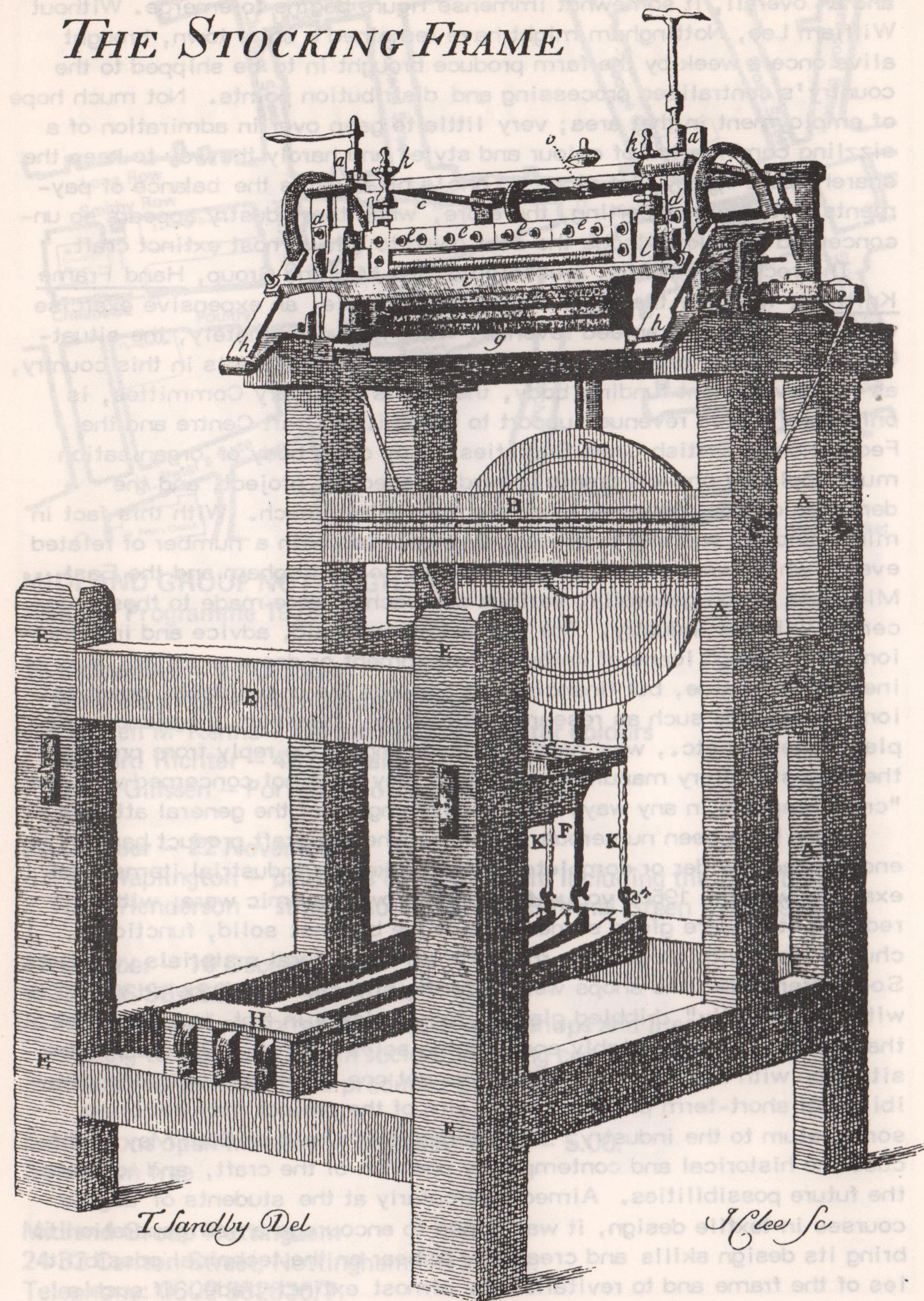
(As Craft Officer to the Midland Group, Malcolm MacIntyre-Read organised the Hand Frame Knitting Exhibition which ran from 13th May to 24th June.)

THE INVENTION OF THE STOCKING or hand frame by the Rev. William Lee while in Calverton in 1589 was of essential importance to the Nottingham area specifically and to textile manufacture world-wide - a fact not necessarily recognised then or now. The development of the earliest frame may be considered the first recorded instance of the "swingwing/hovercraft" syndrome: its patent was refused and the process had to be taken to France to prove its success. With the death of William Lee in 1610 or 1611, his brother Joseph and other colleagues returned with some of the frames to England to commence production in London. Increase in demand for the hose produced by mechanical knitting was considerable and the knitters, along with the subsidiary trades such as framesmiths and needlemakers, became a major part of London commerce.

From the capital, the skill found its way north to Leicester and Nottingham, which were later to form the centre of a major concentration of the knitting industry. The same region was to germinate the largest number of developments and refinements which allowed the basic hose frame to be adapted for numerous other knitting applications - glove frames, shawl and stole frames, rib frames, surgical hose frames etc. The application of power, from about 1860, and machine developments in the late nineteenth century, led to increased quantity and more automated production, but lost some of the subtlety of pattern and texture possible from the skilled hands of the frame knitters. More recently, the addition of computer controls has allowed an infinite variety of pattern and colour in a range of garments and materials from any of the natural or man-made fibres. This myriad of derivations makes it impossible to calculate the full value over some four hundred years of this single invention, in commerce, employment, production and life-style, and to individuals, organisations and society as a whole.

However, it is possible to illustrate the value to the knitting industry and its later offshoot, the lace industry. Simply add up the present sales figures; the capital invested in real estate and equipment; the number of employees; the amount of yarn purchased; the range of fashion garments supplied to an increasingly image-conscious public;

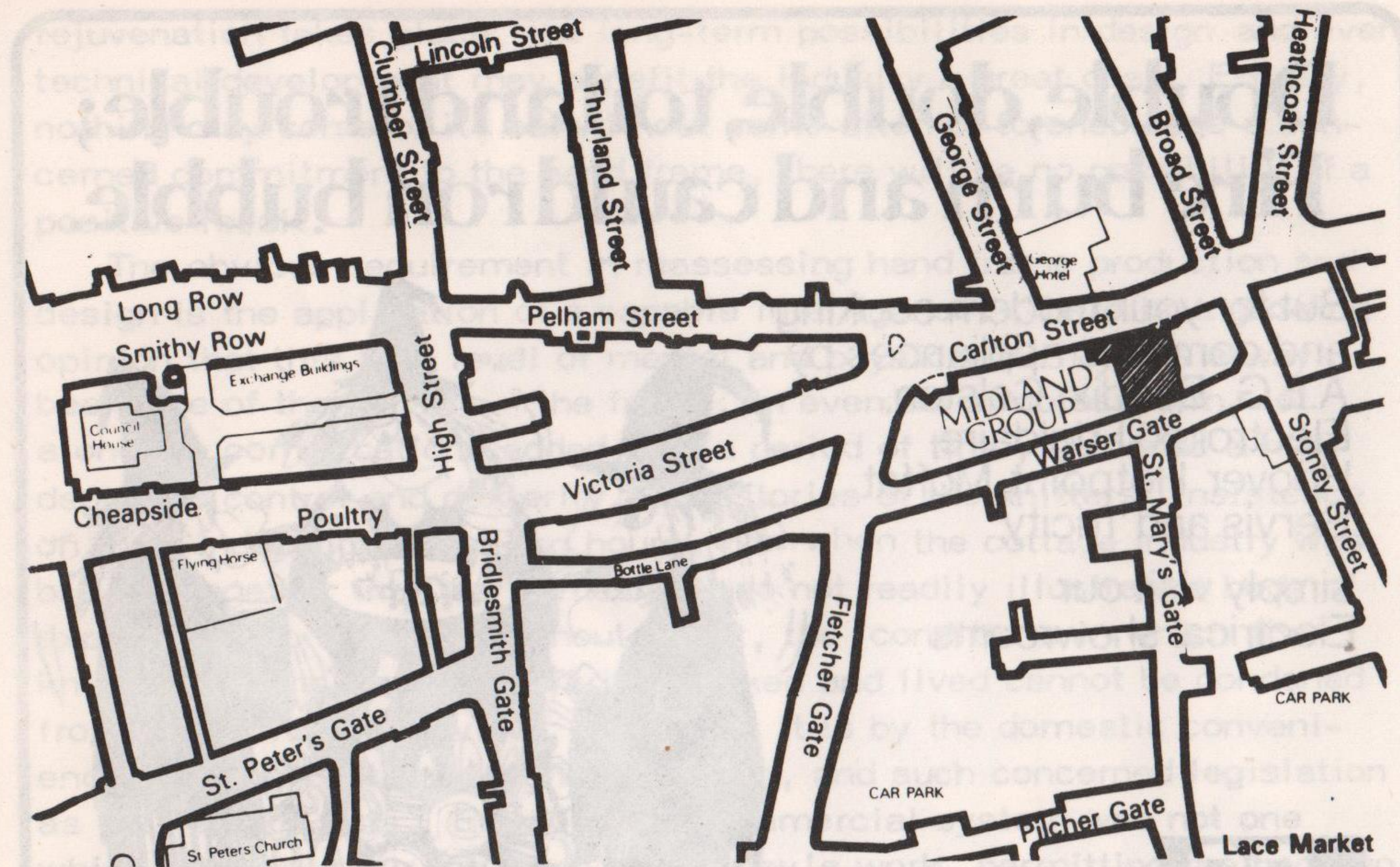
THE STOCKING FRAME



and an overall, if somewhat immense figure begins to emerge. Without William Lee, Nottingham might have remained a shire town, brought alive once a week by the farm produce brought in to be shipped to the country's centralised processing and distribution points. Not much hope of employment in that area; very little to gasp over in admiration of a sizzling combination of colour and style; and hardly the way to keep the shareholders happy, let alone do one's bit towards the balance of payments. It is disconcerting, therefore, when the industry appears so unconcerned to acknowledge the debt owed to this almost extinct craft.

The recent exhibition presented by the Midland Group, Hand Frame Knitting, was, for the Craft section responsible, an expensive exercise with very little guaranteed revenue. This is, unfortunately, the situation faced by any promotional activity involving the crafts in this country, as the government funding body, the Crafts Advisory Committee, is only able to give revenue support to the British Craft Centre and the Federation of British Craft Societies. Any other body or organisation must apply for one-off grants towards a specific project, and the demands on the money available allow little to each. With this fact in mind, and yet wishing to present an exhibition with a number of related events which were of immediate interest to Nottingham and the East Midlands region generally, various approaches were made to those concerned with the industry. The support given in aid, advice and information, and through loans of knitwear, equipment or documentation, was of inestimable value, but financial aid towards the unavoidable organisational overheads such as research, travelling, transport, insurance, display materials etc., was hardly forthcoming. One reply from probably the largest hosiery manufacturers, that they were not concerned with the "craft" aspects in any way, was a summing up of the general attitude.

There have been numerous instances where a craft product has encouraged a wider or completely new market for industrial items. An example was the 1960s vogue for hand-thrown ceramic ware, with a reduced stoneware glaze somewhere in the browns: solid, functional, chunky ware with a colour to mix with all the natural materials you wish. Soon afterwards, the shops were offering slip cast and jiggered ware with "artistically" dribbled glazes, rather sickly in tint, but brown for all that, which produced highly encouraging sales figures. Obviously, the situation with hand frame knitting was not one of being offered the possibility of short-term profit, but one aim of the project may yet bring some return to the industry. A conference was held on 20th May to discuss the historical and contemporary position of the craft, and to assess the future possibilities. Aimed particularly at the students of degree courses in textile design, it was hoped to encourage a new generation to bring its design skills and creativity to bear on the technical possibilities of the frame and to revitalise the almost extinct trade. If such a



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rejuvenation takes place, the long-term possibilities in design and even technical development may benefit the industry a great deal. Equally, nothing may come of it; but without some attempt to encourage a concerned commitment to the hand frame, there will be no possibility of a positive result.

The obvious requirement in reassessing hand frame production and design is the application of a capable intelligence. There is a growing opinion that this high level of mental and physical ability has always been true of the knitters - the frame, in even its simplest form, let alone the complications added over a period of time, demands a high degree of control and dexterity. The stories of the knitters' insistence on their independent working hours, even when the cottage industry was brought together into the frameshop, do not readily illustrate a body of exploited automatons. Without doubt, the conditions in which the knitters and their contemporaries worked and lived cannot be condoned from our own point of view, filtered as it is by the domestic conveniences of electricity and central heating, and such concerned legislation as the Factory Acts. Equally, the commercial system was not one which allowed a fair return on a hard day's work, permitting the bagmen virtually to set the knitters' standard of living by the control of all aspects of supply, production and sales, including, usually, ownership of the frame and the cottage which the knitter rented. However, the environment was that of 1678, 1778 or 1878. The social degradations of 1978 cannot be used as a yardstick for the living conditions of past centuries.

The charge was made during the exhibition that no social standpoint had been taken. This is certainly true. The reason was that there was no intention to sit in judgement on the state reached by society at any particular time. In an exhibition concerned with the craft of hand frame knitting, the purpose was to present a visual synopsis of historical, architectural, technical and design developments, with particular concern for the standards of excellent craftsmanship which were maintained by the knitters in their products. The skill and beauty evident in the articles transcend the sanitary or health standards of the time, and present experience shows that our strictest critics, the public, still demand beauty in creativity. To encourage and promote the highest levels of craft achievement is the purpose of the activities of the Craft section within the Midland Group. To support these endeavours and the craftsmen themselves, thereby improving the future quality of life generally, is a positive purpose to which many more individuals and organisations could commit themselves.

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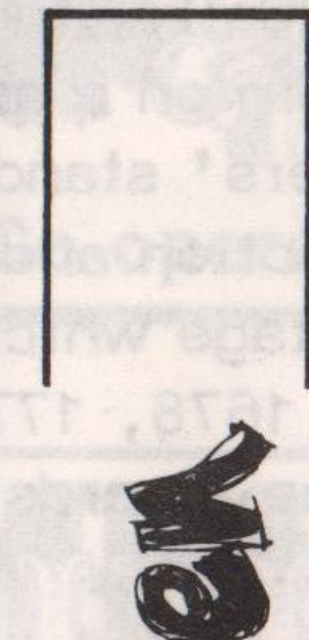
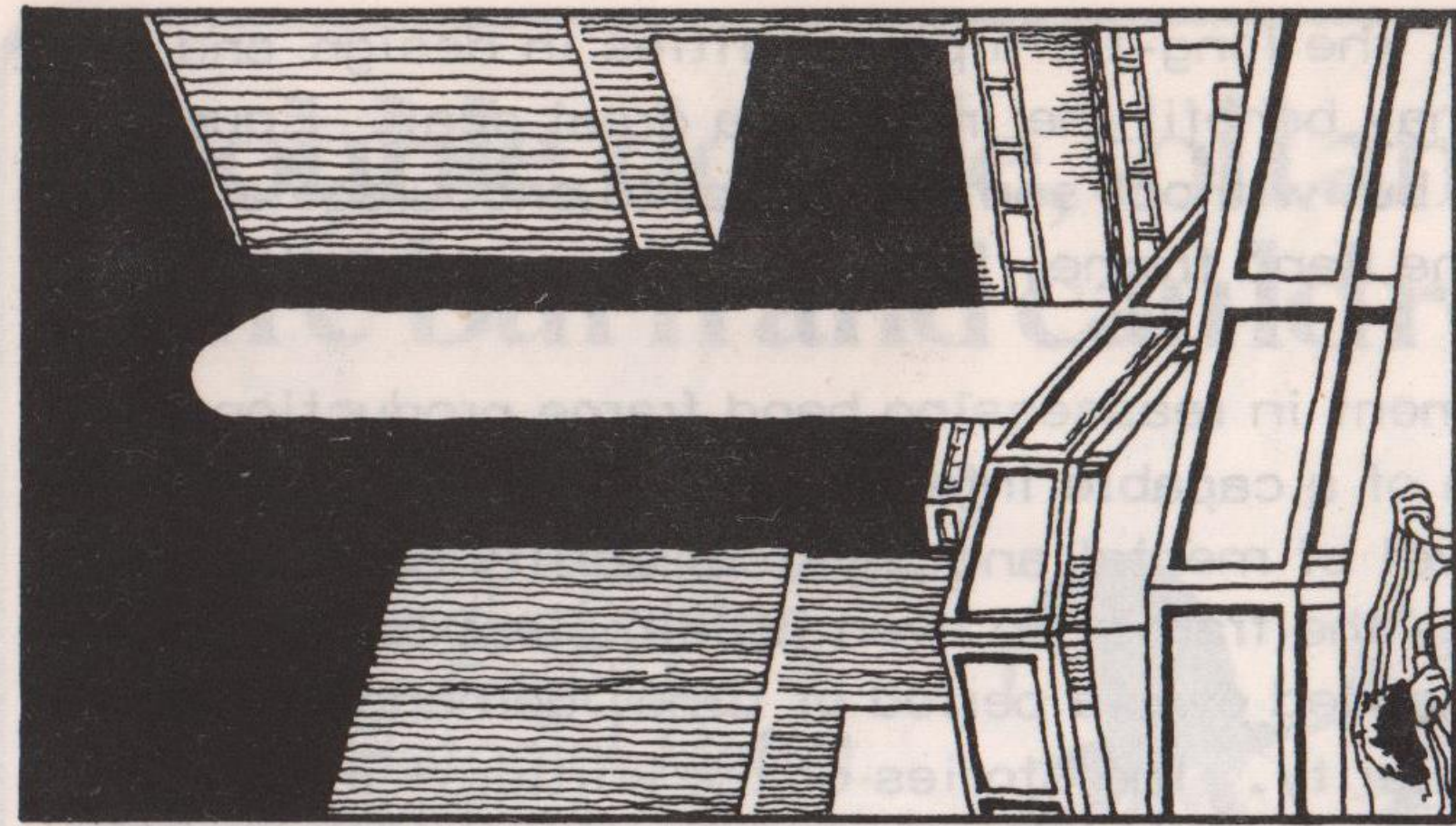
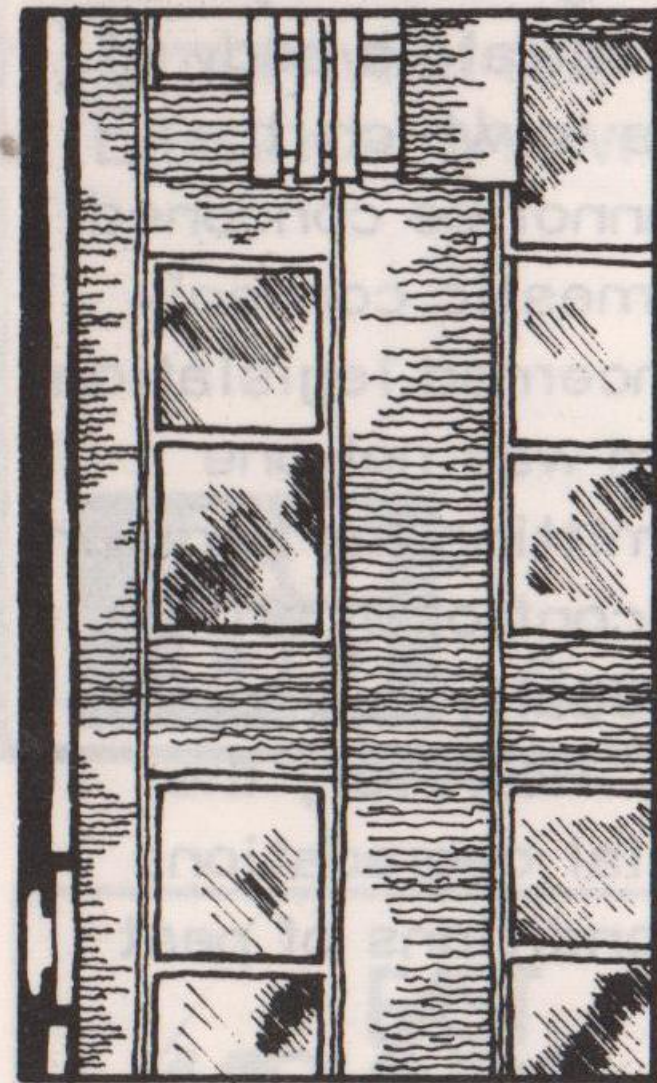
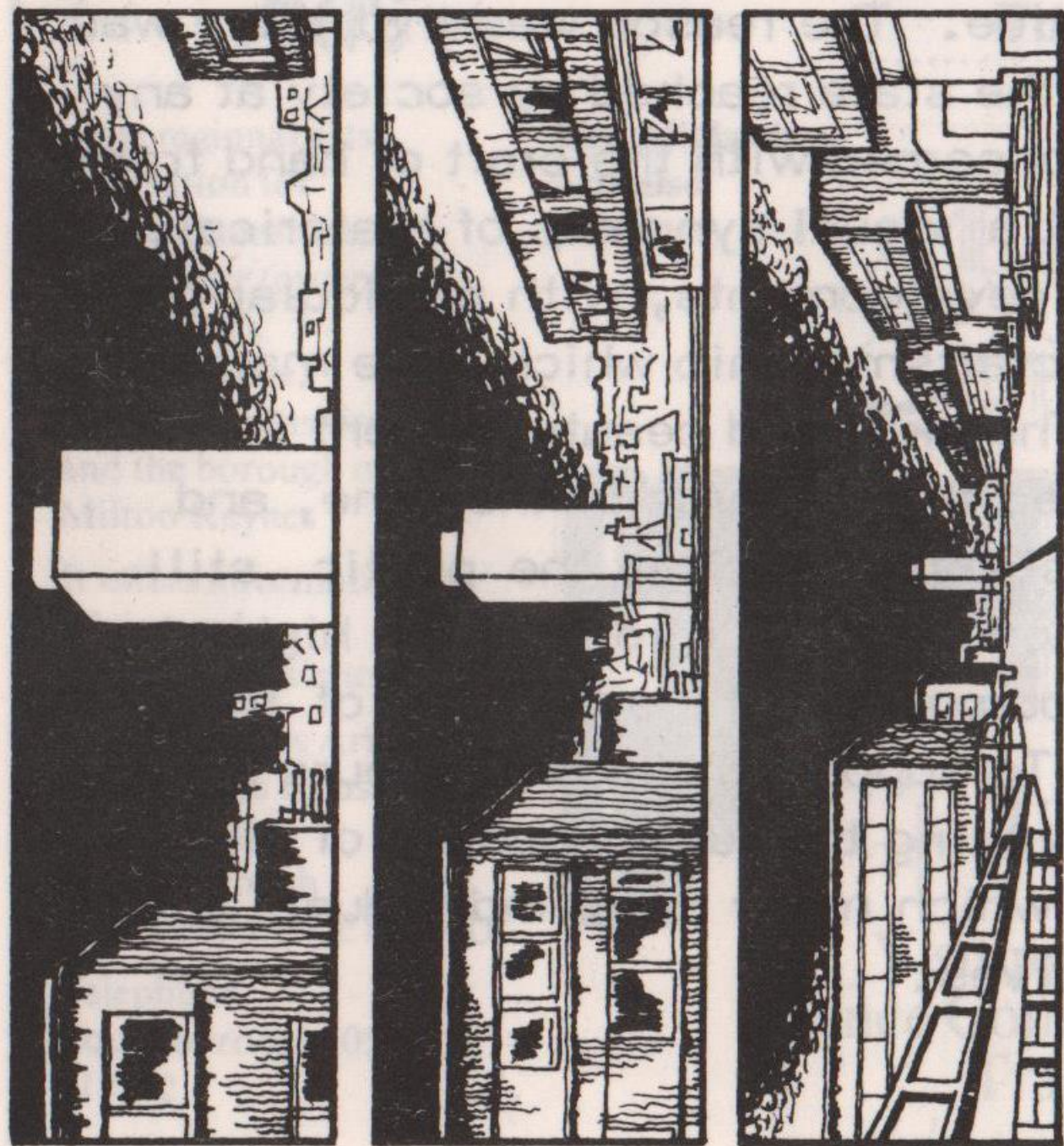
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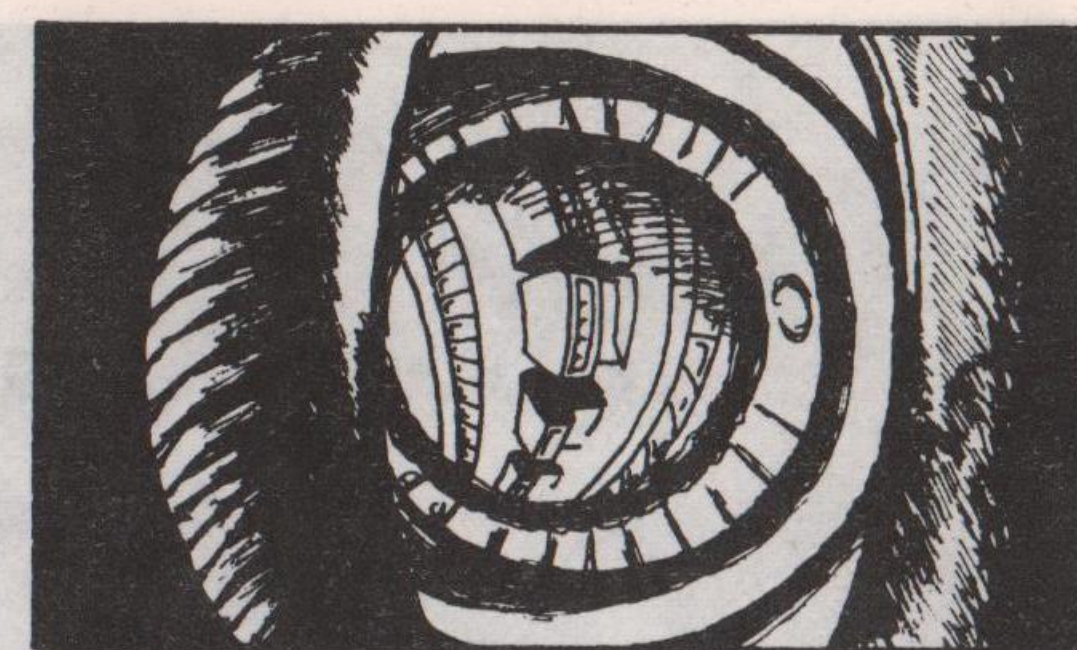
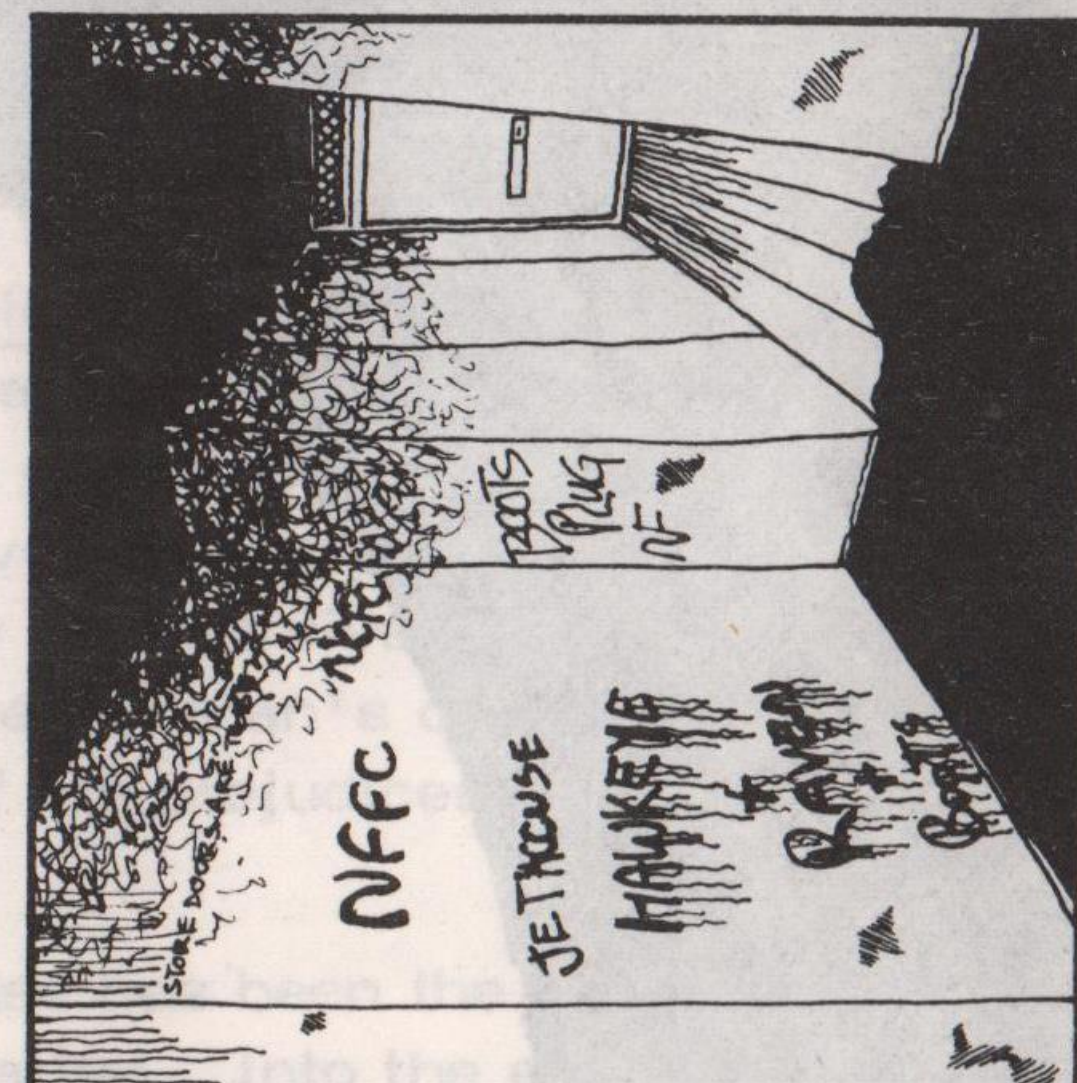
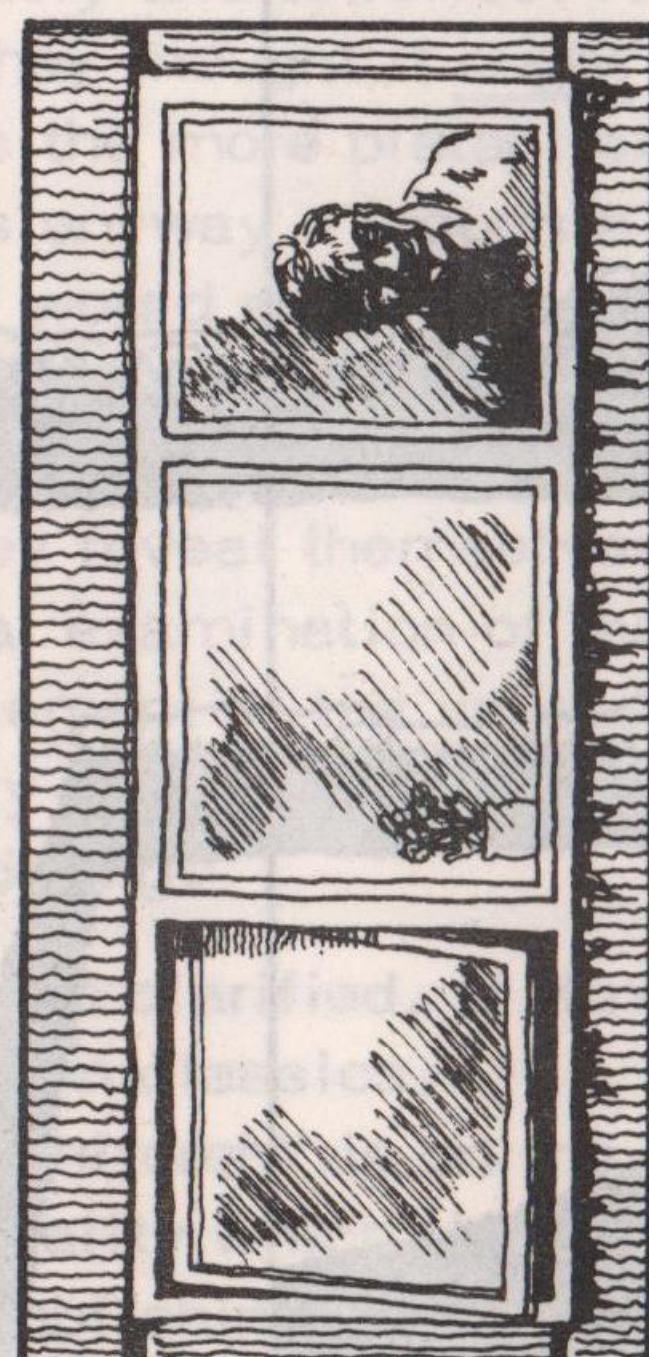
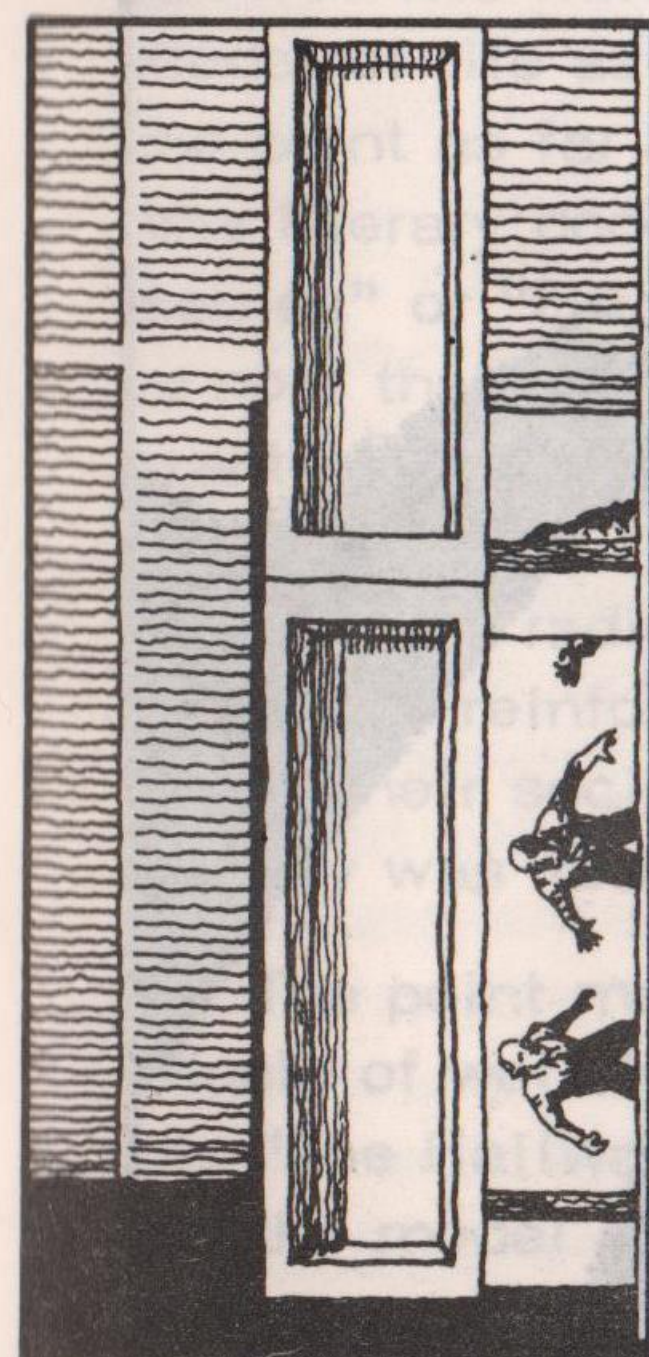
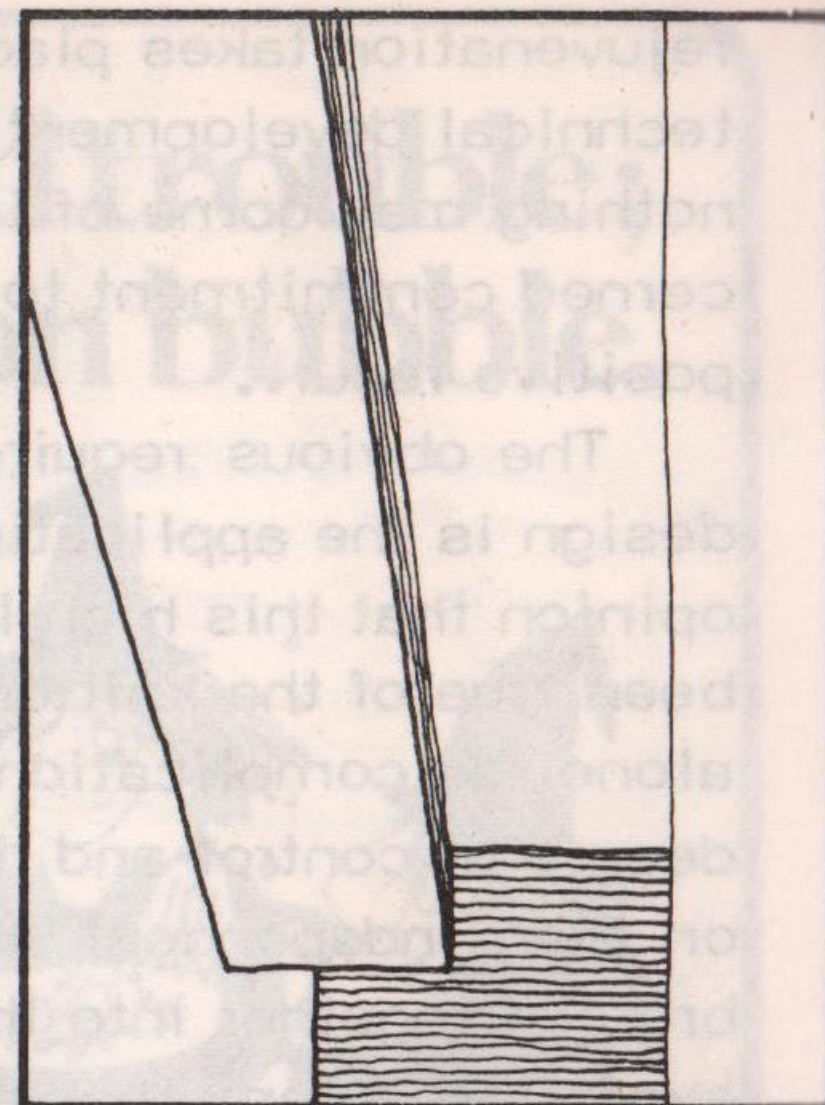
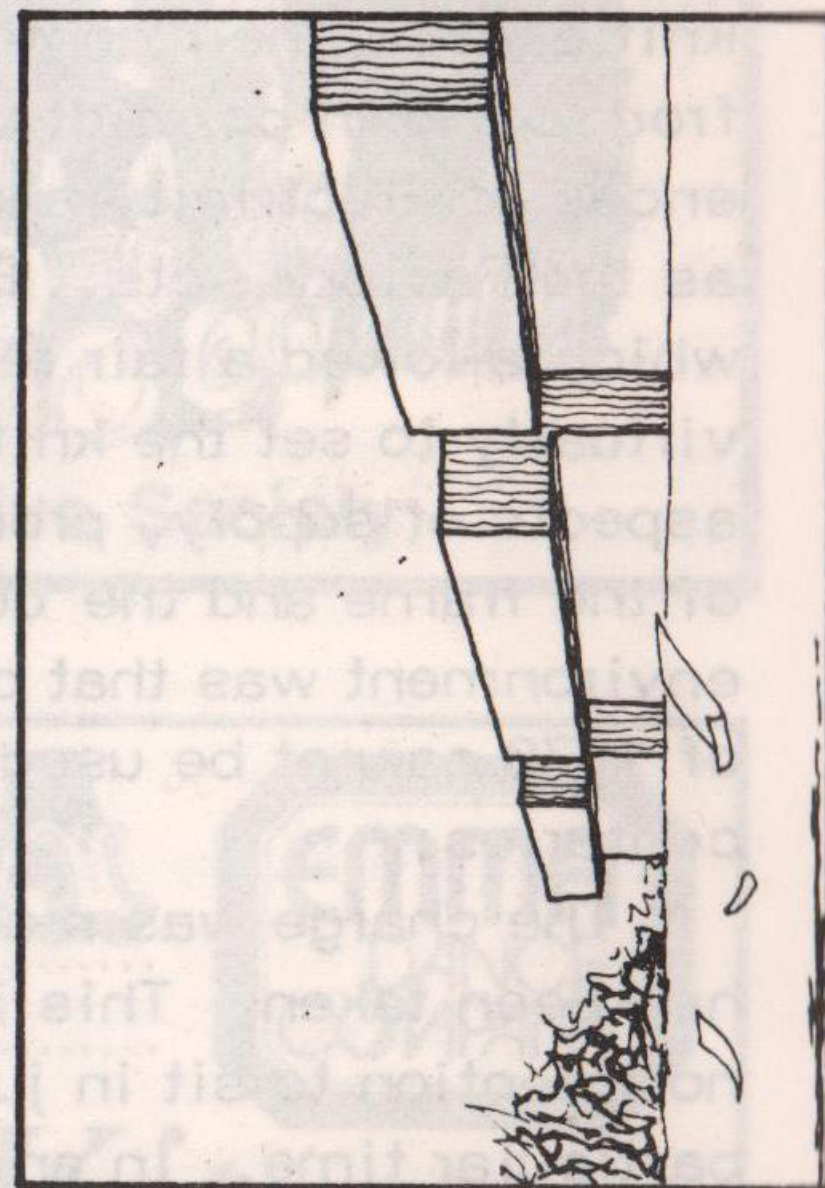
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Violent Green





Children's literature and politics

ALAN SPOONER

CHILDREN'S NOVELS HAVE NOT, traditionally, been novels. The novel has always been concerned to observe life minutely: to present images of what people are really like, of the texture of day-to-day living, of the ways in which relationships begin, grow and disintegrate. The novel is a mirror (as Stendhal said) through which we look at ourselves. We have not always liked what we have seen; but ultimately what we ask of a novel is that it reflect not a likeable image or model of human experience, but an illuminating one: that it enlarge our perceptions of the realities of our existence. Many of the great names in the history of the novel have been radical, even subversive, thinkers. Hardy; Joyce; Lawrence. And even the less obviously "subversive" novelists have been radical in the sense that they have looked at man's condition with an objectivity free from some, at least, of the prejudices which pervaded the society of their time.

But with fiction for children, the case has been the opposite. Children's writers have been deeply conservative. Into the early decades of this century, the great majority of them were openly committed, first, to teaching children what they should believe; second, to entertaining them; and to writing "literature", hardly at all. They were not concerned to observe life minutely and to reflect reality, but to present children with a model of life as they thought it ought to be. There is no need to labour the point as far as the more blatant examples are concerned - most are now literary dodos anyway - though a quick glance at, say, "The Water Babies" or "Eric" would serve to satisfy the curious. But it is disturbing to note that even classic writers, whose worth is still generally taken for granted, participated in the brain-washing of the children for whom they were writing. They reveal themselves on page after page as being committed not to a radical examination of the texture of childhood's reality, but to a solid reinforcement of the values, assumptions and delusions on which their society was founded. Or, one might say, on which their society was foundering.

The point may be clarified, if it needs clarifying, by reference to a couple of well-known classics.

"The Railway Children" is on the surface a simple, unpretentious tale, but the model of reality which it presents is utterly preposterous. The story opens by establishing that "ordinariness" is to be equated with middle-class affluence:

They were just ordinary suburban children ... (who) always had everything they needed.

So far, so predictable. But, early in the story, Peter steals coal from the station yard. He is collared by the station-master, who shows the proper signs of anger, until he realises who Peter is ("So nicely dressed, too"). His anger immediately abates, and he lets the boy off with the words, "But you remember, young gentleman, stealing is stealing ...". (My emphasis.) One can't avoid assuming that a working-class thief would not have got off so lightly. Later in the book, the children (reduced to poverty themselves, but poverty à la middle class, not poverty à la working class) undertake a collection round the village to give the poor, family-burdened, working-class Perks a birthday treat. Perks, predictably, has his pride and is outraged; the children for their part learn a lesson, namely that, while it is proper to feel pity for the honest poor, it is also important to show tact in alleviating their lot. The whole incident (more embarrassing to the reader than to the children) serves to reinforce the gulf between the classes. The most fundamentally "phoney" thing in this book, however, is the central issue arising from the father's imprisonment. It is all too easy: father is simply not guilty. There is no challenge to the relationship between children and father; nothing to disturb the complacency of the central thesis that father is perfect. In fact, the book as a whole, instead of enlarging the child's mind, novel-wise, by setting up a more complex model of reality than the one it starts with, does nothing more than confirm the simplistic and blandly optimistic model based on a facile view of personality, relationships, and class-stereotyping.

Equally guilty of providing a simplistic model is "The Wind in the Willows". Its considerable appeal is almost entirely to our sentimental hankering to evade the realities and responsibilities of real life. True, Mole is in a sense a Pilgrim, and the Wild Wood episode is a kind of journey through the Valley of the Shadow, but the things which chiefly linger seductively in the imagination are the attractions of an independent income combined with a fondness for messing about in boats. The animals are, of course, not animals but human beings; and, what's more, the important ones are middle-class gentlemen of independent means, none of your riff-raff. The riff-raff do actually launch a revolution against the rich, irresponsible, unspeakable Toad, but the tone of the book as a whole is such that Toad, in spite of his unattractive exploitation of his privileged position in life, is one of "us", and we are supposed to be happy that the revolution is abortive. As Beatrix Potter demonstrated, animals offer a children's writer a fine opportunity to present some of the harsher realities, including death; but Grahame will have none of this. Even the small otter who finds his way to the Piper at the

Gates of Dawn is returned to his own, and bland optimism reigns supreme.

It is true that child readers have always wanted literature which presents a simple, reassuring model of reality. But is it the role of the writer to supply this demand? Is it his job to say, yes, you can divide people and issues into "white" and "black"? yes, the easy life is the best life? yes, problems and disasters are disturbing, so we shall assume they happen only to other people?

A lot of children's stuff of today perpetrates these old deceptions. Space stories, for instance, are usually a modern equivalent of the nineteenth century imperial fiction in which, instead of a nice uncomplicated confrontation between us (the British) and them (the natives), we have an equally uncomplicated and phoney confrontation between us (the human race) and them (Them). And, on TV, the mass-produced, hack-written American series represent precisely the kind of thing that Orwell was inveighing against in his essay "Boys' Weeklies" forty years ago: not only do you find in these stories a simple division of humanity into "goodies" and "baddies", but you also find that the goodies are either specifically government agents (Steve Austin, Batman etc.), or at least "establishment figures" representing the authority of the state. There is no arguing out of right and wrong: it's all taken for granted. Such programmes are in effect political: not political education, but political brain-washing.

The truth is that, if children are exposed to a limited range of models of reality, they will inevitably develop only limited understanding of the nature of reality. Children need a wide range of models to give them a sufficiently flexible understanding of the world to enable them to play a useful, adaptable, democratic role within it.

During the last couple of decades, there has been a trend towards a liberal, humanitarian, discreetly radical kind of literature for children. Writers have tried to preserve the narrative simplicity and directness which is essential for children while suggesting models of reality somewhat more subtle, and certainly more acceptable to modern society, than those of children's books in the past. One of the reasons for the popularity of fantasy during this period, I suspect, has been that fantasy enables the writer to pretend to some degree of moral realism while presenting a simple story-line which children will readily respond to. Some fantasy has been overtly allegorical. The world of Tolkien, for instance, enacts an allegory of a continuing struggle between good and evil. Similarly, the early work of Alan Garner allegorised the forces of good and evil warring for possession of the ostensible heroes of the stories - "ostensible" because, though they were at the centre of the action, the real conflict was around them, not within them. (It is interesting that, as Garner moved in his writing away from fantasy into the realms of the novel, he also moved away from children. "The Owl Service" is an effective com-

promise between fantasy and novel, dramatising ambiguities of behaviour and personality which had been expressed only allegorically in the earlier books. "Red Shift" dramatises with considerable technical brilliance an agnosticism about personality, relationships, society and the nature of reality which is characteristic of our age - although, as the book points out, it is not unique to it. "Red Shift" is a novel; but not in any meaningful sense a children's novel.)

Other writers of fantasy have turned not to moral allegory, but to psychological allegory. Catherine Storr's "Marianne Dreams" suggests the perplexing and disturbing nature of psychological reality, while at the same time creating a narrative structure which is sufficiently simple and dynamic to grip and satisfy young readers. The story dramatises Marianne's developing self-awareness: "Truth" is not presented in terms of facile moral injunctions but in terms of dream images - for example, the moving stones and the lighthouse, which are suggestive enough and ambiguous enough to provide an adequate model of the frightening uncertainties and inconclusiveness of a child's growing self-perceptions. Again, Ursula Le Guin's "A Wizard of Earthsea" provides a strong narrative line, a quest story, while providing a challenging model of reality. Her concept of duality ("To light a candle is to cast a shadow") implies no moral dogmas. It does not even present us with a battle between good and evil which is the stock-in-trade of so many fantasy writers. But it does offer a model which helpfully illuminates many of the problems which the maturing child has to face: the nature of personality, of man's relationship with his environment, of the moral structure of the world.

Fantasy has provided some sort of answer to the problem of how to write acceptably for children without writing simplistically. But the potential of fantasy is limited. It becomes too predictable: the narrative tricks lose their sharpness; the old symbols come round too regularly; the fantasy slips too easily into facile allegory. It is, then, to the idea of "real" novels for children that I return: a kind of fiction which observes life minutely and enhances our understanding of it by enabling us to see it more clearly. This concept of children's fiction does raise a real dilemma. To what extent can society allow a novel for children to reflect the whole truth - life with warts and all? All the blaspheming and swearing, the crushing of bodies and spirits, the duplicity and dishonesty? Can childhood bear too much reality? In practice, there is usually a compromise. Some writers have dealt with real issues, but have softened their impact by the setting. Leon Garfield is a master of this: he presents unflinchingly fundamental problems which children sooner or later face - questions of identity; the fallibility of those thought to be infallible; the sheer blackness of human hearts. But it is all acted out in a dashing eighteenth-century context which removes the astringency of the issues. A few writers for children have hardly compromised at all. Robert Westall's

"The Machine-Gunners" is not only about the Second World War, but also about more immediate conflicts in a recognisable immediate setting: conflict of children against children, of children against adult:

Clogger raised his boot and kicked Boddser in the ribs three times. It made a terrible noise, like a butcher chopping a leg of lamb. Then he kicked him three times more ...

This isn't cricket. It isn't middle-class. It isn't reassuring. It isn't British. It isn't any of the things which children's literature used to be. It is more like a real novel: not because it is violent, but because it is honest. And is it subversive? Is it politically dangerous, because it is letting the nasty cat out of the bag? Is it going to encourage the young to violence, or is it going to help them play a positive role in a democratic society by giving them another dimension of complexity to add to the model of life which they are structuring?

Whether you are prepared to accept this or not depends on the degree to which you are prepared to protect children from the truth. If your answer is not, you'd better send the kids back to watching Steve Austin on the telly. There may be a spot of violence there. But it won't matter, really. It's not true, we know that. And anyway, the ones that get smashed, we know, don't we, that they're the baddies anyway? Life's a lot easier that way.

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INTERVIEW

Christopher Bruce

MARGARET HURD

(Margaret Hurd talks to Christopher Bruce, dancer, choreographer and Associate Director of the Ballet Rambert, who appeared with the company at the Theatre Royal in May.)

Margaret Hurd. What type of early training did you have?

Christopher Bruce. I did ballet, tap-dancing and acrobatics at a dancing school in Scarborough.

M.H. Did you enjoy it right from the beginning, or did you go under duress?

C.B. Yes. I didn't go under duress. I felt some affinity with movement. I don't know why, as I'd never been involved with the theatre, or dance, before. I think the ballet lessons were the thing I really wanted. I felt, somehow, they were more serious than the other styles.

M.H. How long did you stay at your first school?

C.B. Nearly two years. When I was thirteen, I went to the Ballet Rambert School.

M.H. And did you go into the Rambert Company straight from the school?

C.B. No. First of all, I went into Walter Gore's London Ballet, which doesn't exist any more, for the last five weeks of his final tour. Then I went back to being a student for a couple of weeks before I was taken into the Ballet Rambert. I was seventeen then.

M.H. What do you feel about classical ballet as a basis for all types of professional dance?

C.B. I think it's essential, absolutely.

M.H. But don't you find that classically trained dancers find it difficult, at least initially, to adjust to contemporary work?

C.B. Yes. When it's been drummed into you that this is the way dance is and your mind has been attuned to approaching dance in a particular way, aspiring to do certain roles, it is very difficult to adjust.

M.H. Of course, virtuosity plays such a part in ballet, especially in the classics.



C.B. Well, I think the same could be true of contemporary dance. I've seen the London Contemporary Dance company doing things that are very much in that vein: "Class", for example. Several of their ballets are geared to entertaining, rather than serious "hand on forehead" works, which is right. One tends to be over-serious in dance. It's very difficult to do good, light ballets.

M.H. What do you like about contemporary dance?

C.B. I like its earthiness. I think it's a much easier form of dance to actually express emotion in. Classical dance seems to be slightly separated from the "natural functions", as it were. I think it's a more abstract form of dance, quite frankly. Modern dance has got a freedom to actually express more ideas. It's very difficult to break down and talk about these things because they cross so much, especially in this company. We mix the techniques, and there are so many different approaches. You can express whatever you want to express in both techniques, but I find contemporary dance an easier way of getting to the depth of an idea.

M.H. When did you first become interested in choreography?

C.B. About '68 or '69, when I'd been a professional dancer for some time. We had workshops, and people in the company were trying to do ballets. It was very rare that anything really good turned up. I just thought maybe I could do as well and so I had a "bash". I found it difficult, but the work was O.K. for a beginner.

M.H. How do you approach a new work?

C.B. Sometimes I have an idea and I begin to work on the movement. I add sound, if necessary, later. Or, if I have a piece of music I want to do a work to, then I'm inspired totally by the music. But I think one is truly choreographing when one is working without any musical framework. The whole phrasing and rhythm are one's own. Martha Graham says she needs the music to lean on. I've found, generally, that I haven't needed the music to lean on. I started using scores, but not always very formal scores; I had a lot of freedom within them. It's always an incredible struggle to do something on the music, without too obviously using the music.

M.H. Do you like to draw choreography from your dancers?

C.B. I tend to draw it from myself, during rehearsal. I don't have a lot of set ideas prior to beginning a work. I find it doesn't work to set things beforehand.

M.H. Do you change your works after they've been performed?

C.B. Yes, but not as much as I think I ought to. I sometimes feel I

should be more selfish about grabbing time and getting things right. I get tired of looking at my ballets and not being happy with them.

M.H. Do you feel vulnerable when your works are performed?

C.B. Yes, always. The thing I've found about being a choreographer is that I can hardly ever enjoy my work, in performance, that is. I might enjoy a studio rehearsal, or a dress rehearsal, but when we get into the theatre it's out of my hands and what I'm seeing is possibly not what I intended.

M.H. Does public criticism upset you? For example, "Cruel Garden", the work you did in collaboration with the mime artist, Lindsay Kemp, has had very mixed reports.

C.B. I was quite shocked, actually, at the critical reaction to it in London at the opening, because it was very well received by the audiences. I was very surprised that so many of the critics hated it so much. During our recent season at Sadler's Wells, it was an incredible success. The critics, however, either stayed away and ignored it, or came and didn't write about it, and a few wrote and said how they'd changed their mind after their initial dislike of the work. Those who'd loved it in the first place said how wonderful it was. I think the biggest criticism was that it's not dance, which doesn't seem to be a valid criticism. It was never intended to be pure "ballet ballet"; it's a combination of many things. It's total theatre, and it worked, obviously, for the majority of the public.

M.H. Did you find it difficult working with Kemp, as he isn't a trained dancer?

C.B. Yes. We talked a lot, and most of the work we were involved with took place before we started rehearsal. We worked out a synopsis, then I tried to keep to it. I did most of the actual setting of everything, very much based on his idea. He produced a few rehearsals, but we were terribly short of time. That was the most dissatisfying thing, that there wasn't enough time for Lindsay to work on the company. But it still has a lot of Kemp in it. I hope it's partly to do with me. I did try to keep as faithfully as I could to our original conception.

M.H. You dance in "Cruel Garden", don't you? Do you find that difficult, being both the director of, and dancer in, a work?

C.B. With all the other responsibilities of maintaining the work and seeing how things mould together? Yes, it is very difficult. However, at the beginning of last season I had a second cast on, and that helped me a lot.

M.H. Do you get the opportunity to see many other dance companies?

C.B. I try to see other companies, but I do get tied up with my own work and I rather resent it. I'd love to see more, so I'm taking some time off at the end of this year to get around and look at other companies.

M.H. Which companies do you particularly like?

C.B. The company I really enjoyed recently was Pilobolus. They were marvellous. I'd like to see some of the American companies, especially the smaller groups.

M.H. Do you admire any particular choreographers?

C.B. Several. The kind of people I accept as standard "greats": Cunningham, Tetley, the late José Limon, Graham (of course) and Paul Taylor.

M.H. Have any of them influenced you?

C.B. Yes, all of them have, slightly. In some works you can see it, in others you cannot. But I think the influence of some of them will show in my future works.

M.H. Have you any advice for aspiring choreographers?

C.B. You just have to get on and do it. Stay as true to yourself as possible and throw your heart into your work. You must be a poet, but you have, at the same time, to cope with the practical side. It's the marriage of these two talents, the artist and the practical man, which goes towards the making of a choreographer.

M.H. What about your future? Do you have any more ambitions?

C.B. After this tour, we've got some foreign touring. We're making a film of "Pierrot Lunaire", which is coming back into the repertoire. I'll be dancing that again. Then I'm leaving the company for a period of time, when I'm going away to create some ballets abroad. I'm really looking forward to that, because I don't have enough opportunity to create ballets here. I'm always so busy. After that, I'm going to America to look around. I'm going to Australia to do some more ballets, then I'm coming back to play Prospero in Tetley's "The Tempest", which he's going to do for us in '79. After that, I'll tour with the company to Australia, Schwetzingen and Paris. That takes us up to the end of '79, and after that I just haven't thought at all.

PROFILE

Sylvia Miles

MIKE WILLIAMS

WHEN THE NEW ADMINISTRATION at the Nottingham Playhouse mounted its prestigious British première of Tennessee Williams's "Vieux Carré", the role of Mrs Wire, a decaying landlady of an equally decaying boarding-house in New Orleans, was taken by the American actress, Sylvia Miles. Tennessee Williams revealed at the press conference which preceded the première that he himself directly inspired the choice of Miss Miles for the part, and when I interviewed her she told me that he is currently engaged in rewriting "The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More" expressly for her. She will co-star with the English actor Michael York. There is even a suggestion that Tennessee Williams wrote the character of Mrs Wire with Sylvia Miles in mind, and she repeated to me, with some relish, the playwright's disappointment at her recent visit to Venice, which had allowed her to avoid playing Leona in a revival of "Small Craft Warnings". Her appearance at the Nottingham Playhouse looks an even more impressive capture when seen as directly preceding the première of her latest films at the Cannes Festival: "Shalimar", in which she appears with Rex Harrison and John Saxon (well-known now through the Bruce Lee movies); and "Zero to Sixty", in which she co-stars with Darren McGavin and the English actress, Joan Collins.

The majority of her films are not well-known in England, but, through those which are, she has developed something of the mystique of a cult-figure. Buffs will know her work from such varied releases as "The Last Movie" (1970), in which she appeared with Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper, and Michael Winner's contribution to the occult movie, "The Sentinel" (1977). Ironically, two of her most remarkable, but shortest, film appearances to date have won her Oscar nominations for the Best Supporting Actress. She was nominated in 1970 for her role as an aging whore, playing opposite Jon Voight in John Schlesinger's "Midnight Cowboy" (a film which probably returns to cinema screens in Nottingham at least half a dozen times a year). Her appearance lasted a memorable seven minutes and was at that point the shortest ever nominated. However, her performance in "Farewell, My Lovely" (1976) also won an Oscar nomination - and lasted for six minutes. Penelope Gilliatt wrote in "The New Yorker" of this performance: "The most distinctively conceived thing in the movie is the performance of Sylvia Miles, playing a woman gauzy with alcoholism but clinging to courtesy as if it were the life of someone dear to her."

Between Oscar nominations, Sylvia Miles spent time with the Andy Warhol circus, and recorded her most substantial film performance to date. She played a decaying but still glamorous movie star in Paul Morrissey's "Heat" - a gloriously inventive recreation of "Sunset Boulevard". It was clear from talking to her that this had been a most important experience: "People said I was crazy. But for eight months I stood in front of Andy Warhol at parties hoping to get into one of his movies and nothing happened. Then I burned all my hair off with that bad peroxide job in Peru, and suddenly he saw me in some horrible gypsy wig and said, 'That's it.' It was Andy's idea of a movie star, I guess. I thought of all the obvious things - they'd want me to do nudity and sexy things. And since there was no script, I decided if I went through with it I'd have to just become a character. So I created the part ... a movie star, in her late thirties, sort of a Dorothy Malone type ... in such a way that by the time I flew out to Hollywood and got met at the airport by Elvis Presley's limousine I was already the person I was playing. If I was feeling lousy or good that day, I felt lousy or good as that woman ... to the extent that I lost thirty pounds during the film, and you won't even notice it on the screen, because you'll think, 'Well, that lady got herself together.'" The loss of hair and the enforced slimming were a small price to pay for achieving a dozen awards as Best Actress.

Sylvia Miles has also had a varied and impressive career in the theatre. She made her debut in 1956 opposite Zero Mostel in "A Stone for Danny Fisher", by Harold Robbins, and in the following year appeared off Broadway with Jason Robards in "The Iceman Cometh". In 1960, again off Broadway, she appeared in the world premiere of Genet's "The Balcony". Recently, she appeared on Broadway with Richard Chamberlain and Dorothy McGuire in Tennessee Williams's "The Night of the Iguana".

She is, then, a formidable person and, initially, difficult to interview. I met her in her dressing-room shortly before her penultimate performance as Mrs Wire. My immediate impression was of a petite figure with an almost grotesque shock of hair. She was already made up for her performance, and ready for the routine questioning of an interview. That is to say, she was bristling defensively: "You said that, not me ... You're putting words into my mouth ... That's your word, not mine." Yes, she had enjoyed Nottingham. She found it as cosmopolitan as London. She had seen Newstead Abbey and the Castle, and she had met Oscar (the Lord Mayor), and she would like to come back, despite some of the drawbacks in funded theatre, where administration often took precedence over creative work. Yes, she had enjoyed working with John Schlesinger, Paul Morrissey, Joe d'Alessandro et al., and she was justly proud of her close relationship with Tennessee Williams. She was also proud of her ranking as a Tournament Chess Player. Yes, she had ambitions. She would like to branch out into Shakespearian comedy, and cherished a project to film or stage



the life of Helena Mjeska, a contemporary of Sarah Bernhardt. Interestingly, she did not care to portray characters she felt she could not invite home. She had not liked Martha in "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" But this was the routine, desultory stuff that interviews must cover.

We moved to more interesting ground when I referred her to a claim by the English actress, Barbara Leigh-Hunt, made during a run of "Macbeth" at the old Playhouse on Goldsmith Street, that she was able to perform Lady Macbeth's opening soliloquy while mentally planning the following day's menu. Miss Miles was visibly shocked. I suggested that Miss Leigh-Hunt presumably meant that she had in rehearsal lived through the emotional range demanded by the role, and had discovered the externals of physical movement and gesture, facial expression, and vocal phrasing and intonation which would convey to an audience in performance the feelings already lived during the rehearsal period. This challenge to her own approach transformed Miss Miles and in a few moments the interview was forgotten as she launched into a deeply felt explanation of her own method.

Sylvia Miles regards acting as a craft which concerns itself primarily with the ways in which feelings "go on". "There are," she said, "good traffic cops and bad traffic cops" - but she did not directly elaborate on the comparison. Acting is something you "do", an instinctive process in which you discover the values and feelings contained in a play as a live experience; and the values and feelings go on being discovered till the final curtain. If there is a difference between rehearsal and performance, it can only be that in performance the actor is dealing with an audience, and each audience demands the establishment of a unique rapport. I have to admit that, in summarising her views, I have tried to put some kind of theoretical value on what Miss Miles said. That may be unfair to an actress who seems to resist attempts at theorising about her art, and her performance as Mrs Wire was a clearer statement of much that she said in interview.

In the Playhouse production of "Vieux Carré", Sylvia Miles's performance crucially altered the nature of the play. In a previous article, I argued that Tennessee Williams's later dramatic style had created an alienating effect at odds with the impact of the earlier, greater plays; and that the Playhouse production had reinforced this through the setting of the action. The audience watched a revolving cross-section of the New Orleans boarding-house, which allowed us to watch the characters as if they were in a pageant, and this alienating perspective was supported by a highly artificial use of the Writer figure as a commentator. But Miss Miles's performance informed the production with a sympathy, a tolerance, and a humour which countered the effect of the alienation, and defused the potential horrors of the play. Time and again, her enormous warmth guided the audience's responses to the human trafficking in her boarding-house. It was a remarkable - and completely successful - reading against the text. And the more remarkable as a creation of instinct rather than planning.

STEWART BROWN

Truth

In our house "fiction" was a dirty word.
My father read only history and travel books
'cause they were true, the rest was make-believe
or downright lies I had no business looking to.

Our local library was split in half;
Non-fiction books were fat, ungainly tomes
drab-jacketed, moral, like Mormon preachers,
insisting with a fuzzy photograph or two

that "How To Do It: Lapidary" or "Historic Wales"
were good for me and should be read right through.
The Fictions on the other wall flashed
crude invitations to imaginary orgies;

slim-waisted, cheap, gaudy in much-fingered skirts,
they would not last, like haughty tarts
who promised nothing "useful" but dared my eyes
explore their supple spines' vocabulary ...

I snuk them home to ravish in the dark cave
beneath my sheets, reading with a torch:
they taught me much but ruined my sight,
straining at the dog-eared, juicier parts.

Today I write this fiction for my father
who was right; Truth is the only thing
worth searching for, though histories
be proved untrue and travelogues distortions.

DERRICK BUTTRESS

The Ministry of G

The hawk has flown again -
those lousy birds have returned
to the copse:
the rifle has rusted through neglect
and I miss you both.

R.J. screamed for an hour
before we burned him:
the son revealed his cultivated breasts,
and she refuses to leave the summerhouse.
Later, before we could gather
sufficient dry kindling
it began to rain.

Sometimes, secretly, I think it a mistake
to pamper these ignorant half-believers.
And the way the earthquake failed
after the event!
Even when Y offered himself
for decapitation we couldn't find
an axe large enough
for that grotesque head.

In fact, the whole affair was botched
from start to finish.
And she, of course, flaunted herself
before the loutish guards.
She can be so ugly,
but I am learning to hate her
by degrees ...

When you return bring me a hawk
and a suitably sharp axe.
In the meantime I shall sit here
and wait for G to reveal his motives
in keeping me out in the cold.

PAMELA LEWIS

Valley of the Sun

1. THE ENCHANTED PILE

I sit by a pool in Phoenix;
two palms helped by a small wind
play Charmian and Iras.
I am Egypt wearing Indian jewels,
the sun catches turquoise
and it doesn't match the sky.
Languor runs in my veins
and I have forgotten how to read.

2. SWEET AS A LEMON

Long haired and short tempered
the cat and I spat in the backyard.
Succulents are everywhere
and citrus hang on the trees
like rain drops in an English garden.
He is playing on home ground
refusing to back on to a cactus;
I am frustrated and remember
catkins on the willow where winter
is winter - soon to be spring.
Here there are four seasons in one day.

3. NOVEL

Plant a nugget of gold
in the desert
and let the sun melt it ...
cooked cheese, the threads spread
in straight lines, eight to the mile.
The houses lie low under the sun
each one a page of a book;
it is all the same story around here
only the words on the page
are arranged a little differently.
The women wear wealth
as a kind of beauty
and with wrists heavy with silver and gold



still manage to manage everything.
It is not the same in the Old World.

4. SUMMERTIME

You can fry eggs on the sidewalk
on the hinges of hell;
on the edges of town
they are so well oiled
they never let you down.
Some people retreat into
the limbo of air conditioning.
Others take flight,
returning (as the sun lowers)
carrying baskets of the shoppings of Europe.
Under the air conditioning
every surface is covered
embroidered with a map of home.
Here it is considered necessary
to cover the sand with porcelain.

5. SIGHTSEEING

Frank Lloyd Wright matched up buildings
to the red desert, and built birthday cakes
all over the University; unlike cake
they last fresh from year to year.
These confections are campus icing;
I hope the filling is as good.
No one walks anywhere, we drive to the zoo,
under a geodesic dome we stop off
to observe ourselves thinly disguised
as orang-outangs, we eat popcorn and marvel.
On, and we read ...
there's a shortage of shrimps in the desert;
they feed the flamingo with carrot juice
to keep up his colour, bright as tangerines
fallen on the freeway.
Everything is pink here.

6. BLOOD BROTHER

There isn't much to do on the reservation,
except make blood plasma for dollars.
Five the first time and if you come again

in the same week it's up to seven.
 Navajo, Papago, Hopi, the doctor is faintly amused
 to observe Buffalo Meat showing embarrassment
 when called by name for his turn
 to sell what little he has left of his inheritance.
 The doctor lives in sybaritic splendour;
 I know, I was there last night.
 It is no joke. I hope the Indians
 haven't lost their sense of humour
 as well as everything else.
 Indians bank Blood Bank,
 everyone else Valley National.

STANLEY MIDDLETON

A name loosely attached

In the street where I lived as a child

The occupants of houses next to the gas lamps
 Lent them their names. So we'd meet

In the yellow circle of Leatherlands',
 Or race downhill to Stevensons', sometimes make off
 For Bowerses'. The fourth, higher, near the top,
 Was alien country, nameless. Those who gave

Their names were remembered when they'd
 Flitted by conservative-minded boys; otherwise

Apart from forays when we outshouted
 Convenience, or mester was on shift work,
 They kept indoors, in the back, mindless
 Of their fame, small fortune. "Come on. See you
 At Leathoes'," we said. "At Stevoes'." And we did.

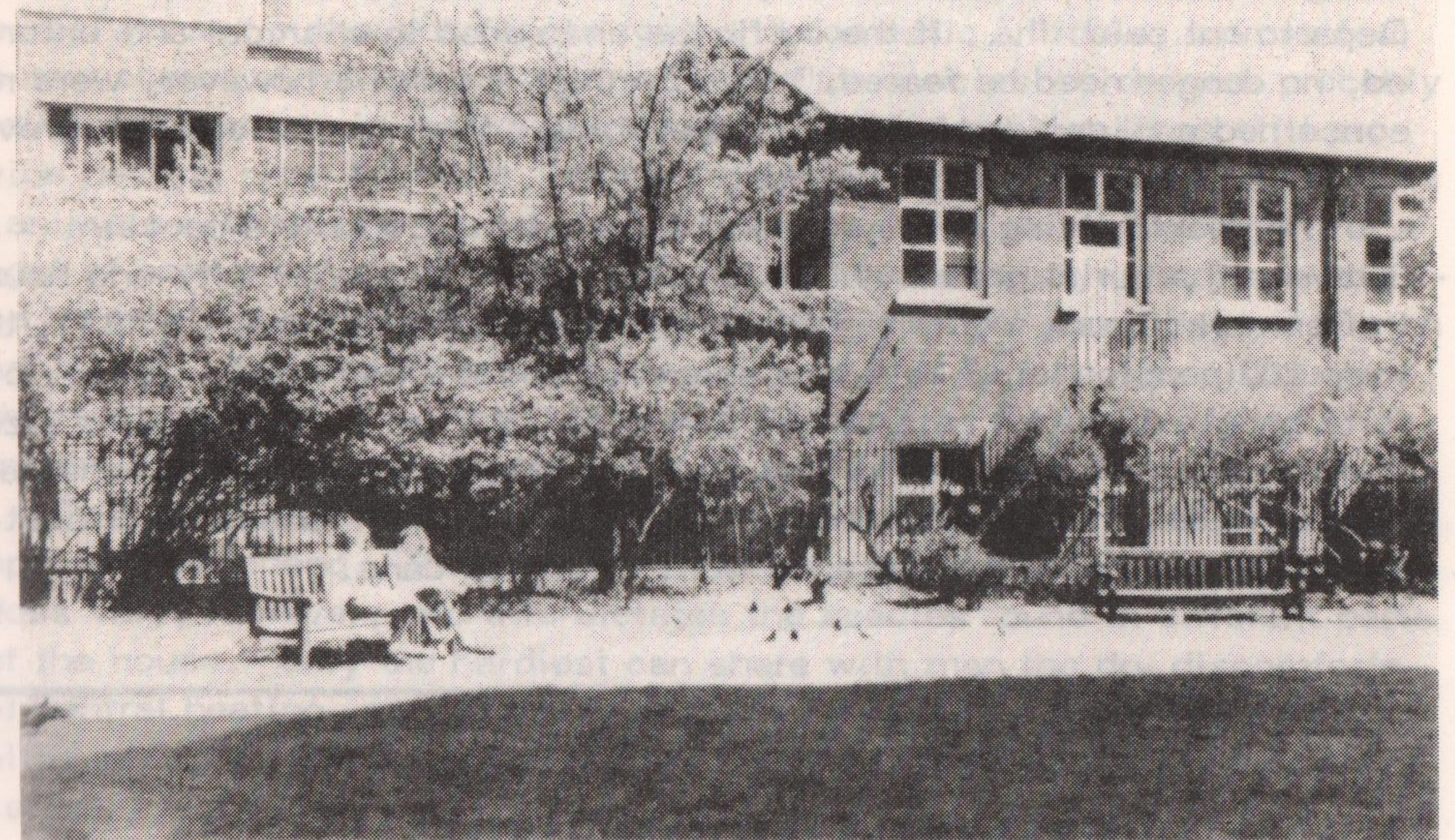
* * * * *

They had their moment, these folk, unearned
 Centres of verbal interest. Now they're dead,
 I guess. One family I can't put even vague
 Figures to. I am somewhat equivalent.
 Somewhat. A circle of light, a centre of
 Talk. My name is loosely attached.
 Fifty years hence somebody will pull me
 Out of his head. I am not displeased.

Off the beaten track (2)

The Barker Gate Rest Garden

GEOFFREY OLDFIELD



(The second in a series about some lesser-known parts of Nottingham.)

THIS PLEASANT LITTLE OASIS in the heart of the Lace Market is used mainly in the summer-time by workers from nearby offices and factories who eat their lunches there accompanied by pigeons hoping to share their food. Probably those who use it scarcely notice the old gravestones on the walls of the surrounding buildings or realise that this is the site of a disused burial ground. On Badder and Peat's map of Nottingham of 1744 the site appears as a garden or orchard, like so much of what was then a fashionable residential quarter of the town. On the north side was Woolpack Lane, formerly known as Tilpin Lane, and on the east was Maiden Lane. In earlier times, the latter was known as Fair Maiden Lane, but it was not inappropriate that "Fair" was dropped from the name, in view of the later development. By 1800, the site was known as St Mary's New Burial Ground, to distinguish it from St Mary's Old Burial Ground on the opposite side of Barker Gate. The growth of Nottingham in the second

half of the eighteenth century had meant that the churchyard of St Mary's Church nearby was no longer sufficient. The gardens and orchards were fast disappearing and workshops, warehouses and crowded alleys and courts of cheap houses were taking their place.

By 1856, the burial grounds themselves were full and their nearness to houses was being recognised as a health hazard, and they were closed. Despite this, in 1877 the Health Committee reported that a burial had taken place in the Barker Gate ground. The Burial Acts Department of the Home Office did not seem unduly worried about this, as a letter from the Department said: "... if the coffin be embedded in charcoal and entombed, no danger need be feared." The Borough Council, however, were more concerned and decided to petition the Home Office for an order to prevent further burials in disused grounds.

The people living nearby no doubt shared the Council's concern. Between the burial ground and Woolpack Lane were some fifty-one houses in Denmark Court, Wollerton Place and King's Arms Yard. In 1871, there were 202 people living here in a space of about a half-acre. Today, over forty people would be regarded as overcrowded in an area of similar size. These houses were all demolished in the 1930s under clearance schemes, but the walls of some of them can still be seen, with recesses for boot-scrappers, alongside the entrance from Woolpack Lane.

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The domestic desert

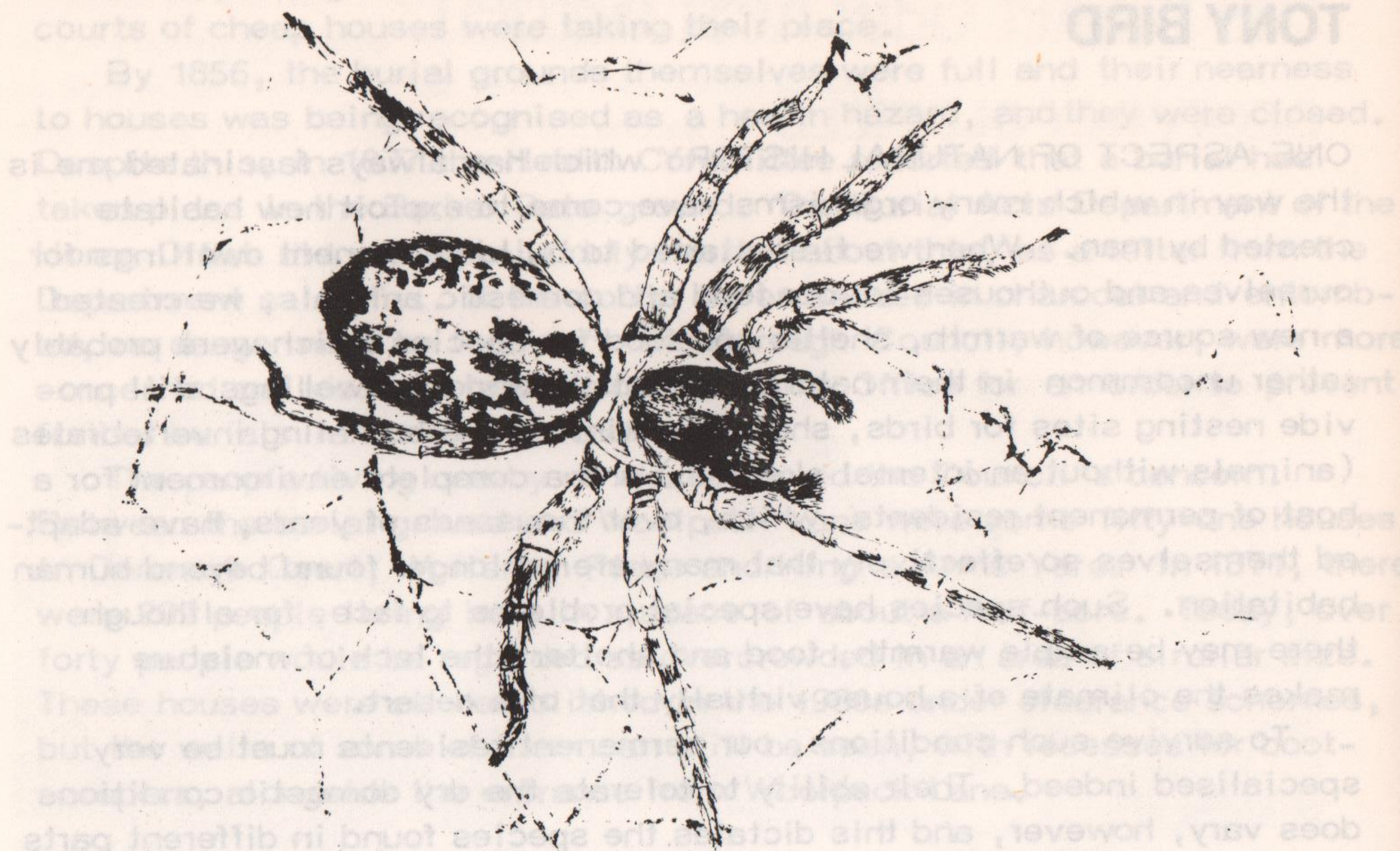
TONY BIRD

ONE ASPECT OF NATURAL HISTORY which has always fascinated me is the way in which many organisms have come to exploit new habitats created by man. When we first started to build permanent dwellings for ourselves and outhouses for our food and domestic animals, we created a new source of warmth, shelter and food for species which were probably rather uncommon in their natural habitats. Modern dwellings still provide nesting sites for birds, shelter in winter for hibernating invertebrates (animals without an internal skeleton) and a complete environment for a host of permanent residents, which, over thousands of years, have adapted themselves so effectively that many are no longer found beyond human habitation. Such species have special problems to face, for although there may be ample warmth, food and shelter, the lack of moisture makes the climate of a house virtually that of a desert.

To survive such conditions, our permanent residents must be very specialised indeed. Their ability to tolerate the dry domestic conditions does vary, however, and this dictates the species found in different parts of the house. Only the hardiest can share with man the dry discomforts of central heating, and so some of the fauna common in former times, although still with us, are now rather rare, or restricted to outhouses and cellars.

The majority of residents belong to the invertebrate group known as the arthropods (animals with a jointed outer skeleton). Least numerous but perhaps most familiar and noticeable are the spiders. These harmless animals do a great deal of good around the house controlling insect populations, although their value is little appreciated. One of the largest European spiders is the house spider, Tegenaria. There are three common species, the ubiquitous T. domestica, whose body length (excluding legs) can reach 1cm, and the larger T. atrica and T. parietina, the latter reaching its northernmost limit in Nottingham and thus being somewhat rare here. It is perhaps the long legs of Tegenaria which make it rather unpopular, those of T. parietina being particularly long and furry. This "Cardinal Spider", as it is sometimes called, is the one which, according to legend, was used to terrify Cardinal Wolsey at Hampton Court. And not only Cardinal Wolsey!

Spiders are predatory, and to trap their prey many use snares (webs) of silken threads produced by special glands on the abdomen. They immobilise their prey before feeding with poison injected through a pair of fangs. Tegenaria builds a thick, sheet-like tangle of threads in any



Ciniflo on her sticky, lace-like web. (From a photograph by the author.)

corner of the house where there is sufficient humidity, such as bathrooms, on window frames, and in outhouses. Other common domestic spiders can often be recognised by the type of web they build. Zygiella-x-notata builds a circular orb-web, characteristically with a missing segment crossed by a stout signal thread leading to the owner's hiding place. The shiny brown Steatoda bipunctata has an open-meshed, untidy-looking web with sticky threads (anchor lines) attached vertically or obliquely to the ground or to walls, whilst species of the genus Ciniflo, C. fenestralis or, in drier situations, C. similis, spin rather lace-like, very pale bluish webs firmly attached to the substrate, commonly a fence, wall or window frame.

It can be fascinating to watch the different methods by which these species snare, detect and retrieve their prey. The web of Tegenaria is a mass of trip wires across which a stumbling insect can make little progress. The dragging and pulling of the threads by the struggling insect transmits a signal to the spider, which emerges from its retreat hole in the corner of the web and overpowers the insect with a series of fatal bites, then drags it back to its retreat. The very taut threads of the Steatoda

snare have gummy drops arranged close to the points of attachment of the anchor lines to the substrate. Crawling insects become caught in the gummy threads, which break and contract away from their point of attachment. Steatoda then hauls up the thread and when the prey is within reach turns round and casts gummy threads over it with her fourth pair of legs. Having largely immobilised the prey, the spider can then inject her poison into the legs. This method is successful enough to enable Steatoda to accept ants, which are rejected by many other species.

Zygiella, by contrast, bites first and then enshrouds her victim in a mass of silken threads drawn from the spinnerets by rotating the insect with her legs. Crawling insects form the main prey of Ciniflo. They become caught up on the lacy, adhesive threads of her snare and in response to the vibrations of the struggling insect Ciniflo darts out of her retreat in the centre of the web, bites the leg of the victim to inject her poison and then drags the insect back to the retreat. Ciniflo is known to respond rapidly to vibrations, including that of a tuning fork and violin, which might seem to be the basis of the various references to spiders' love of music!

The aptly named Zebra Spider, Salticus scenicus, does not build a web but hunts the prey actively, in a manner not unlike that of a cat. She patiently stalks the prey and then in a sudden jump seizes it before finally inserting her poison fangs. On vertical surfaces, she uses her silk glands to spin out a safety line which is attached to the substrate before jumping. Salticus has an impressive battery of eight eyes which provide a wide range of vision and enable the spider to detect prey approaching from behind. The two large, well-developed eyes at the front, which are always directed towards the prey, provide a detailed, enlarged image for stalking.

A close look at a spider will reveal that, unlike insects, spiders possess four instead of three pairs of legs. They share this characteristic with the closely related mites, which differ most noticeably from spiders in being very tiny. Furthermore, whereas spiders have two distinct parts to the body, the rounded or oval bodies of mites and ticks appear undivided. Apart from the unpleasant scabies mite which burrows beneath the skin and causes intense irritation, the group includes an assortment of creatures associated only with foodstuffs or domestic animals, but which can cause hypersensitive reaction in humans. These nowadays are mercifully rare, although the bed mite is not uncommon. Looking like specks of dust, these creatures feed on the scales of skin which we shed continuously. They prefer a high temperature and humidity, hence are found in beds. They do no harm except that their cast skins and faeces can be inhaled in large numbers during dusting and bed-making, causing acute asthmatic attacks in sensitive patients - indeed, they were only recently discovered as a result of research into the causes of asthma.

Similar in their minuteness but actually belonging to the insects are

the lice. Those infesting humans are the sucking type and feed on blood, but fortunately they do not thrive under hygienic conditions, and so are less common than in former times.

Bugs are insects with mouthparts adapted for piercing and sucking. Most, such as greenfly, live on plant juices, and so are already well-known to gardeners. Belonging to the same group is the notorious but now uncommon bed bug, which sucks human juices! These animals hide in cracks, crevices and joints, under carpets and behind wallpaper, emerging at night when hungry to seek food. When close to the sleeping human, they are attracted by bodily warmth and, after a meal of blood, retreat into a hiding place. Such animals make spiders an attractive proposition! Bed bugs can be controlled by insecticides, although they can move from house to house. Fly bugs are interesting creatures: they suck the body fluids of other insects. The larvae produce a sticky secretion which collects dust and debris, providing excellent camouflage whilst they search for food in outhouses, although they may stray into houses in search of bed bugs.

The only group of Arthropods possessing wings are the insects. The lice mentioned earlier lack these wings, having lost them in the course of evolution. A group of very primitive insects which never ever had wings has a representative commonly seen in houses - the silverfish. This living fossil is about 1cm in length, carrot-shaped with three tail bristles. The body is covered with tiny silvery scales which come away on the fingers, making the animal extremely difficult to pick up. With simple biting mouths, these rather pleasant animals feed on food scraps, but can digest cellulose and may cause damage to books if these are damp.

Also sporting biting mouthparts are the beetles, a group of insects whose most obvious characteristic is that the outer of their two pairs of wings is hardened to form wing cases called elytra. In houses may be found several small species which feed on stored food, particularly starchy foods, although they are uncommon in northern Europe, being largely tropical or sub-tropical species. Most feared are the wood-boring beetles, which can digest lignin, sometimes with the aid of micro-organisms in the gut. In most cases, it is the larvae which eat their way through wood causing structural damage and emerging as adults. The three of greatest economic importance are the common furniture beetle Anobium punctatum, the death-watch beetle Xestobium rufovillosum, which attacks oak, and the house longhorn Hylotrupes bajalus. The latter species is a serious pest in southern counties of England but is (fortunately) rare in Nottingham because of its requirement for high temperatures for the dispersal of the adults. It is particularly common in lofts, where of course there is most warmth. The wood boring beetles do not thrive in very low humidities, and so within modern, centrally heated houses there are fewer niches where these species could survive.

Most of the animals I have so far mentioned are those able to exploit niches provided by human dwellings, and are uncommon in other habitats in Britain. This stems mostly from the fact that they are adapted to a warm or relatively dry climate and many are thus tropical or sub-tropical in origin. Furthermore, we do not often see them, as they are mostly active at night, hiding in cracks and crevices during the day. Perhaps we are more likely to see the visitors which frequently stray in through open windows or are brought in with garden plants or firewood. As we know from experience, they survive only for a short period in our domestic desert. I have encountered an assortment of interesting and attractive insects in this way - including caterpillars feeding on house plants. Some months ago, a friend was startled by the sight of a wasp. As it was mid-winter, I was somewhat surprised, but her mistake was understandable, as the so-called wasp turned out to be a wasp beetle (Clytus arietus). It resembles a wasp not only in its black and yellow markings, but completes the illusion by agitated, jerky movements and the habit of tapping its antennae against the substratum. In nature, the larvae feed on dead wood, but do not attack indoor timber - fortunately!

Notes on contributors

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DERRICK BUTTRESS teaches at a local comprehensive school, having worked at Raleigh and in the Lace Market for twenty-five years before taking an English degree at York University. His plays have been performed on stage and radio, and his first television play will be broadcast early next year.

RAY GOSLING is Chairman of the St Ann's Tenants & Residents Association, reviews books for "New Society" and "The Times", and is an occasional journalist and broadcaster. He is at present completing a travel book from his radio and television work entitled: "The South Coast and Other Great British Resorts".

MARGARET HURD is a Nottingham dance teacher and choreographer. A former tutor of the Royal Academy of Dancing, she is Director of the East Midlands Youth Ballet, an amateur company of dancers which performs for communities throughout the region. She writes occasional dance reviews.

CLIFF LEE taught for a number of years in schools in Nottingham and at the Trent Polytechnic, and is now an Open University tutor. He played clarinet with Mick Gill and has led his own band. He is jazz columnist of the "Evening Post" and a regular contributor to "Melody Maker".

PAMELA LEWIS was born and still lives in Nottingham, and is married with three children. Her poetry has been widely published in magazines, including "Encounter", "The Listener", "The Cornhill Magazine" and "The Poetry Review". Her work has also been broadcast on

Radio 3 and Radio 4. In 1971, Turret Books published a collection of her work under the title "One Mile from the Centre". Among the anthologies in which her work appears is the PEN selection of contemporary poetry for 1977-78.

PROFESSOR JOHN LUCAS is Head of the Department of English and Drama at Loughborough University of Technology. He is the author of "Literature of Change" (Harvester Press, November 1977) and "The 1930s: a Challenge to Orthodoxy" (to be published shortly).

MALCOLM MACINTYRE-READ trained in Ceramics at Cardiff College of Art and Design and the Central School of Art and Design, London. From 1967-72, he lectured in Ceramics, particularly decorative and printing techniques, and from 1967-76 was involved in studio presentation for exhibitions and commissions in Ceramics, particularly sculptural pieces, and in Graphic Design. He became increasingly involved with exhibition organisation and design, and in 1977 he became Crafts Officer at the Midland Group, Nottingham. In September 1978, he takes up an appointment as Director of the British Crafts Centre, Covent Garden, London.

STANLEY MIDDLETON is a novelist. His eighteenth book, "Two Brothers", comes out in October.

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MIKE WILLIAMS was born in Nottingham, read English at Jesus College, Cambridge, and is now Head of English at Gedling Comprehensive School. He recently directed "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" and "Kennedy's Children" at the Nottingham Theatre Club. He lives in Carlton with a wife, two children, a dog and a rabbit.