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NOTTINGHAM QUARTERLY

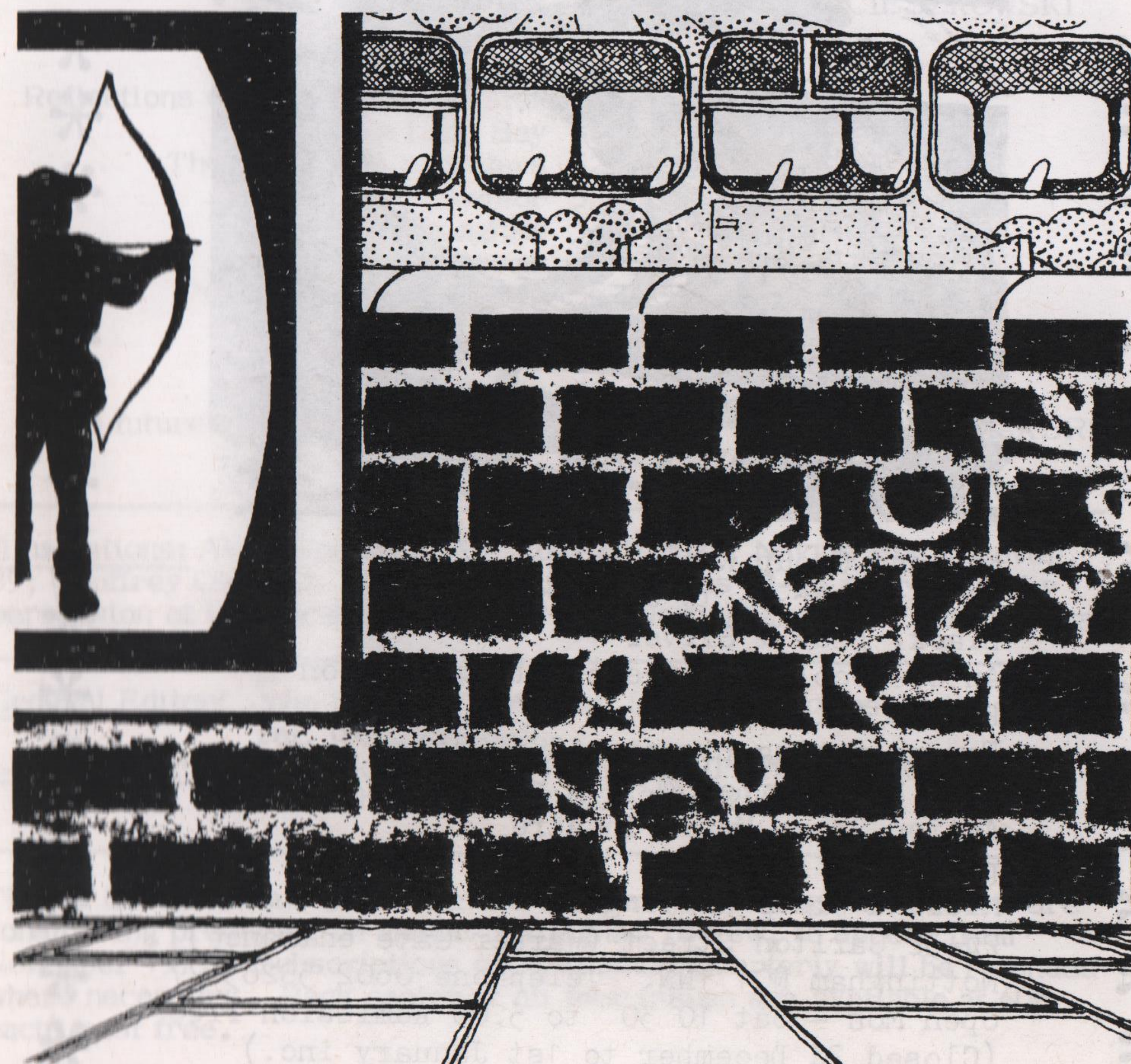
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NOV-DEC 1978

PRICE 60p

The identity of Nottingham

ROBERT ABBOTT





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NOTTINGHAM QUARTERLY

Number 4
 Nov - Dec 1978

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This is the last issue of Nottingham Quarterly, although the editors are considering producing an annual Nottingham review, to appear from November 1979. Subscriptions to Nottingham Quarterly will be refunded where necessary. Back copies of all four issues are available at 60p each, post free.

PAUL WAPLINGTON

Interviewed by PETER FULLER

(Paul Waplington is a Nottingham artist who is now receiving wider recognition. An exhibition of his paintings of Nottingham, including the lace trade, appeared at the Midland Group from 28 October to 22 November this year.)

F. What was your life like as a child? What sort of background do you come from?

W. It was a very ordinary, housing estate kind of background. My father was a milkman; during the war he was a fitter; later he became a storeman.

School was a terrible place: in fact, I think it had the highest Borstal rate in Britain then. The people I grew up with had come from Broad Marsh; then that was knocked down. When I was about fourteen I dreaded every day at school. There was always some bully in wait for you. It was a sickening place.

F. Was anyone at home interested in art? Do you remember any images in the house?

W. There was no interest in that sort of thing at home.

F. What about at school?

W. The school was orientated towards sport: boxing and football. One of the kids, Swift, turned out to be a champion boxer. Before the war there was a lot of slum clearance in Nottingham: whole communities were shifted out on to housing estates. How could an art lesson be considered important? Art and music lessons were regarded as a skive. We used to go for music masters and give them nervous breakdowns and actual physical fights.

F. Do you remember when you first became interested in making images?

W. That was at school. Probably when I was about ten years old. The art lessons were not much more than pieces of grey sugar paper and poster paints.

I was interested in puppets and had a marionette theatre. Once I had seen a Punch and Judy show and was spellbound by the theatricality of it, by everything about it. The first thing I remember drawing was the puppets that I made; drawing for its own sake did not interest me.

F. You left school in 1953 when you were fifteen. What did you think you were going to do with your life then?

W. It was all a question of what I did not want to do. When I failed the eleven plus, my old man said, "Well, that's it, you are going to be Marsden's delivery boy." That meant going around on one of those bikes for the rest of my life. It was a fairly dismal prospect, but I managed to get a job for £1 a week training as a lace curtain draughtsman in a small



Paul Waplington: Laughing foreman

trade shop in the Lace Market. So I got a pencil and brush job.

F. Did you enjoy this work?

W. Yes, I became a fanatic. Before I even set eyes on a lace machine I knew how it worked, because I read a book about it.

F. What does a lace draughtsman do?

W. Lace is a woven fabric and therefore different from any sort of printed textile. The mechanical process is involved at the design stage. So the draughtsman leads the drawn design through to the finished fabric. He plaits it and determines which way it is made. The pattern is made in the weaving. The draughtsman has to have a mechanical, technical appreciation of the machine. The designs are stereotyped because of the nature of the fabric. You gradually pick up the rules about what looks right and what looks wrong, where to break a line with another line, at what point and from what angle. Most of the designs are ornamental floral.

F. You did this for about six years, until you were twenty-one, then you decided to go to Brussels. Why was that?

W. It was not me deciding to go to Brussels so much as the trade going through one of its periodic slumps. In fact, the machines were being broken up. I had qualifications as a skilled technician. At twenty-one I was redundant; in the dole queue, signing on. So that was it. I just wandered off. I had read a book about globe-trotters and I decided to become a bloody globe-trotter. I was not consciously seeking anything. I just didn't know what I wanted. By this time, I had done a bit of painting around Nottingham: trees, horses, cows, that sort of thing. So in Brussels I started to draw on the pavements. I met one or two real artists too, artists who painted on canvas. Herman Miner, a good expressionist painter was there and I got to know him. On the streets I used to paint crucifixions and copy scenes from postcards because you had to. I always did my best, but I didn't really connect this with art. I just did it for the money. But I made other pictures too. I remember painting, in oils, a scene of autumn trees, and a cart with two horses pulling it; I had never seen anything like it, in fact, but I painted it because that was what art was for me. I was naive as that. I had a very romantic view of the world in Brussels. It was a sort of paradise for me. Painting was associated with dreaming.

F. What would you have said that your idea of a painter was at that time?

W. Probably Herman. He lived in a dirty flat where nude ladies posed for him and he wore clogs.

F. It was almost a nineteenth century, European Bohemian view of the artist.

W. Oh, most definitely! Yes.

F. Why did you decide to leave Brussels and come back to Nottingham?

W. Well, I was making a living as a pavement artist, but you can't do that when it starts raining, or in winter. I went back to Brussels the following summer and did the same thing again. When I got back to

Nottingham, the new knitting machines were coming in. I took a look at them and applied my design knowledge and draughting experience to them. Since then, they have virtually taken over and the trade has been booming tremendously. But by this time I was not so enthusiastic about being a lace draughtsman. I don't basically like lace as a fabric. You could say that politically I don't like the connotations of the material. Lace draughting was just a job to go back to. I was keen on the machine and how it worked, but I wasn't interested in the product or what it meant.

F. Did you realise that the lace manufacturers were exploiting your skills as a designer?

W. It was beginning to dawn on me. In this set-up one tends to get pounced on.

F. When you settled in Nottingham again did you stop painting?

W. No, no. I painted a lot. Mostly country scenes. Constable and, I am afraid, Edward Seago were where it was at for me: sitting out in the country painting trees. I had odd attempts at what I thought was Cubism and Surrealism, but they didn't amount to much. Once, I tried to paint a political picture, a grandiose thing called "The Decay of Capitalism". Oh dear! It was full of snakes and men with girders on their backs, rotting teeth and crosses spewing out of anuses. I sold it to someone one night, when I was hard up, for a fiver. I have heard that it is hanging in the foyer of a mental hospital in Leicester. They probably think it is a picture by one of the inmates, at least I hope they do! But basically I have always liked to go out into the country. Many of my weekends were spent camping or hiking. I have always liked to get away. So, after a while, I went down to Devon to paint.

F. Before you went to Devon where were you discovering the painters you liked, like Constable and Seago?

W. In books.

F. Did you ever go to museums?

W. Two or three times a year the Arts Council would send a touring exhibition to Nottingham and I would go and see that. I had never been in the Tate Gallery, or the National Gallery. I didn't like Cézanne and I was just beginning to tolerate Van Gogh.

F. Art seems to have been an escape for you, a way of getting away from what you didn't want to be and did not have to do?

W. That's right. It was.

F. What sort of things did you paint in Devon?

W. I painted the sea, boats and cliffs. Sometimes, I'd do a rich man's catamaran: a portrait of his latest toy. I made a bit of a name for myself at the local yacht club. I learned to paint the sea naturalistically. That may sound small beer but it is quite difficult to get it actually to sit back, to get the waves to recede. I used to apply oil paints straight on to the canvas, a sort of purist thing. I would always paint everything there, on the spot and would not change it afterwards. I would aim for a straight

slab of reality: as near as I could get to it with as few brush strokes as possible. The act of painting was an act of bravado, an economy of strokes.

I calculated that I was earning as much as a bloke in a factory was. Probably, I was putting in more hours, but I enjoyed what I was doing. For a 2ft by 1ft 6in picture I could get about £12.

F. Why did you tire of painting picturesque seascapes?

W. I had become competent at it. Anything I had to get out of it, I had got out of it. I didn't sit down and think that through, just fed up with doing yet another one.

F. How far was the change in direction in your painting bound up with other changes in the way you were thinking about and looking at the world?

W. Well, I lost interest in the drop-out type of situation, I regarded it as cowardly and not very rewarding even on its own terms. I had a row in the town where I was living. It came about because of a water-gypsy who toured the coastline and stopped at all the harbours and ports where he got a job, usually as a milkman. He had got his wife, a couple of kids and a dog with him. He was a sort of water hippy, and they pounced on him and made his life a misery. I would be painting on the quay, and he would come up to me and ask for advice about what to do next. I told him about the health authorities so he got his water back on and generally stirred the shit. This seemed more interesting than my pictures: I'd put my paints down to help him. You can see that I was in a schizophrenic position. I was painting one type of thing, but my consciousness was somewhere else. When I got back to Nottingham I remember going out of the front door, walking for a hundred yards, stopping to draw whatever was there: I wanted to avoid any compositional preciousness. I tried just painting the streets around where I was living. I had never before seen this as material for art, in any way. I had seen Lowrys, but again had not been touched at all by them. I wanted the art to back up what I was realising politically at that time. I've lived by the sea since, and not painted it once; nor have I felt the desire.

F. Soon after your return to Nottingham you went through a hard-core "Socialist Realist" phase didn't you?

W. Yes. I found the new subject matter I was dealing with very difficult to handle. It wasn't like painting at all, in fact. It was a totally different thing. So a lot of it was very much first attempts. You could say I was a slick, professional seascape painter, but a bloody awful Socialist Realist.

F. This was the era of the working-class hero, of Amis, Braine, Osborne, Angry Young Men and Kitchen Sink. Did you read this literature?

W. Not at that stage. It was a bit too much for me to read that then. I saw "Look Back in Anger" at Nottingham Playhouse, but it didn't connect for me.

F. Did you read Sillitoe? He was describing working-class life in

Nottingham too.

W. I saw the film "Saturday Night and Sunday Morning" but just accepted it as realistic. I didn't see what all the fuss was about. To me, it was almost a documentary. That is not at all a criticism of Sillitoe, but I just could not tell where reality began and ended.

F. Didn't this sort of work encourage you to take Nottingham and local working-class experience as your subject matter?

W. I don't think that influenced me very much.

F. Were you aware of the British realist painters of this time?

W. Not at first. Later on I got to know the paintings of Augustus John, Stanley Spencer, Carel Weight and John Bratby, mostly through books.

F. You were a dissatisfied seascape painter, on the threshold of switching to scenes of life in an industrial city. Surely such pictures had some effect on you, if only at the level of what was and was not permissible subject matter?

W. I don't think that came from other paintings. It came from the fact that I could not stand escapism.

F. You never conceived of yourself as entering the art world then?

W. Definitely not. There was one book that influenced me a lot. That was John Berger's "Permanent Red". I read it first in a library and I thought, "What has all this got to do with painting?" But I read it lots of times after that and saw round to what he was writing about. Then I went and found books on the painters he discussed. Some, like Joseph Herman, I had come across anyway. I think this was a revelation to me. Berger would not deny the fact that art and life are totally interlocked; you can't have one without the other.

F. What were your politics then?

W. At that time, I was very enthusiastic, uncritical left. I joined the Young Communist League and I put in four or five evenings a week, running around like a madman. I really believed that we were developing political understanding. I was full of enthusiasm and drive, not realising at that time how many little egos were operating in the left, how fragmented it was. These problems still haven't changed. The state of the left is a crime and could well turn to tragedy if it carries on. I'm talking about round here. Round here the left is in a terrible state. Nationally, the YCL has what - 1,040 members!

F. Were you still selling works at this time?

W. Not much, no. I just did lots of drawings of houses, factories, everything that was around me. I drew a lot in St Ann's. I found I could draw terraced houses and enjoy it because of the rhythm of the forms and the rhythm of the chimneys. I got the feel of those streets then. They have knocked them down since. What they have put up in their place is even more hideous. I just got out on my motor bike and drew round about. I drew all the time. I must have made thousands of drawings!

F. But you carried on working as a lace draughtsman?

W. Yes.

F. In your recent work you have developed a very distinctive pictorial space. How important was the structure of the local landscape in helping you to realise this? I ask because the way that Nottingham appears seems to relate closely to the kinds of effects you use in your pictures. You often get strange views of terraces of houses stacked up above each other, for example.

W. Nottingham has this advantage because it is built on hills. Also, I stand on the top of high buildings, or multi-storey car parks to sketch. The way that the town is laid out and the topography of the land have definitely influenced me. I just pushed it a bit further than it actually is. This enables me to put more in. The sky is gradually getting to be about the top quarter of an inch of a four by three because I am not very interested in it really.

F. You have recently been producing a series of paintings about lace-making in Nottingham. Are these autobiographical?

W. I don't want them to be at all autobiographical, but obviously in some ways they have to be. I don't want myself to be the subject. There are no self-portraits in them. I have just drawn on my memories, on what I have seen and known. Obviously I have technical knowledge about lace machines, so I can portray lace-making with a certain amount of authority, but I would not say that I want to make an autobiographical statement. That would be too arrogant. The fact that you are doing a painting should be enough. I want to keep my own hang-ups and my navel out of it.

F. Another frequent subject of yours is miners. Why do you paint them so often?

W. The first time I did miners I made some drawings underground. I went down a pit one day and had a go at doing some drawings, it being a dramatic situation. There are a lot coal mines around here. The pit tops are interesting too.

F. Although your view of miners is sympathetic, it is also distanced: you certainly do not produce heroic images of them.

W. No, it certainly is not an heroic view, although heroism is one aspect of mining, but I would not use the stereotyped images of heroism. When drawing a figure I never think I am going to do a hero or a heroine. The thought just is not there.

F. How much exposure has your painting had to working-class audiences?

W. Whenever I am asked to try to come up with a picture. I exhibit in all the local shows, and with all sorts of little societies, shops, churches etc.

F. When they are seen, how do people react? Do they appreciate the way you are depicting their world or not?

W. I am not really sure. I have had blokes, miners, say that they

appreciated the pictures, that they can see what I am getting at. Simple, ordinary statements like that: this is really very encouraging.

F. Who buys your work now?

W. Well, this is it, isn't it? University lecturers, doctors, dentists - people like this. A manufacturer or two; the odd capitalist. People in the upper bracket.

F. Do you think you are a working-class painter depicting the working class for the middle class?

W. This is the same problem. It arises out of the class situation itself. I have been striving to be free from being working class but I could not, and I would not, join the others. My attitudes, the ways I react to things, are still working class.

F. Your relationship to the art world has changed recently. You were included in "Towards Another Picture" at Nottingham Castle. Richard Cork selected you for a British Council mixed touring show; now you have your own exhibition at the Midland Group gallery. How do you feel about this attention?

W. I much prefer this to being ignored. Whether I deserve this more than anyone else is another question. At times I can't see what all the fuss is about because I see myself as still basically struggling. The art world itself is in a little bit of an impasse. There is a bit of looking back, some looking forward, and a lot of thrashing around. Perhaps it helps if you have not come out of the usual slot, the usual mill.

F. Does it worry you that your work and you yourself may be forced into a token, working-class slot within the art world?

W. Well, that is one of the things that happens, but the struggle of trying to get something down with integrity and all the old problems of actually working push that right into the background.

F. At the moment you paint three days a week and you work as a lace draughtsman three days a week. Would you like to paint full-time?

W. That would be paradise! Well it would be bloody good. I think I have enough subject matter under my belt now. I wouldn't have said that before, but I think I have developed enough and am strong enough to be able to do without other sorts of working.

F. Don't you think that might involve a removal from the experiences that you are depicting?

W. Of course, you can always get set in your ways but I think it would enable me to go further, in fact to spend more time with my subject matter. Instead of making say two visits to a factory, I would be able to spend a fortnight going in there. There would be a great advantage in that. But I wouldn't have been saying this to you ten, or even five years ago.

The Nottingham Chartists

MICHAEL BROWN

IN THE FIRST STAGES of the industrial revolution, Nottingham grew from what Defoe had called "one of the pleasant and beautiful towns of England" into an overcrowded, unhealthy slum with the lowest life expectancy of any city outside India. A new situation had developed, not just in terms of physical conditions, but in the way people experienced the world. An urban proletariat had been created almost by mistake in conditions which guaranteed restlessness and rebellion.

This new, densely overcrowded mass of workers was dependent upon a wage economy, but, within the context of trade cycles and consequent unemployment, wages fluctuated. Survival thus became a precarious matter. Moreover, the rise of the factory system was particularly traumatic for those who worked outside the factories. Workers organised on a domestic system saw their standard of living and their status eroded. By far the largest group affected in Nottinghamshire was the framework knitters, who suffered the severest reductions in real wages. This meant that they had no money to save for periods of unemployment, and so they were at the mercy of a pernicious and brutal Poor Law. In 1834, a new Poor Law was introduced which abolished the customary outdoor relief and replaced it by the principles of "less eligibility" and "the workhouse test". The new Poor Law cast a grim shadow over the lives of working people.

Moreover, few working people were entitled to vote, and so they had nobody to represent them. Thus the Chartist movement and its antecedents placed great importance upon electoral reform. The "Nottingham Journal" reported in 1831 that "nothing but reform is heard from one extremity to the other, reform is the talk by day and the dream by night of the vast bulk of working people". When the Reform Bill was rejected by Parliament in 1831, angry crowds attending Goose Fair marched on the castle and set it alight in a spectacular act of arson.

The formation of a local Chartist group was encouraged by the Nottingham Workingmen's Association and the local radical press. The NWA supported four of the six points of the Charter: manhood suffrage, vote by ballot, annual parliaments, and the abolition of property qualifications for MPs. The local radical newspaper called the Charter "the common text book for reform".

In 1838, a letter appeared in the columns of the Chartist newspaper, "The Northern Star", published in Leeds, calling upon the working men of Nottingham to support Chartist demands. This letter led to a meeting on Monday, 3rd September 1838 in a close near Carlton Road, where the National Petition was read and speakers urged different trades to form unions to back the Charter. The movement quickly gathered momentum, and by 5th November the Nottingham Chartists had organised their own meeting on the Forest. The first meeting of the Nottingham Chartists was attended by over 4,000 people. They marched out of the town in an

impressive procession holding banners proclaiming "Equal Rights and Equal Laws" and "England will be free". The Nottingham Workingmen's Association, the Hyson Green Friendly Society, the New Basford Workingmen's Association, and the Nottingham Female Association were all present.

There were splits within the national Chartist movement and these became apparent at a local level. They were mainly differences between those who advocated the use of violence and those who wished to gain reforms by peaceful methods. The reformist position of local leaders like James Sweet (a newsagent and hairdresser) was apparent from this first meeting, where those present were told to see "that you are met as rational men and that your object is peace". However, the size of the movement had the authorities seriously worried. It was rumoured that the local Chartists were planning a series of assassinations against the local gentry. While it is true that the Duke of Portland and the Duke of Newcastle were objects of common hatred, no attempt to assassinate them was ever made. But they were very worried indeed, and within this context a new general was appointed in 1839 to preside over the Northern Command with headquarters in Nottingham.

Major General Sir Charles James Napier was appointed at a time when the Chartists were busy preparing the first National Petition to Parliament. He regarded the local dukes and magistrates with contempt, and throughout his stay in Nottingham practised a policy of restraint in his dealings with the local Chartists. His diaries reveal a certain sympathy towards the local Chartist cause.

With the rejection of the first National Petition by Parliament, local Chartists began a "sacred month" on 12th August 1839. This began when local Chartists attended en masse the church of St Mary where Napier and his troops were accustomed to worship. They marched to the church at the head of Napier's men and occupied the pews so that the militia were kept outside. In this way, two bastions of oppression were attacked simultaneously. The church and state were seen to be synonymous and responsible for the passing of the "inhuman, immoral, and unchristian act of 1834".

Meanwhile, the Chartists had called two days of public holiday for the 13th and 14th August 1839. But the day before the holiday arrived, the Mayor issued a warning forbidding any demonstrations. However, the second day of the holiday saw six hundred framework knitters march undeterred through the town to the Forest. At the Forest, the meeting was dispersed and the Riot Act read. But the next day saw two thousand gather on the Forest, where local leader James Woodhouse was arrested and charged with riotous assembly. His arrest was followed by protests all around Nottingham, where Napier and county magistrates were pelted with stones as they attempted to read the Riot Act. No other arrests followed. During the winter, open air public meetings gave way to meetings in a nonconformist chapel in Ristes Place, Barker Gate.

The winter of 1839/40 saw two thousand starving on the streets of Nottingham. Napier noted in his diary that "the poor starving people go about by twenties and forties begging but without the least insolence: and yet some rich villains and some foolish villains choose to say that they exact charity. It is a lie, an infernal lie." Indeed, the distress became

so bad that the "unchristian act" of 1834 became unworkable. Relief had to be given outside the workhouse and a relief fund was set up to provide work and wages for the unemployed and starving. During this period, rumours spread throughout the town that the Chartists were planning to attack the barracks and start an uprising. In practice, this did not happen, but it is almost certainly true that local Chartists were training themselves in the use of arms.

The administration of the Poor Law in Nottingham was in the hands of Absolem Barnett, who was clerk to the Board, superintendent registrar and relieving officer. His autocratic powers caused much hardship and the poor called him "Absolute Barnett". He was the "best hated man in Nottingham". Inside St Mary's Workhouse, it was "dark and dirty and quite unfit for the residence of human beings". By 1842, no less than one quarter of the population of Nottingham was in receipt of some form of poor relief.

In opposition to the Whigs, who had passed the hated Poor Laws, the Chartists decided to support the Tories at the local elections. In the event, the Tory candidate Walter won. During the campaign, the East Midlands Chartist leader, Thomas Cooper, came from Leicester to speak for Walter. After his speech, he is reported to have turned to the Tory and made his position clear. "Don't have a wrong idea of why you are to have Chartist support: we mean to use your party to cut the throats of the Whigs; and then we mean to cut your throats also." Subsequent elections saw Chartists using the same tactics until they were able to put forward their own candidates.

The first Chartist candidate to be returned to Parliament was Thomas Gisbourne. Although he proved to be a poor MP, his election does show the size of Chartist support. Elections at this time were fought amidst bribery and corruption. A group of thugs known as the Nottingham Lambs was hired by either party to silence the opposition. On one occasion, whilst the Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor was campaigning at local elections, the Nottingham Lambs were used by the Tories to charge the crowd. O'Connor was not to be so easily inhibited, and waited till the Lambs drew near before giving the call to "charge". Whereupon he went down into the crowd and floored them "like ninepins". The opposition fled, so that O'Connor was able to gain the Tory wagon, from where he addressed the crowd. O'Connor was elected as Chartist MP for Nottingham in 1847, but by this time his chequered political career was almost at an end, for during his stay in the House he was removed to a mental hospital.

The elections followed a series of disturbances occasioned by the rejection of the second National Petition. The rejection of the Charter, which had contained 40,000 signatures from Nottingham, was the signal for a wave of strikes. In Nottingham, local magistrates forbade public meetings and so strikers marched through the town visiting local factories in an attempt to gain more support. The strikers then marched to Lord Middleton's collieries, where they were met by troops. A clash followed and over two hundred strikers were arrested and imprisoned. Then five thousand Chartists were discovered on Mapperley Hills by the 2nd Dragoon Guards. When they refused to disperse, they were arrested and marched as prisoners to the town. As they marched along, the

troops escorting them were persistently stoned by angry crowds. The "Nottingham Review" complained afterwards that they were "a party of poor, starving, defenceless men, seated at their hard begged for meal beneath the canopy of heaven and on the carpet provided by nature for all. To be surprised, surrounded by dragoons and police and dragged through the streets to jail, when they were not committing the shadow of an illegal act is rather too barefaced".

These events on Mapperley Hills became known as the "Battle of Mapperley Hills". They were remembered in a giant anniversary meeting a year later. At this meeting, "people mustered in the square and at eleven o'clock with the Sutton Brass Band and also the Lambley Band they marched in procession to the railway where they met their friend Feargus O'Connor. They then proceeded to the hills where at least thirty thousand assembled."

The victory of O'Connor at the 1847 elections and the news of European revolutions put hope into the Chartists' hearts and horror into those of local magistrates. Local Chartists collected signatures for a third National Petition to Parliament. As the day for the presentation drew near, a meeting was called in the Market Square on Monday, April 10th 1848. Trouble was expected and fifteen hundred special constables were on duty. At the gasworks, workers were supplied with extra food to withstand a siege. The meeting began at one o'clock with five thousand assembled. They were addressed by James Sweet, who told them that they had met to "show the government their moral power; the government must be taught that the sabre cannot cut down an argument nor the bullet stop the progress of opinion". In the event, the third National Petition was rejected by Parliament, and from 1848 onwards the People's Charter was never presented to Parliament again.

Because support for the People's Charter died away as quickly as it had begun, many historians have dismissed Chartism as a failure. To do so is to ignore the fact that the aims of the Chartists were eventually met. Because many Chartists joined the advanced wing of the Liberal Party in the 1860s and 1870s, they were able to provide the backbone of a vigorous reformist movement. And the professed aims of what Lenin later characterised as the "first mass and politically organised proletarian revolutionary movement" were reformist. This is not to ignore the fact that many Chartists sought to destroy the system that oppressed them, but rather to emphasise that those who advocated the use of violence were a minority. Against such coercive military power, "the victory of the vanquished," as J.S. Mill described Chartism, must stand as no mean achievement.

To dismiss Chartism as a failure is also to ignore the moral support that members must have derived from each other. This was by no means unimportant in the new political context in which people met. Finally, many Chartists expressed this through co-operativism. According to the local historian, Robert Mellors, the houses in Pleasant Row, Lenton Street, Saville Row and Lindsay Street were built by a working men's co-operative effort.



Off the beaten track (3)

A curious structure

GEOFFREY OLDFIELD

PROBABLY VERY FEW of the thousands who use the Broad Marsh Centre each day see this rather curious structure. It is in a small amenity area near the little-used eastern entrance to the Centre sandwiched between the elevated road, Middle Hill, which links Canal Street and Weekday Cross, and the disused railway line. The carved heads are those of poets, authors, soldiers, sailors, explorers and other well-known names from the history books. There are ten altogether and each has the name and dates of birth and death of the person commemorated. On the south side are William Shakespeare and Robert Burns, whilst Captain Cook and Livingstone share the north face. The east and west sides each have three carvings. These heads were all saved from Montague Burton's shop which stood at the corner of Carrington Street and Broad Marsh and was demolished in 1972 when the Centre was built. They formed the keystones of the curved pediments above the first floor windows.

Carrington Street was only formed in 1828 when Collin's Almshouses were built between there and Greyfriar Gate. In the early part of this century, a public house, the Carrington Arms, stood on the site at the corner of Broad Marsh and Carrington Street, which in the eighteenth century had been a lead works and, in medieval times, had been part of the Franciscan Grey Friars' property. In 1912, Evans and Sons, a Nottingham firm of architects, submitted plans for the erection of a theatre on the site, on behalf of George Parkin Cooley. The plans were not approved by the City Council because of a number of items which did not comply with building regulations. Two months later, in October 1912, new plans were submitted by the same applicants and these were approved. They were for a new store and the plans show the keystones depicted as heads. At the corner of the buildings, the words "Cooley Buildings" were shown at first floor level. The site itself was owned by the Trustees of Collin's Charity and was leased to Mr Cooley for 99 years at a rent of £292.10. Known as the "White Palace", the store was completed a year or two later, but on 23rd September 1916 it was partially destroyed in a Zeppelin raid on Nottingham and became known ironically as "Lucky Corner"! Plans for alterations in 1925 showed that the premises were occupied as a tailor's shop by Montague Burton's, who remained there until demolition. The basement was for some time used as a billiard saloon.

Nottingham Corporation acquired this and adjoining buildings in order to demolish them in connection with the redevelopment of the Broad Marsh area. When the time came for demolition, Mr Terry Doyle, an architect acting for the developers, suggested that the heads be preserved and so special arrangements were made so that they were retained for preservation.

The actual site where the column with the heads now stands has under-

gone a number of changes in the last two hundred years or so. On Badder and Peat's plan of 1744, Turn Calf Alley ran from the eastern end of Broad Marsh down to the River Leen, which then flowed where Canal Street is today. Adjoining Turn Calf Alley, the land is shown as an orchard, which no doubt inspired the names of the streets which were built on the site a little later. These were called Plum, Pear, Currant and Peach Streets, singularly inappropriate for what had in the early part of the nineteenth century become one of the most overcrowded and insanitary parts of the town. Turn Calf Alley was later renamed Sussex Street.

In 1900, the new Great Central Railway cut through these four streets and, whilst it meant the demolition of some of the overcrowded dwellings, it can hardly have added much to the quality of life in those remaining, as the line ran next to them at bedroom level. The area was finally cleared of dwellings in the 1930s, although the railway arches remain. Most of the cleared site was used as an open bus station until the Broad Marsh Centre was built.

CAMPBELL KAY

Summer in the city

Summer in the city
and the noisy flies
clamour, like beggars
in the open doorways

Across the courtyard
a truant boy lounges
against the sun-stained
wall; and the sound

of his laughter,
hollow as grief,
hangs like a hawk
in the summer sky.

Byron and Hucknall

DAVID SMITH

I WAS SIXTEEN BEFORE IT DAWNED on me that the Byron was a peculiar name for a cinema. For some reason I had never associated the picture house with the poet's remains in the church of St Mary Magdalene, Hucknall. Perhaps living so close - I was born and bred in the town - resulted in a kind of presbyopia. Nevertheless, despite one voice telling me that the name was totally inappropriate, another stronger voice persuaded me that it was all part of the unorthodox relationship the town has with its most famous corpse.

To begin with, Byron did not want to be buried in Hucknall. During one of the lucid moments in his final illness at Missolonghi, in Greece, he said: "One request let me make to you. Let not my body be hacked or be sent to England. Here let my bones moulder. Lay me in the first corner without pomp or nonsense."

Systematically, every wish of the poet was ignored. The desires of the Greek nation to bury the poet there were rejected, and on July 1st 1824, the embalmed body arrived back in England. On 9th and 10th of July, the body lay in state at 20 Great George Street, Westminster while the decision as to where to bury it was finalised. Eventually, Byron's half-sister Augusta decided that he ought to be interred in the family vault at Hucknall Torkard.

The coffin was carried in a hearse drawn by six black horses for its four days' journey to Nottingham, arriving there at 5 a.m. on 16th July. The coffin was placed at the Blackamoor's Head, Pelham Street. Later the site of a Boots shop, this is now a furniture store. The route out of the city was to be via Smithy Row, the Market Place, Chapel Bar, Parliament Street, Milton Street and Mansfield Road. The cortège was to turn for Hucknall just past the Seven Mile House, the final stage taking it through Papplewick.

The procession turned out to be a quarter of a mile in length. Following the hearse "adorned with twelve large sable plumes and drawn by six beautiful black horses each having a plume of feathers on its head" came representatives from Missolonghi, and the Mayor of Nottingham, together with other local dignitaries. Behind these rode "about forty people on horseback", while a large crowd walked at the rear.

"Pomp and nonsense"?

For the actual service, the church "and little village were crowded to excess". At four minutes to four, the body was carried down the steps into the Byron vault and the appropriate prayers said. Surprisingly, that was not the last the world, or at least part of it, was to see of Byron.

Hucknall Torkard was not to remain a "little village" for much longer. In 1864 and 1866, two colliery shafts were sunk and the Industrial Revolution arrived at the town. This new Hucknall came as something of a shock to Byron pilgrims. One writing in Chambers Journal of December

1881, while praising Newstead Abbey, Southwell and Linby, had this to say about Hucknall: "No description can do justice to its utter unloveliness, and want of what is perhaps most looked for - poetry. Briefly it is one of the most straggling, patched-up dirty villages in England, with colliery chimneys on the outskirts belching forth thick smoke, a population almost entirely of miners, an infinite variety of smells, and evils innumerable."

Perhaps because of the dismay and dissatisfaction with the poet's last resting-place, rumours started to circulate suggesting that the poet was no longer buried there. Others, more probable-sounding and poetic, declared that Byron's heart was both literally and metaphorically still in Greece. In 1938, the then vicar of the church, Canon T.G. Barber, obtained Home Office permission to re-open the Byron vault to confirm the possible presence of a crypt under the chancel, while at the same time, of course, discovering which bits of Byron were still there.

Those taking part in the work were sworn to the utmost secrecy by Barber. At first the size of the vault, a mere $7\frac{1}{2}' \times 6'$, came as a disappointment, while the floor was covered by several inches of "decayed wood, perished lead and innumerable bones". On exploring the vault, the party found the first indications of the poet: a small chest with a brass plate saying: "Within this Urn are deposited the heart and the brain of the deceased Lord Byron."

Many of the coffins had been crushed by the pressure of other coffins stacked on top of them, but the poet's oak casket was well-preserved. The lid was loose and James Betteridge, the caretaker of the church at the time, describes the scene: "After some deliberation, Canon Barber very reverently raised the lid and suddenly we gazed on the face of Lord Byron. The features with the slightly protruding lower lip and the curly hair were easily recognisable from the many pictures we had seen of him. Both feet seemed normal. The right foot, however, had been amputated just above the ankle and lay in the corner of the coffin."

"Let not my body be hacked"?

Byron scholars, despite the fact that the council dropped the suffix in 1916, still persist in calling the town Hucknall Torkard. This does little to prepare the Byron pilgrim for a town where the visitor is more likely to be reminded of the works of D.H. Lawrence than of Byron. Indeed, Lawrence himself, in a letter to Rolf Gardiner in 1926, wrote: "How well I can see Huckna. Torkard and the miners." But nowadays the miners arrive in cars and leave clean and newly washed. But the Byron enthusiast can see two visible monuments to the poet.

One is a statue "erected in memory of Lord Byron by Elias Lacey of this town May 30th 1903", which from a niche in the Co-op building (!) looks down on the (in Pevsner's words) "unattractive Market Square (a rare thing in Notts.)". For years, the poet looked like a huge white vulture among the pigeons preparing to swoop down. However, in 1974, in honour of the 150th anniversary of his death, the statue was painted - giving Byron light hair. Now he resembles a local Dracula captured and placed on high where everybody can keep an eye on him. His right hand, which once indicated his final resting-place, now shows the way to a set of modern toilets.

The second monument is, of course, the church. Lawrence in his

letter continued, "Didn't you go into the church to see the tablet, where Byron's heart is buried?" Surely the reply must have been, "Of course I did." Throughout the centuries, this church has retained a simple and honest beauty and faith. Often it is possible to stand and admire the beauty of the stained glass windows by Kempe and hear nothing but the ticking of the clock in the tower. It is as if the town, unsure of what to say to its reluctant corpse, has decided that the safest way is silence.

IAN KENDRICK

School magazine

I never published then.

Some vague and weary theorist

Of verse seemed to expect

A higher art than mine.

The annual scuttle to rehearse

Old forms for new ideas

Could never tempt me

To immerse my dormant thoughts

In mesmerised iambs,

Caged by rhyme.

So a schoolboy of the sixties

Chose to spurn the dull, inflated style

Of lofty verse for junior academics.

But when the school rag rose in price

From three-and-six to twenty pence,

Somehow we all seemed rather lost in metrics.

The eighteenth century topographers' view of Nottingham

COLIN READ

DURING THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, Nottingham appears, from all accounts, to have been a very pleasant town, as yet undisturbed by the massive industrial and population growth of the nineteenth century.

Literary works, particularly topographies and journals kept by intrepid travellers, often provide an insight into local conditions. Such writing was very fashionable in the eighteenth century.

In 1705, Joseph Taylor, in his "Journey to Edinburgh", found a "very neat town in a delicate countryside ... famous for its excellent ale ... we went first to see a great cellar cut through the rock under ground, where we tasted admirable liquor. On Sunday we went to the church but found nothing curious except the fair sex who adorn the place."

This favourable impression was upheld by Misson in his "Memoirs and Observations in his travels over England" (1719) when he claimed that Nottingham was "one of the neatest, most politely built and most agreeable towns in England. Its situation upon a height, in a pure air, from whence you have a prospect of a great extent of very fine country, is entirely charming."

Five years later, Daniel Defoe visited the town. His description in "A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain" contains some interesting detail. "Besides the delightful situation of the River Trent in the south of the town, it is equally pleasant to the land side, towards the Forest; where is a fine plain for an horse-course and where the races are run once a year. An handsome Town-house upon Piazzas, has been erected within these few years, for transacting the business of the corporation." (This was the 'Change, built in 1724 on the site now occupied by the Council House.) "The town has been at great expense in making the Trent navigable for vessels or barges of burden, by which all the heavy goods are brought from the Humber such as iron, block-tin, salt, grocery, dyers wares, wine, oil, tar, hemp, flax, etc. and the same vessels carry down lead, coal, wool and corn. The chief manufacture carried on here is frame-work knitting of stockings and some glass and earthenware which has greatly increased since the introduction of tea drinking."

There appears to have been little change in the general appearance of the town by 1751, for in that year Dr Richard Pococke, in "Travels Through England", wrote: "I came to Nottingham ... the situation in itself somewhat resembles some part of Constantinople, making a sort of natural theatre in a hollow between two rising grounds ... Nottingham begins to be much frequented by gentlemen, some of whom retire to it from their country houses, others who have left off trade, and many gentlemen of the neighbourhood have houses here for the winter."

Four years later, another visitor, Roste Patchen, in "Four Topographical Letters", written on a journey in July 1755, tells in a little more detail of what he saw: "Nottingham appears to great advantage to a

traveller who approaches it from the south; being a large and well-built town, standing on the declivity of a rock. The great church (St Mary) stands on the summit and the castle stands on another to the south-west ... there is a small piazza on each side of the market place continued from street to street, which makes it pleasant to walk here in all weathers, and view the shops, which are generally large and well furnished. This town is so remarkable for rocks, especially on the south side ..."

Most of this is repeated by Thomas Quincey in 1772 in his "Short Tour in the Midland Counties", but he also mentions one or two other interesting features: "The town is supplied with water by an engine erected on the little River Leen; this forces the water to a reservoir at the top of a hill near the castle; from thence it is distributed by pipes to most houses. The principal manufactures here are silk, cotton and worsted stockings, mitts etc.;, in which a great number of people are employed."

In spite of all these references, the best picture of Nottingham in the middle of the eighteenth century is given by Charles Deering in his "History of Nottingham", published in 1751, after his death in 1749. After Thoroton, Deering is the second great figure in Nottinghamshire historiography. He was a German and first came to England as secretary to Baron Schach and envoy of the Czar, Peter the Great. Later, he settled in Nottingham. For our purposes, the main value of his work lies in those chapters on the Nottingham of his own time. He describes how, soon after the Restoration, Nottingham put on a new face, when many of the inhabitants took to fronting their houses after the newest fashion, and apparently a considerable number of new houses were built by wealthy tradesmen. For example, on June 20th, 1743, one Rothwell Willoughby was given leave to erect "palisadoes" in front of his house in Low Pavement on condition that he paid 2/6d a year for them. Fortunately, the gracious frontage of Willoughby House still stands.

Such contemporary writings give us an insight into an apparently attractive town that was soon to grow into a major industrial centre notorious for its domestic conditions. In 1750, the population was about 10,000; by 1779, it had reached 17,500, and by 1793, 25,000, with little extension to the built-up area.

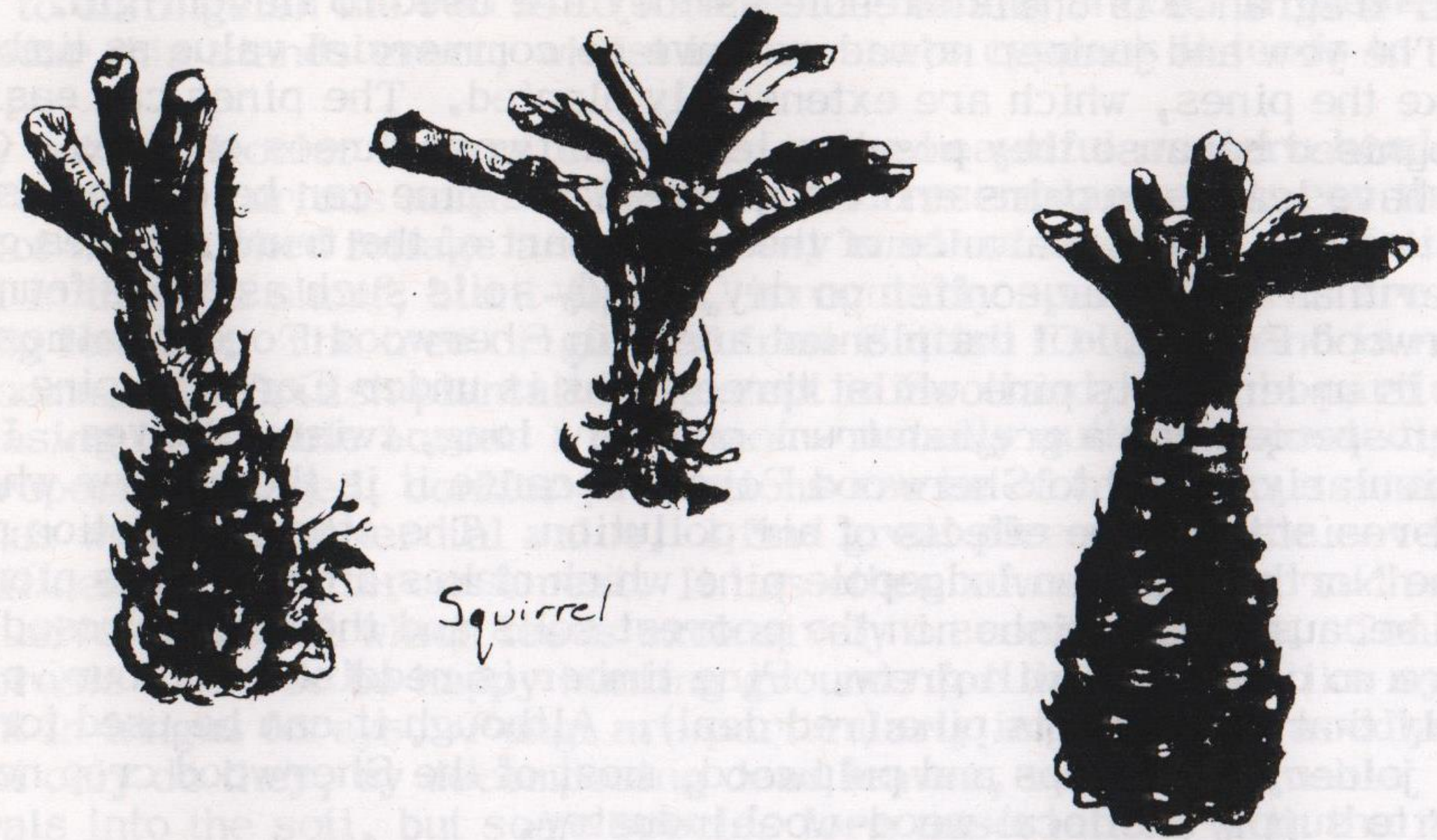
Getting to know your Gymnosperms

TONY BIRD

FOR ME, NOVEMBER MARKS the end of the season of activity and the beginning of the long winter sleep. Migratory birds have long since left for warmer climes, invertebrates and small mammals are well into hibernation and fewer and fewer fungi are to be encountered in woods and fields. Green plants too are settling into their period of suspended activity. Not only do they suffer from the problem of resisting frost damage, but they have difficulty in absorbing enough water from the cold soils to avoid running up a water deficit. To surmount these problems, many plants cast off those organs through which most water is lost, the leaves. Aerial parts of herbaceous species may lie dead, only underground parts remaining alive to resume growth in spring. Trees and shrubs too have cast off their leaves, leaving only the well-waterproofed stem lying above ground.

Not all trees, however, lose their leaves in winter. Some are able to retain their leaves by wrapping them in a thick, waxy, waterproof coating. These evergreens include amongst their ranks a group known as the conifers, whose scale-like or cylindrical, needle-like leaves also help to save water by limiting the surface area from which water can be lost. Such features, together with the resinous smell, regular branching habit and the characteristic scaly cones in which they produce their seeds, make the conifers a distinctive group. Not only do they look distinctive but they are distinct taxonomically. They belong to the group known as the Gymnosperms (or "naked-seeded plants"), more primitive but no less fascinating than the Angiosperms (in which the seeds are protected by a fruit wall) - the group which includes the broadleaved trees. The conifers are very important to our economy because they grow rapidly on poor soils and in harsh climates, producing some ninety per cent of the nation's timber. Conifer timber is always called softwood; it is lighter, softer and easier to work than the hardwood of broadleaved trees and finds a multiplicity of uses ranging from building timber and pulpwood to kitchen furniture.

Only three Gymnosperms are native to Britain: the yew, the juniper and the Scots pine. The yew, although a Gymnosperm, is not a conifer but belongs to a more primitive group known as the taxads. It produces its seeds within a fleshy cup called an aril, which resembles a berry. There are separate male and female trees, thus the bright red "berries" and their poisonous seeds are only found on female trees. With its dark green foliage and yellow underleaves, the yew is most often seen in churchyards and is said to symbolise everlasting love. In the Middle Ages, its wood was widely used for bows and later for costly furniture. Juniper occurs naturally in only a few places in Britain, and where it does it gives rise to scrub with a peculiar "other-worldly" atmosphere owing to the mixture of columnar, rectangular and bushy shapes which it can produce. The prickly leaves occur in whorls of three, and the cone



ANIMAL FEEDING SIGNS ON PINE CONES

Conifer seeds form an important part of the diet of birds and rodents in coniferous forest. The seeds lie at the base of hard woody scales and attempts to reach them leave characteristic handling signs.

scales of juniper are fleshy, uniting to form green to purple "berries". Their fragrance is unmistakeable as they are used to flavour gin.

The yew and juniper nowadays have no commercial value as timber, unlike the pines, which are extensively planted. The pines can easily be recognised because they possess leaves in twos, threes or fives. Our own have leaves in pairs and the native Scots pine can be distinguished by the rusty red appearance of the upper part of the trunk. Pines grow better than any other conifer on dry, sandy soils such as those found in Sherwood Forest. Of the planted areas in Sherwood Forest, almost one fifth is under Scots pine whilst three fifths is under Corsican pine. This latter species has a greyish trunk and very long, twisted leaves. It is particularly suited to Sherwood Forest because it is the conifer which is most resistant to the effects of air pollution. The other plantation pine is the North American lodgepole pine which makes a marvellous pioneer tree because it flourishes in the poorest soils and the most exposed sites where no other tree will grow. Pine timber is reddish in colour, particularly that of the Scots pine (red deal). Although it can be used for building, joinery, pit props and pulpwood, most of the Sherwood crop now goes to supply the local wood-wool industry.

Spruces and firs have needles arranged singly. Norway spruce (the Christmas tree) and Sitka spruce are the source of whitewood and also make good pulpwood for the paper industry. They require more fertile and moist soils than the pines, Sitka spruce needing some sixty inches of rainfall per annum and thus being most widely planted in the mountains of Cumbria and Western Scotland. The firs also tend to demand moderately fertile soils and are not common, with the exception of Douglas fir, which is frequently planted on valley slopes. A fully grown Douglas is an awe-inspiring sight. Its timber is excellent, particularly for flagpoles and ships' masts! In the field, firs can most easily be distinguished from spruces by the sucker-like base of the leaves. Spruce leaves lack this feature and are attached to a distinct peg-like projection on the branch.

If you look across a plantation of conifers in winter, you may see green areas alternating with brown areas. The colour of the latter is a sure sign that the larch has been planted. Larch is unusual amongst the conifers in that it is deciduous, i.e. it loses its leaves in winter. In summer, the delicate foliage can be recognised by the bright green leaves occurring in tufts, which are really many single leaves attached to a very short side branch. As well as possessing attractive foliage, larches are useful plantation trees because they are quick-growing yet yield strong timber. Some Japanese larch is planted in Sherwood Forest.

The foliage of the larches, whilst being distinctive, does resemble that of the cedars, which also have leaves in tufts but on slightly longer side branches (up to one centimetre). Cedars are not grown commercially for timber but are commonly found in parks, churchyards and large gardens. Cedar of Lebanon has distinctive horizontal branches, whilst the strikingly bluish foliage of the Atlas cedar is unmistakeable; I have seen it in many a Nottingham garden. The western red cedar, from which much of our garden fencing and outdoor timber is derived, is not really a true cedar. It has scale-like leaves and closely resembles that

other more common garden conifer, Lawson's cypress. A useful rule of thumb to distinguish the two is to look at the leading shoot. In western red cedar this stands erect, whilst in Lawson's cypress it tends to droop.

My own particular favourite conifer is the beautiful western hemlock, which owes its curious name to the supposed resemblance between the smell of the crushed foliage and the mousy smell of hemlock. Its foliage is odd in that the short, blunt-tipped, irregularly spaced leaves are of varying lengths. The tree originated from British Columbia and is not very common in British plantations except in Scotland, so it is particularly pleasing to stumble across a specimen - usually quite unexpectedly.

Properly managed, conifer plantations can be of tremendous amenity value as well as commercial value. I find great pleasure in the enveloping stillness of a coniferous forest. It has other advocates too, such as the elusive crossbill which feeds exclusively on conifer seeds. Coniferous forests can also be happy hunting grounds for those who, like myself, delight in fungus forays. Fungi are particularly important in woodlands, for not only do they, by decomposing dead leaves, release valuable minerals into the soil, but some species form associations with the roots of trees. These associations are quite specific, so that coniferous woods support a characteristic collection of fungal species. The fungi involved in such associations are termed "mycorrhizae", and biologists use the term "symbiosis" to describe the relationship between the tree and the fungus. The term implies that the two organisms derive mutual benefit from the association. It is thought that, in return for the sugars provided by the tree, the fungus passes on directly to the roots some of the minerals which it can absorb very efficiently even from poor soils deficient in them. And therein lies the secret of the conifers' success!

How to identify Gymnosperms

Below is printed an artificial key which should enable the reader to identify most of the Gymnosperms he is likely to encounter in the British Isles. There are thirteen paragraphs. Each paragraph presents two or more contrasting descriptions. The reader chooses which description applies to the specimen and to the right will either find the identity of the specimen or a number indicating the next paragraph to which he should refer.

1. (a) Leaves scale-like, pressed closely to stem: 2
(b) Leaves free, needle-shaped: 3
2. (a) Foliage with fruity smell, leading shoots erect, cones small, slender and leathery: WESTERN RED CEDAR (*Thuja plicata*)
(b) Crushed foliage with resinous smell, leading shoots drooping, cones small and globular: LAWSON'S CYPRESS (*Chamaecyparis lawisoniana*)
3. (a) Leaves occurring singly: 4
(b) Leaves in pairs, or bunches: 10
4. (a) Shoots distinctly flattened in appearance: 5
(b) Shoots not distinctly flattened in appearance: 6

5. (a) Leaves deep green, yellow beneath, pointed, of similar length: COMMON YEW (Taxus baccata)
 (b) Leaves bright green, bluish white beneath, blunt at tip and of varying lengths (0.5 - 1.5cm): WESTERN HEMLOCK (Tsuga heterophylla)
 (c) Not as above: 9
6. (a) Leaves in whorls of three, sharply pointed (resembles gorse); cone berry-like, smells of gin when crushed: JUNIPER (Juniperus communis)
 (b) Leaves and cones not as above: 7
7. (a) Leaf petiole (stalk) slender from peg-like base (pulvinus): 8
 (b) Leaf petiole stout from sucker-like base: 9
8. (a) Leaves 1.5 - 2.0cm, dark green, stiff, pointed. Bark grey-brown with reddish tint. Cones 15cm: NORWAY SPRUCE (Picea abies)
 (b) Leaves 2.0 - 2.5cm, ridged beneath, green above, bluish beneath, stiff, sharply pointed. Bark purplish-grey. Cones 7cm, pale brown, crinkled margin: SITKA SPRUCE (Picea sitchensis)
9. (a) Leaves soft, dense, 2.0 - 2.5cm, fruity/resinous aroma; twigs pale green, spindle-shaped buds; cones with distinct 3-pronged bracts: DOUGLAS FIR (Pseudotsuga menziesii)
 (b) Leaves dark green above, white beneath, grooved, up to 2cm; twigs grey/buff: SILVER FIR (Abies alba)
 Leaves bluish, leathery, grooved and flattened, blunt, 1 - 2cm, twigs pale reddish brown: NOBLE FIR (Abies procera)
 (d) Leaves rich green, silvery beneath, flattened and grooved, orange/grapefruit-scented when crushed, long and short leaves (2 - 5cm), stem olive green in first year: GRAND FIR (Abies grandis)
10. (a) Leaves in pairs: 11
 (b) Leaves in bunches (except current year's growth): 12
11. (a) Leaves bluish green, 3 - 7cm, upper part of trunk reddish: SCOTS PINE (Pinus sylvestris)
 (b) Leaves grey-green, 12 - 18cm, twisted, bark greyish throughout: CORSICAN PINE (Pinus nigra var maritima)
 (c) Leaves deep green, 4 - 5cm, densely set, buds twisted, bark dull brownish black, cones prickly: LODGEPOLE PINE (Pinus contorta)
12. (a) Tufts of leaves on short (0.5 - 1cm) side branch, foliage green, cone 8cm, barrel-shaped: CEDAR OF LEBANON (Cedrus libani)
 (b) Tufts of leaves on short (0.5 - 1cm) side branch, leaves bright blue-grey: BLUE ATLAS CEDAR (Cedrus atlantica)
 (c) Tufts of leaves on very short side branch, tree deciduous: 13
13. (a) Leaves 2 - 3cm, slender, rich green turning golden in autumn; stem pale yellow, cones with straight scales EUROPEAN LARCH (Larix decidua)
 (b) Leaves 3 - 4cm, broader than L. decidua, bluish-green turning orange in autumn; stem orange, fruit red, cones with reflexed scales: JAPANESE LARCH (Larix Kaempferi)
 (c) Type intermediate between two: HYBRID LARCH (Larix x eurolepsis)

The new régime at the Playhouse

MIKE WILLIAMS

GEOFFREY REEVES'S NEW ADMINISTRATION at the Nottingham Playhouse began by announcing a package for spring/summer this year. The sequence of plays ran from May until August. It comprised, in chronological order: "Vieux Carré", by Tennessee Williams; "Kiss Me Kate", by Cole Porter; "Funny Peculiar", by Mike Stott; "Around the World in Eighty Days", a musical adaptation of Jules Verne's novel; and "Sleuth", by Anthony Shaffer. That is to say, the new administration has given us: a prestigious British première of the latest work by an indisputably great dramatist, who was jetted into Nottingham for the occasion, having been closely involved in the production since its inception; an American musical whose every number is a standard; a modern English comedy, a "sit-com" whose inventive bawdiness alone disqualifies it from a television showing; a world première (and, it is to be hoped, the only première unless it's extensively rewritten) of an English musical adaptation which relied irritatingly exclusively on low-key pastiches of the popular musical conventions of several generations ago; and a modern English version of the conventional and well-loved thriller which must have the worst-kept secret ending of any in the genre.

With the first phase of Geoffrey Reeves's work now completed, this is a suitable moment to take stock of the achievement. There is no doubt that certain critical reservations have to be placed against all five works mentioned above. The Tennessee Williams, for instance, is the work of a man whose vision of life is mellowing, whose powers are weakening, whose recent plays are in many ways a tired re-working of former glories. "Funny Peculiar" may have been a West End smash hit, if that's necessarily a recommendation, and its comic exploitation of bawdy language and situations may occasionally touch the genuinely creative; but, as a play, it is loosely constructed, self-indulgent in the writing, and, like many of the plays and series in the television genre from which it derives, it depends on an ignorant and insensitive exploitation of conventional prejudices about lower middle-class life.

Every number in "Kiss Me Kate" is Cole Porter at or near his best, but the plot-vehicle which the songs decorate is ludicrous in its dialogue and in its situations. By contrast, the home-grown musical employed a familiar and acceptable picaresque plot, but indulged itself in some half-hearted comments on the Victorians and Money, and in a string of undeveloped pastiches which drew an excellent bead on their targets, but had forgotten to load with live ammunition. As for "Sleuth", what can one say, other than that it is an elegant piece of nonsense which pretends to the creation of a conflict between its two characters, and ends by playing elaborate and superficial tricks.

Despite these reservations about the nature of the works which were chosen, I found the approach adopted by the new directors at the Playhouse very impressive, with the exception of "Around the World". Keith

Hack, for instance, offered a very impressive reading of "Vieux Carré", and, without any straining for effect, realised the eternal repetitiveness in the lives of the boarding-house's occupants, underlying the squalor and straightened economic circumstances which provided the detail of the play's conflicts. Since Nottingham, this production has become a minor "cause célèbre" in the West End. Sheila Gish, giving a physically delicious and emotionally extravagant performance as Jane, a young woman tied to a Tennessee Williams stud, was asked during the London run to remove what she considered to be a most important speech. She refused and walked out. That really is a pity, for in the original production at the Playhouse she was the only player capable of withstanding the presence on stage of the awesome talents of Sylvia Miles. Certainly, the director failed to confine Miss Miles within his concept, and she sailed through the evening, as stars sometimes inevitably must, reading her part according to her own lights, and conjuring from within her own personality a sympathy, a tolerance and a humour which brilliantly, and, I'm sure, unconsciously involved her audience in a parade of characters and situations from which they were otherwise alienated by the writing and the direction.

The approach of Penny Cherns to "Kiss Me Kate" was equally impressive, and failed on exactly the same point. She failed to discipline the talents of Ray C. Davis, who played Fred (Petruchio). His performance aside (it would have been impressive in a more expansive production), we were offered a deliberately low-key version of the musical which did exact justice to the limits of its dramatic expressiveness. That several of the numbers were disappointing musically can be overlooked in the face of the precise judgement and tight discipline at work.

With these two productions over, we were at last introduced to Garfield Morgan and Geoffrey Reeves, and the beginnings of what is becoming discernible as a house-style. "Funny Peculiar", despite its shortcomings as a play, was deservedly a success. It offered some exquisite comic timing, tight disciplined work in ensemble playing and in the shaping of scenes and situations, and a sensitive handling of some admirable aptitude for farcical playing. Christopher Ettridge's performance as the idiot was a case in point. Ettridge, on his showing so far, is a slightly undisciplined actor who has a tendency to play to the gallery. He has done so in "Around the World" and, less forgivably, as Pistol in the recent production of "Henry the Fifth". But, in "Funny Peculiar", his clowning was under a strong discipline and the result was a memorable performance.

Unfortunately, the inspiration flagged with "Around the World". The text was uninspired and repetitive. It sounded rushed, ill-thought-out, and do we really want more time and energy put into knowing parodies and pastiches of old forties numbers and their cinematic presentation? As for "Sleuth", it was played for all it's worth, and for those who've never seen it before, that is probably a lot, but it is becoming old hat these days.

Yet, despite the individual vagaries of the plays, the directorial policy at the Playhouse seems clear. It is to meet the text head-on with a consistent interpretation, and to shape the evening's proceedings

according to that. Nowhere has that been clearer than in the recent production of "Henry the Fifth" which opened the current autumn/winter season. Here at last was a considerable drama, and Geoffrey Reeves and Garfield Morgan gave a courageous reading of it. I say courageous, because I think it takes guts to offer such an openly traditional reading of Shakespeare's politics after the theatrical re-interpretations of the last fifteen years. Tom Wilkinson, in the leading role, plays Henry as a human being not only cursed with a conscience, but also blessed with a genuine humility in the face of a history being cruelly played out under the guiding hand of a Divine Providence in which he obviously believes; and the text has been beautifully edited to enforce the overall concept. But the project has stretched the Playhouse's acting strength to the limits, and there is some abysmal playing of the minor roles. There is also a shoe-string look to the production budget which looks ominous; and behind that is the more disturbing lack of response by the Nottingham public to the new administration.

The poor attendances at all so far but "Funny Peculiar" and "Sleuth" are not the responsibility of the new régime, no matter what the philistines of the present city council may assert. The blame must be placed where it belongs. The tremendous attraction of John Neville's régime created a support for the Playhouse which was thrown away by the increasingly mediocre policies of Stuart Burge and the eccentric happenings of Richard Eyre's régime. The latter may well go into theatrical history as the man who rescued for funded theatre the exciting talents of men like Howard Brenton and David Hare when they were threatened by the financial starvation of the fringe - but he is also the man who alienated the Nottingham public and threw away all that John Neville created. Geoffrey Reeves and Garfield Morgan need a great deal of support in reversing Eyre's legacy, and I believe that, on present showing, they deserve support from all quarters.

The identity of Nottingham

ROBERT ABBOTT

"THERE IS NO NOTTINGHAM," declared D.H. Lawrence, the region's greatest and perhaps most notorious name in literature. With wild inaccuracy, he accused the city of being an amorphous agglomeration with a population approaching one million, and lacking a sense of place in the way that, for example, Siena has a sense of place. Lawrence was, in this instance, unfair to the city. Nottingham does have a sense of place, but what is its identity?

Nottingham is rather reticent as cities of its size go. It is not a capital city, and though it calls itself the Queen of the Midlands by tradition, Birmingham is the commercial centre; Nottingham is as far from being a seaside resort as is possible in England; it is only just beginning to acquire for itself an unsavoury but newsworthy reputation such as Glasgow and Belfast can boast; and it has been unable to establish itself, in the national consciousness, as a centre of popular culture and irreverence, as Liverpool has been able to do.

The principal images revolve around a group of clichés. To start with there is Robin Hood, a goody-goody bore of uncertain chronology who was probably invented by a TV scriptwriting team in London or a tourist agency in New York. Other historical associations are with Mortimer and his highly convenient Hole; King Charles, who raised his standard on Standard Hill and no doubt his spaniel on Spaniel Row; and the legendary Snot, who started it all and whose literal descendants by reputation now live in the hillier parts of West Bridgford (and from which prejudice I would quickly dissociate myself!).

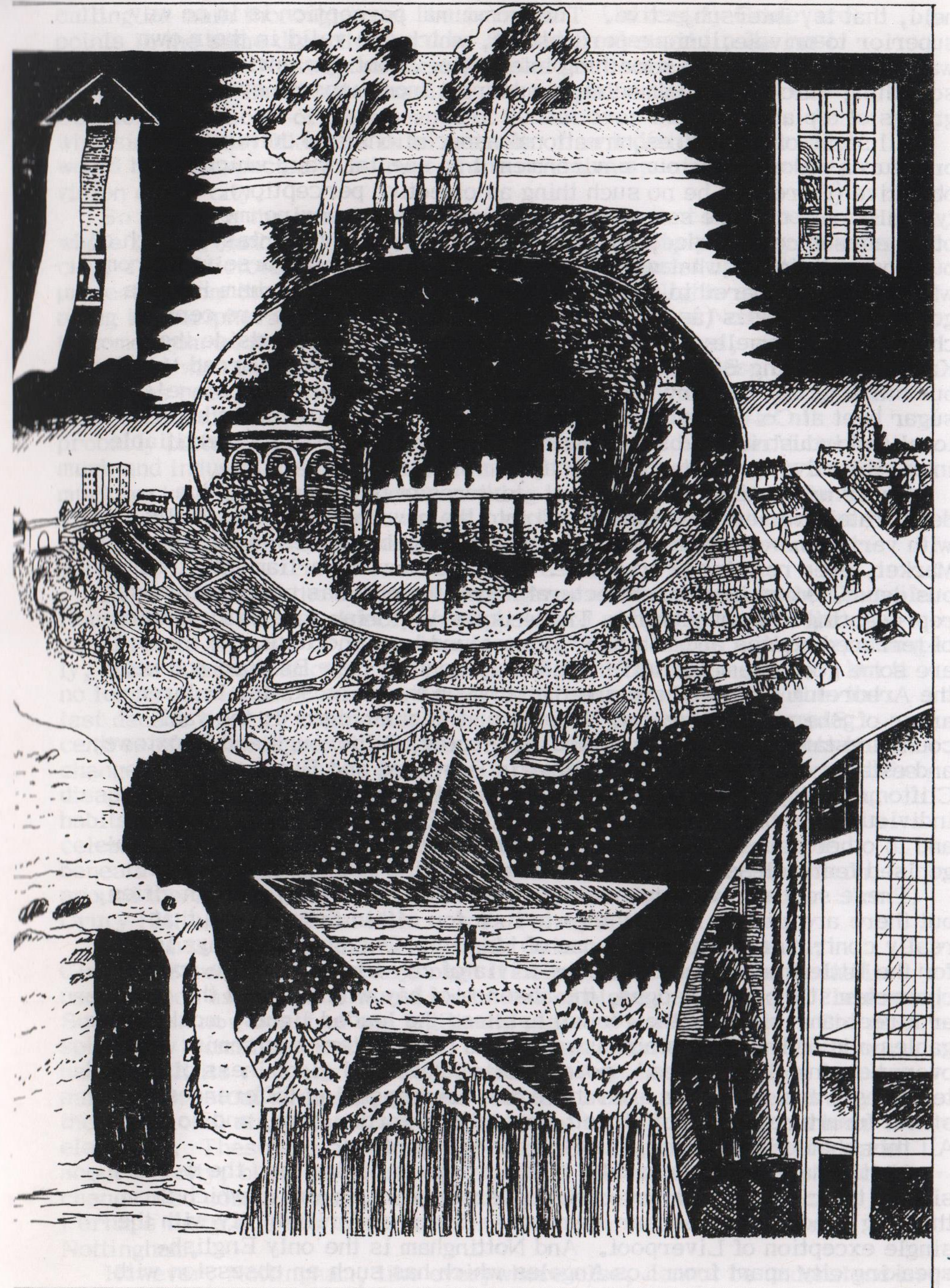
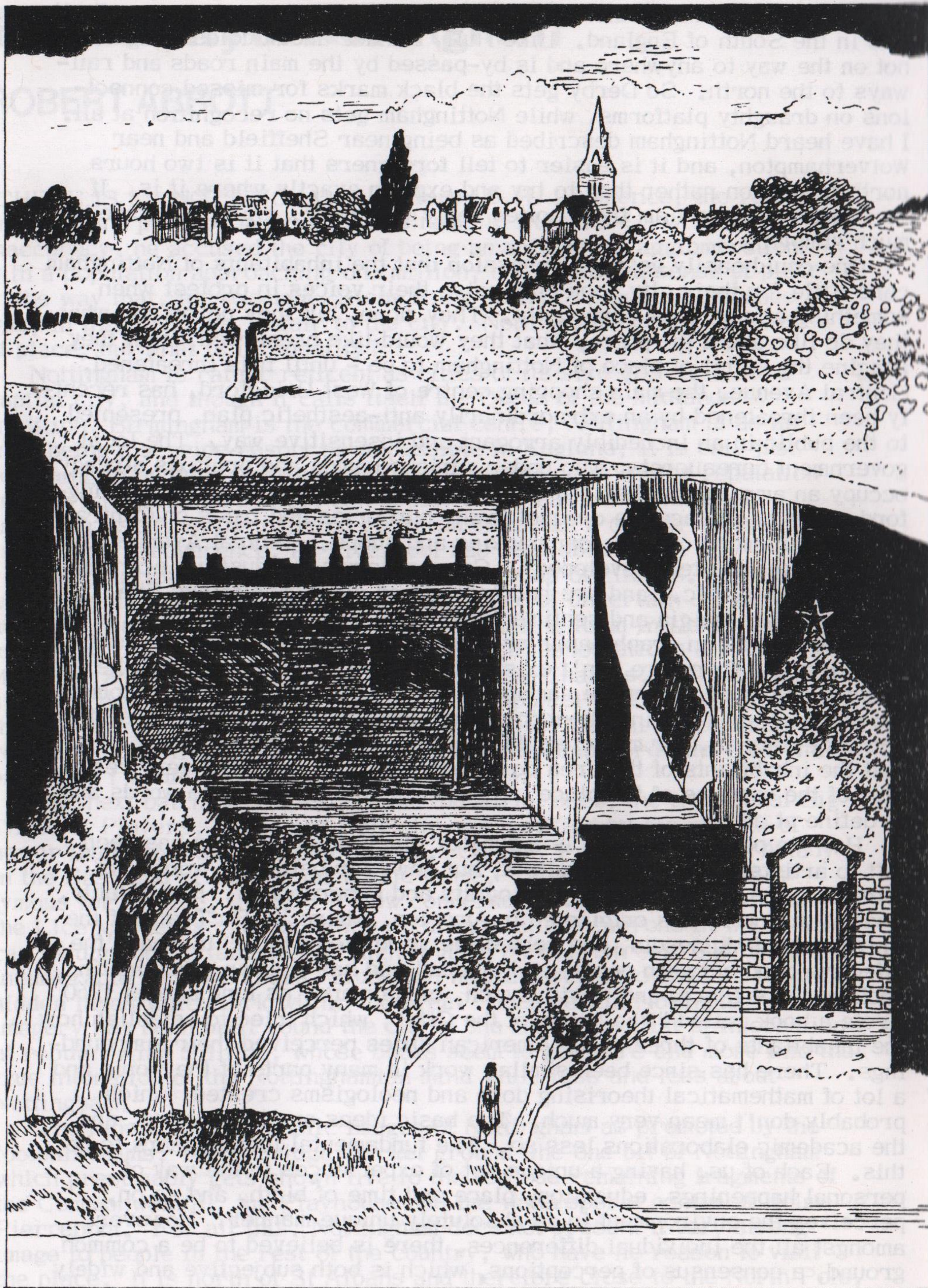
The next batch of clichés are the industrial ones: the traditional Big Three of Players, Boots and Raleigh, now modified by the arrival of newer industries such as electronics. Oh yes, I nearly forgot. A lady in the East End of London once said to me, "'Course, No'ingham's fymous for its lice, in'it." Now concerned with textiles in general, the Lice Market is predominantly an area of silent canyons in which one can indulge one's fantasies of high finance on Wall Street, and there are innumerable sandwich bars, clubs and hairdressers slotted into the well-hidden lanes which lurk within the area. More recent Nottingham imagery has been built round the city's one living novelist of international repute, Alan Sillitoe, whose books seem to get more and more into the true intonation of the Nottinghamian mind while less and less about Nottingham.

Then there are the public images of Nottingham as promoted by the football teams, Trent Bridge cricket ground (the one bit of Nottingham which presumably gets shown live to the few odd remaining fragments of the Commonwealth), the Playhouse and the watersports centre at Holme Pierrepont. For all this, Nottingham does not present a very strong image to people in the rest of the country, who have no reason to visit the place. It is north of St Albans and therefore close to the North Pole,

along with clogs, mill chimneys and black puddings, but to the Geordie it lies in the South of England. Like Hull, Dundee and Middlesbrough it is not on the way to anywhere and is by-passed by the main roads and railways to the north. So Derby gets the black marks for missed connections on draughty platforms, while Nottingham gets no recognition at all. I have heard Nottingham described as being near Sheffield and near Wolverhampton, and it is easier to tell foreigners that it is two hours north of London rather than to try and explain exactly where it is. If they ask me where I am from I often reply "London", which is untrue but much simpler.

One could easily get the impression that the inhabitants of Nottingham care little for their city, and only raise their voices in protest when something affects them personally. They moan, but they never say what they do like about the place, what they would like preserved, what they imagine the spirit of place of Nottingham to be - until it is threatened. Central Avenue, the main shopping centre of West Bridgford, has recently been threatened by an extraordinarily anti-aesthetic plan, presented to the public in an incredibly arrogant and insensitive way. The local government bureaucrats, who under various names and pretexts already occupy an amazing number of properties in the older part of West Bridgford, want to replace the croquet lawn, nurseries and trees on Central Avenue with more offices, car parking and shops. Central Avenue, they say, is "incompletely developed". Croquet lawns are just not economically viable etc. etc., and are redolent of bad old human things like emotion and nostalgia and sentimentality and subjective aesthetics, which can't be plotted on graph paper or measured in meganostalgies or millinostalgies and therefore don't exist. It is hoped that the plan will be stopped before irreversible damage is done, but whatever the outcome the depth of local feeling about the issue does show that awareness of the spirit of place is, for many people, only brought out under threat, and that the inhabitants of the area do have some intangible, but very real, idea of the essence of the place, which is difficult to put into words and to define at all.

How we perceive places is a subject which until recently has been left to artists, poets and novelists, but now, for better or worse, is attracting the attention of psychologists and geographers. Predictably, most of this work has originated in America, where Yi-Fu Tuan, of the University of Minnesota, has coined the word "topophilia" to mean "the affective bond between people and places" and has written a fascinating book on the subject, and Kevin Lynch, of Harvard, as long ago as 1960 wrote a book called "The Image of the City", which tried to establish how the inhabitants of three major American cities perceived their surroundings. There has since been similar work in many parts of the world and a lot of mathematical theorising done and neologisms created, which probably don't mean very much. The basic ideas are interesting, and the academic elaborations less so. The fundamental idea appears to be this. Each of us, having a unique set of experiences in the way of personal happenings, education, place and time of birth, and so on, perceives the environment in an absolutely unique manner. However, amongst all the individual differences, there is believed to be a common ground, a consensus of perceptions, which is both subjective and widely



held, that is, intersubjective. This communal perception is in no way superior to private, unique perceptions, which are valid in their own way, but it does tell us something interesting about our environment, something which is not immediately apparent from maps or even photographs of a place.

All sorts of prejudices, irrational associations and cultural pressures make us see our environment in a special way, which is not objective (there may be no such thing as objective perception). We typically only use one sense - sight - to assess our environment, but other senses can be used, plus memory and imaginative fantasy. Much of our appreciation of what we perceive comes from within ourselves, from what we are prepared to put into our perceptions. Nottingham is not a good city for smells (as for instance are ports), but there are certain characteristic smells in the city: gas at Basford, coffee outside the Kardomah in King Street, hot dogs and diesel fumes in the Broad Marsh bus station, the brewery smell sometimes radiating from Shipstone's, sugar beet at Colwick during the right season, and many other highly localised industrial and shop smells. These are all readily identifiable intersubjective attributes of the city.

There are textures to examine - textures of pavements and the deliberately varied ones introduced into the new paved streets, hills with variations of gradients, a few areas of cobblestones in the Lace Market, even remains of tram lines near the Lower Parliament Street bus depot. More in an architectural sense the city has other textures, representing eras of growth. There is the Victorian inner city texture of terraced houses and "entries", now found less and less, but there are some good examples left in Radford, Lenton, New Basford and near the Arboretum. Then there are the between the wars semis, in large areas of Sherwood, Carlton, Beeston and West Bridgford; the vast council estates of the same period, in Aspley, Bilborough and Broxtowe; and estates of more recent decades, in Bestwood and Bestwood Park, Clifton and Top Valley. There are areas of slightly spooky but highly individualistic big Victorian houses in The Park and Mapperley Park, and in other places, and whole new non-districts of labyrinthine, homogenised featurelessness where St Ann's and the Meadows used to be.

These sort of divisions are of course common to many British cities, but there are certain little things to look for within these areas that really contribute towards a sense of identity. One should always look for the little things, the unobvious trivia of city life. So there are the characteristic privet hedges, the absence of bay windows and the circular streetname signs in the council estates; the leaded lights, mock Tudor gables and odd-shaped staircase windows of the inter-war semis; the overwhelming "brickiness", poverty of windows and gloominess of the old terraces - and with each area there are corresponding differences in street furniture, width of street, vegetation, garden size, and so on. All this should be obvious, but it is missed so often.

Nottingham has an unusually high acreage of parks, and the western side of the city has a series of dual carriageways, many of which form the ring road, of a grandeur unknown in any other British city with the single exception of Liverpool. And Nottingham is the only English-speaking city apart from Los Angeles which has such an obsession with

calling its main thoroughfares "boulevards". University Boulevard points in the same direction as does Sunset Boulevard (in its most glamorous part): Nottingham clearly missed out here on an opportunity for some highly imaginative naming, but I suppose the sunset over Beeston lacks some of the romance of sunset over the Pacific. A whimsical fantasy like this is an example of an individual view which would not be expected to be part of the consensus, intersubjective, vision of the city.

So what are the images of Nottingham? I fear that they are on the whole rather dark and dingy ones, which tends to imply a cosy, evening city, a late Victorian autumnal city, safe and enclosed upon itself, protected from the world by double rows of sodium lights strung out along its peripheral boulevards. The truest images of Nottingham seem to come from another age, an age of fog and trolleybuses, and closely connected with the three magical October evenings of Goose Fair. The world has been given images of a slightly unsavoury and rough city by Lawrence and Sillitoe and if it retains an image of the city at all probably pictures rows of grimy back-to-backs wallowing in Victorian murk and industrial sordidness. It may be that since emerging from that murk we have found nothing new, nothing lovable, and nothing identifiable as uniquely Nottinghamian to act as a replacement - and other cities have no doubt discovered the same problem. We are an era unsure of ourselves.

In my childhood the centre of Nottingham was right inside the Council House dome, a sacred object, an omphalos to which the rest of the city could relate visually or in the imagination. The dome is still, surprisingly, quite dominant amongst the highrise of the Nottingham skyline, but it no longer marks the centre of the city with such certainty. Within the last decade the city centre has been polarised between the shopping centres of Victoria and Broad Marsh, and the surrounding streets have changed their characters, partly as a result of pedestrianisation and the disappearance of trolleybuses and partly because of changed shopping habits. Whole areas have gone: the Granby Street bus station area, a celebratory mess of curved asbestos shelters, is now untraceable beneath the sterile cuboids of Maid Marian Way, and the road pattern around the original Walter Fountain, Greyfriar Gate, Carrington Street, Drury Hill and Broad Marsh is now retrievable only in dreams.

St James's Street and Bridlesmith Gate have become trendy; Clumber Street now looks as though it belongs in Cologne, whereas it used to look as though it would not be out of place in Soho; and Theatre Square can now boast of one legitimate place of entertainment. The most splendidly womblike cavern in old Nottingham, that of Victoria Station, has lost all its romantic notions of steam and streaming sunlight to a car park of perpetual midnight, always cold and scary and enlivened only by the occasional shrieking claustrophobic and by hallucinatory cartoon elephants. These are all commonplace observations which can be made about the city, but it is not always realised that with concrete physical change also comes a change in the subjective perception of the city. Perhaps there are now fewer reasons than ever before for liking Nottingham.

However, Nottingham, like everywhere else, cannot be understood in

terms of itself alone, and must be looked at in the context of the whole of the Midlands and of Britain, and compared with other cities, before any real ideas of its identity can be established, that core of identity which distinguishes it from broadly similar cities like (dare I say it) Derby or Leicester or Coventry. Aspects of Nottingham's character can be found in far-flung places: in a waiting train at St Pancras, at Skegness and Mablethorpe, Lincoln and Newark and Ripley and Ashbourne and many other towns on which Nottingham has had some influence.

One very interesting exercise is to try and determine where the spirit of Nottingham begins and ends. A bus journey to Nottingham from, shall we say, Ambergate, Derby or Tamworth would be quite revealing: there are no clearcut boundaries, but certain conclusions might be drawn, such as the fact that Nottingham does not stretch out (atmospherically) uniformly in all directions, and that there are areas which seem unduly influenced by, for instance, Sheffield, Derby or Birmingham, and there are all sorts of "sub-flavours" within the area, corresponding to places like Bulwell, Carlton, Netherfield, Long Eaton, Burton Joyce and Ilkeston.

The old Nottingham flavour is naturally to be found most intensely in the few surviving inner city districts, in streets such as Radford Road between Bentinck Road and Gregory Boulevard, Colwick Road, Sherwood Rise, and Radford and Lenton Boulevards. It is also to be found, not surprisingly, in the new housing estates which have grown up on the fringes of the city to rehouse those displaced by slum clearance. I am not sure whether it can be found in the redeveloped inner city districts. Maybe it is too soon to tell, but the stories we hear about the new Hyson Green are not reassuring.

At present, the city is changing so fast that subjective viewpoints rapidly become obsolete, and that of course is one of the reasons why the demolition and rebuilding of whole districts is resented everywhere. Wholesale redevelopment severs personal memories and associations with places, creates disorientation, and is partly responsible for the great twentieth century disorders of existential despair, meaninglessness and alienation. Slums have to be replaced, of course, but more could be done with property as it is, without resorting to the bulldozer and the swinging steel ball. And since so much that goes up these days is shoddy, uninteresting and visually offensive, why should people be expected to like change for its own sake?

Inarticulate and indeed silent though the general public so frequently are, and though they perhaps have no better ideas about town planning than do our so-called experts, they do have their own type of knowledge and perception of the places in which they live, and which, intangible and often irrational as it is, must be somehow incorporated into redevelopment schemes if places are to retain their meaning and identity, and not become hated, vandalised, alienating, placeless nowheres.

An educative exercise for Nottingham schoolchildren (and one of potential value to the whole community) would be for them to draw maps of the city as they see it and understand it from where they live. On these maps they could show the places and buildings which mean the most to them, or which they are most aware of (perhaps the bus stations, shopping centres, maybe even the Council House), and rather than being

processed into some obscure journal with limited readership the findings could be displayed in, say, the Victoria Centre. What our children think of Nottingham may be very important to the future of the city. It is possible that children can enjoy the city better than can those who have known an earlier city which has now mostly gone. I propose such a project as a challenge to the city's geography teachers, as a practical means of encouraging their pupils to learn to perceive their surroundings and to think about them in a positive way. To think about the environment probably means that one cares for it, or at least for some of it. And it is now all too obvious, the world over, what the failure to think in a personal, subjective way about the imponderables of the environment can lead to.

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Antek

KRZYSZTOF CIESZKOWSKI

MY FATHER STANDS DEEP IN SILENCE, the light declining behind him, his shadow long on the pale soil. His head is sunk down on his chest, his hands joined loosely behind him, his trousers baggy at the knees, a crease across his back where his shoulders stretch the material of the jacket. The sun lights the edge of the onion-dome on the featureless whitewashed church - every time there is an invasion or an insurrection, or whenever an occupying power so decrees, the wretched dome is hauled down and melted, to provide material for cannon or armour. And is later replaced.

These moments are tough. These meetings, these encounters. I have so little to go on. I am awed by the depths of emotion that are uncovered - recognised and acknowledged, but responded to with carefully muted words. It is all inside him, he will never admit how intense the experience is to him. When asked what it feels like to be back in Poland after more than twenty years - after war, captivity, exile - he looks away, and says that he is taking the whole thing in his stride, that it is easy to cope with, that he is never surprised or knocked off his balance. But, while saying this, he looks away.

This time, he is with Antek. A tall, very gaunt, fragile-seeming man, with a high brow and thin grey-edged moustache. They talk, but avoid one another's eyes. Antek leans on a stick, or, shifting his weight on to the other foot, traces broad arcs in the soil. My father watches every movement. If a dog were to bark in the distance, or the church bell begin to ring, they would look around, pleased at the interruption - but the angelus bell rang two hours ago, and the dogs will only begin to bark when the sun touches the skyline.

Each day he drifts further beyond the circuit of our knowledge and our understanding. We try to establish contact by reducing what we can to a joke - it is easy to belittle the attempts to establish a precise relationship to us of some hitherto unknown distant relative, and here there are so many of them, all bearing the name that was once ours. Those who extend arms of welcome from out of dark doorways of their low houses, and the others who lie beneath stone slabs or rusted metal crosses. They too extend arms of welcome here, and will not be ignored.

People in the village said to my father, you must see Antek, he'll be more than happy to see you, after all these years. And so we were directed by a distant cousin to a low wooden house on the edge of the village, and a small dark woman opened the door to our knocking, and Antek came out to greet us. They embraced, my father and Antek, each clutching the other by the shoulders. It had been a long time. He asked us in, took the small glasses out of a drawer, filled them with vodka, and we drank. And more silence than talk. Fly-paper above the table, a gehenna of large grey flies trapped in thick honey; the Sacred Heart on the wall, beside him a frail discoloured cross from a remote Palm

Sunday, the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa, some photographs in wooden frames, a view of the mountains coloured in by hand.

His wife brought us tiny red-rimmed cups of thick sandy black coffee, and he refilled our glasses. My father passed his hand over his glass to ward off the return of the newly opened bottle, but allowed himself to be prevailed upon. These are the rituals which prevent us from lacerating one another with our emotions. He who has never been into a pub back in England has drunk more vodka these last two weeks than in the preceding twenty years.

He has come back. He has drifted with the tides and with the rivers, but he is back. Like Jews promising each other every Passover to return to Jerusalem during the coming year, every Christmas we have said that we shall go back to Poland. But we have believed it only with that part of our credulity which Christmas broadened in us, and have then turned back to the feast on the table and the midnight mass from Munich on the radio. But now we are here. And he has come back to the village where he was born.

Five or six years earlier he had arranged for me to visit Poland alone - and had clung to every word when I returned, bursting with stories and impressions and descriptions. He interrupted my narrative to ask what I had thought of this village, and I hesitated before replying, I shrank before describing the run-down arid little cluster of houses. I approached my reply obliquely, but he smiled, catching me out, and put words into my mouth - I hated it, he urged, I hated the flies and the horse-shit and the backwardness of the people, I hated the remoteness and the lassitude of the place. And I agreed, relieved. That, he explained, was why he had left it as soon as he possibly could, that is why he had gone into the army as soon as he could reasonably chuck in his job in the local post office.

Antek stands silent. You must see Antek, they said, he's been looking forward to seeing you ever since people began to talk about your coming out from England. But what they meant was, for God's sake see Antek while you're here - if you come again next summer, he'll be gone. Antek is an impressive figure, but the pain in his face is too open, it assaults and engulfs you. Even in high summer, he never wears a short-sleeved shirt, because the number etched into his forearm is something he prefers to cover from others' sight and silent comment. He receives a small pension from the Germans, as reparation. He has not worked since he returned from the camp, a grey shape beneath a grey blanket on a stretcher. He wanders round the village and looks up at the dome of the church tower, and wonders when it will next be hauled down and melted. He is very tired, and finds it hard to sleep at night.

After the vodka and the coffee, we walked out of the house, ducking to avoid the fly-paper, and strolled down the road, towards the stone statue of Our Lady which stands at the edge of the village. Carts were coming in from the fields, the small horses harnessed to the left of the long shaft. In the distance someone finished his ploughing.

We stand on the brow of the slight rise. I scrape up the soil with the side of my foot into a ridge, then bisect the ridge with the point of my toe. My brother cups his hands to light a cigarette, although there is no breeze. My father is remote - I would say that he is far away, only I

know that every part of him is here, in place and in time.

In England you are an exile. If you are young, like my brother and myself, you mask your strangeness by an over-scrupulous command of the language, you excel at school so as to gain acceptance. But if you are old, you remain an exile. You acquire enough of the language to facilitate your everyday affairs, but you avoid all closer contact which will leave you without the words to express your feelings. You pretend you have no feelings.

Above all, you are no part of the permanence of your surroundings. Perhaps you work hard and save and buy a house, a car, good clothes, but for you these belong only to the moment, they are temporary. You are always waiting for something to happen, for the armies to start moving once the harvest has been gathered in. You are waiting for the dome on the church tower to be hauled down and melted - it means nothing that the church closest to you, in a South London suburb, has a stone spire.

Antek turns and says he must be getting back, his leg is beginning to trouble him. An expression of concern crosses my father's face, and we make our way back towards the village again.

And who is Antek? Does it matter? At least we are not related to him, so nobody will attempt to trace a genealogical link for us. He is about the same age as my father. The rest I can only guess at, I will never ask. He will die soon. I imagine they were at school together, I suppose they were close friends once. Antek didn't leave the village, he stayed here, perhaps tied down by a possessive mother or a comfortable family. He saw the armies begin to move, he saw them enter and take the village and pass through. The rest is silence. They took him away. He is very tired.

My father turns to talk to Antek, but the conversation is doomed. All they can do is bring up the name of someone they knew in their childhood, and then the conversation dies, cut by the name of a place, an approximate date. Beyond that, there is no more to be said. Somewhere, in the depths of some file, is all that remains of these people they try to recall - three photographs: profile, full-face, and half-face with a cloth cap jauntily placed on the shorn head.

Antek stops in front of his house, and turns to my father, his eyes bright.

What's happened to you? he begins, what has living in the West done to you? You've become just like all the others - settled, comfortably off, detached from us here.

But he cannot say what is in him. He cannot accuse my father of having lost the faith, because perhaps there never was any faith in the first place, here or anywhere. He quickly embraces my father and turns to go. The door closes behind him, and I catch a glimpse of the fly-paper which, disturbed, reaches out to touch him. If we come back here next year, he will not be here.

I look up at the dome on the church tower, now a curved silhouette, and want to memorise its outline, want to impress the image on my memory, because it looks very frail and weak. In my mind I will protect it.

The village poet

CHRISTOPHER WEIR

FOR MOST OF HIS LIFE, George Hickling (1827-1909), a stockingmaker of Cotgrave, was better known as Rusticus, the well-loved contributor of pastoral verse to Nottingham and county newspapers.

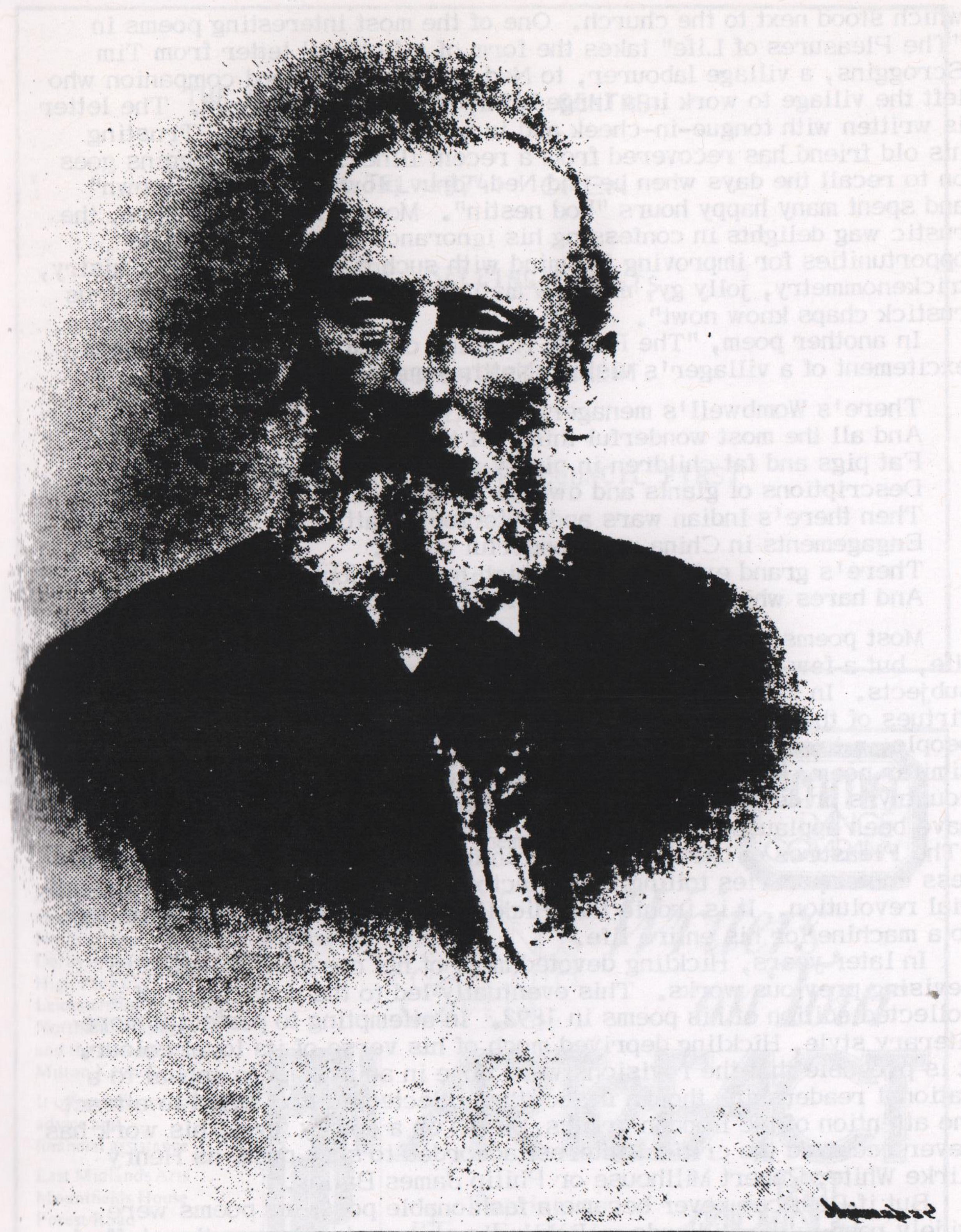
Although for modern taste much of Hickling's verse would be considered too sentimental, Rusticus himself was no parlour poet. At the age of thirteen he began work on his father's stocking frame and continued to do making-up work for the Nottingham Lace Market firm of I. & R. Morley for the rest of his life. It was a hard trade, demanding long hours for little reward, and it can have left little room for the creative spirit to flourish. But, despite this, Hickling not only developed a life-long passion for poetry but also made a considerable success of his efforts, publishing several volumes of poetry and contributing regularly to newspapers and journals.

Hickling was fortunate in having the encouragement of a lively and artistic family. His brother became a professional singer and was for many years a member of the world-famous Carla Rosa Opera Company. Locally, the family were well-known for their musical evenings when they entertained friends with music and songs of every description. Hickling himself played the concertina and was an enthusiastic bellringer at Cotgrave church. And it was through his church activities that the aspiring poet met Archdeacon Browne, the parish rector, who encouraged Hickling to publish his first volume of poems, "The Mystic Land", in 1856.

"The Mystic Land" was a philosophic work written in blank verse after the style of Milton's "Paradise Lost". Lacking in originality, "The Mystic Land" did not receive critical acclaim, but included in the same volume was a poem entitled "The Hour of Enchantments" which, although much shorter than the principal work, succeeded in establishing Hickling's reputation as a poet. "The Hour of Enchantments" bustles with local characters and sketches from village life: the parish school with its "ponderous benches and dreaded slates", the tired mower returning home at the end of the day, the rattling post-chaise arriving from Nottingham and the pleasures of the village feast. Throughout the whole poem, the colours and sounds of the countryside are recorded in detail and an interest in bird life is evident in many passages. Describing a summer's evening, Hickling writes:

The whitethroat chatters in the wild rose tree
the swallows high o'er head are full of glee
the noisy rooks have left the ripening corn
and in yon wood collect till break of morn.

Hickling's next book of verse, "The Pleasures of Life", was published in 1861. It contained a wide selection of verse and, in addition, included a fine engraving of the author's childhood home, an old cottage



GEO. HICKLING.

"RUSTICUS."

which stood next to the church. One of the most interesting poems in "The Pleasures of Life" takes the form of a fictional letter from Tim Scroggins, a village labourer, to Ned White, a childhood companion who left the village to work in a large town, probably Nottingham. The letter is written with tongue-in-cheek and in broad dialect verse. Trusting his old friend has recovered from a recent illness, Tim Scroggins goes on to recall the days when he and Ned "druv plow for Farmer Brown" and spent many happy hours "bod nestin". Moving to other matters, the rustic wag delights in confessing his ignorance of town life and its opportunities for improving the mind with such things as "musick, histry, trickenommetry, jolly gy, matthew maticks and other things of which us rustick chaps know nowt".

In another poem, "The Fair", Hickling captures all the breathless excitement of a villager's visit to Nottingham's Goose Fair:

There's Wombwell's menagerie and Holloway's stage
And all the most wonderful things of the age:
Fat pigs and fat children in plenty are there
Descriptions of giants and dwarfs rend the air.
Then there's Indian wars and Waterloo's battle
Engagements in China and wonderful cattle.
There's grand exhibitions and high learned ponies
And hares which perform and astonishing conies.

Most poems in "The Pleasures of Life" were descriptions of rural life, but a few attempted, albeit in very flat verse, to deal with political subjects. In "The British Aristocracy", Hickling eulogised upon the virtues of the landed gentry, concluding them to be the "safeguard of the people, a tower of strong defence, the corner-stone of England". In a similar poem, he urges the working men of England to work for their country's pride and to enjoy the dignity of labour. Such sentiments must have been applauded by the Duke of Newcastle, Hickling's patron for "The Pleasures of Life", but they can have held small comfort for countless contemporaries toiling in the factories and sweatshops of the industrial revolution. It is ironic that Hickling himself should have been tied to a machine for his entire life.

In later years, Hickling devoted most of his creative energies to revising previous works. This eventually led to the publication of a collected edition of his poems in 1892. In attempting to perfect a more literary style, Hickling deprived much of his verse of its local colour. It is probable that the revisions were done in an attempt to appeal to a national readership, though in fact the collected edition failed to attract the attention of the London critics. Even on a county level, his work has never received the critical interest accorded to such poets as Henry Kirke White, Robert Millhouse or Philip James Bailey.

But if Rusticus never became a fashionable poet, his poems were widely read in the Midlands. Hickling's philosophising was the stuff of conversation and argument, something to be debated over a glass of ale in the local inn. In contrast, his descriptive verse provided both lyrical and humorous entertainment, while at the same time remaining a valuable record of village life during the nineteenth century.

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Hungarian John

COLIN HAYNES

JOHN'S A ROGUE, A SCOUNDREL, but a likable one. He has a wide white smile and a flashing gold tooth, but he's terrible to his wife. They have two young sons, one quiet and reserved, like his mother, one a big bouncy bully, like him.

He's Hungarian, was apprenticed a painter restoring church murals, then ran away to travel the world at a tender age. "At sixteen, I was on a mountain in Innsbruck. I said - I'll see all the seas and oceans, mountains and jungles. And I did." He tells marvellous stories of twists of fortune. One minute penniless, somewhere in Australia, he sees some one painting his house and offers to help. Suddenly, an advance of money and he's rich.

He brings out sheafs of passports and old address books. "Travel is a wonderful thing." How can his neighbours bear it, brought up and mortgaged to a small town, never having lived?

In the Channel Isles, he met his future wife. They married and eventually settled down here. But he's left with a nagging wanderlust that sends him driving around needlessly in the red beetle some days.

And this is the house that John rebuilt. This is the roof he tiled, conservatory he constructed, windows he double-glazed, floors he laid, all more or less at the same time. He beat out a cowl for his cooker from a copper water tank. Stencilled mushrooms on the kitchen ceiling and made a border in candle smoke on wet paint. At the moment, he's knocking out a fireplace. He was going to rebuild it faced with old pennies - on edge - but couldn't find enough. Perhaps he'll put an iron door on the chimney breast to smoke sausages. He makes his own, with lots of pepper. They give me stomach ache.

At the bungalow back is the garden, and how it grows. A few years ago, he collected saplings. He planted them at the wrong time of year, then moved them to put in a swing. I said they'd never grow, but they have. He cut the top off a hawthorn and grafted on an apple stem, and it's green. Strange flowers line the path up to eye level. What are they? He doesn't know, but nobody else has got them. The kids scratch about in the sand by the waterless pond and bring back treasures. One bed is full of garlic. The fennel grows to seven foot. All the scraps from the table go straight on the soil - no bothering with a compost heap.

They go to Hungary two or three months of the year. "Actual fact," says John, "we can't afford not to." They'd pay out as much in tax, electricity and food in England, but there, at his mother's, they live more cheaply and bring back a stock of food to live in their style of surplus for the winter. They bring back tins of honey, blackcurrant juice in glass carafes and carafes of apricot liqueur. Six pairs of shoes each for the boys, crystal glasses, and, hoovered from Hungarian flowers in the fields, a bowl of pollen to take in teaspoons. "It's expensive - I would much as to say in English money two pounds a pound

- but for the boys' health in winter, is worth it."

In his work he's a craftsman. A lady told me so. "I can tell. He strains his paint through a stocking." He mixes his own paints with lead and knows all the tricks with driers to put two coats on in a day. But most of his jobs are mundane, straight emulsioneing, glossing up outsides. His fancies he has to try out at home. He has a wild look in his eye when he doesn't get paid, the customer accidentally misplaces his cheque book and suggests calling back tomorrow. Tomorrow he might turn up with a can of creosote ready.

Once or twice I've worked with him. On some new work, off scaffolding, he brought out a snap bag for lunch with hard-boiled eggs and a silver salt cellar. Spraying a pub yard, saying "good morning" to the passers-by, he chalked "WETT" across the tarmac, and ordered a drink at the bar in mucky overalls, shoulder to shoulder with lunch-break executives. He thought it would be quicker not to mask the windows. It took him a week to get them clean, each Georgian pane.

Then he asked for a hand with some strange jobs that weren't really painting or decorating ... demolishing a shed of railway sleepers and building the biggest bonfire since Guy Fawkes. Sealing a chimney with a paving stone. Who was on top and who was underneath? But nothing slipped.

I often call round. His wife gives me a slice of her home-made cake and I go to talk to John in the bathroom. His son is perched on a stool in the bath, having his hair cut, and John tells me, "You have strange ways in England. Instance, in Hungary, only if you are poor you send your child away at school. You want to bath child, teach him, watch him, don't want him away unless he has to go. Here - people pay a thousand, two thousand pounds a year for child to go away."

He explains his "wider way of looking". Each person expands and expands his ideas until he finds his limit, then builds a circle and stays within it for the rest of his life. Some people start their circles early, John hopes never to find his.

Reflections on a part-time passion

CLIFF LEE

"ALL THE ARTS ASPIRE to the condition of music," Walter Pater once wrote, thereby causing knowledgeable critics to scratch their heads wondering precisely what he meant. Well, I've never actually lost sleep over it, but I should imagine he was referring to that very special attraction and response that music inspires in individuals, and especially in those who have at one time or another actively participated in playing music.

I know that there are several millions of people in this country who put as much distance between themselves and jazz as they can, and for whom it is a raucous din unfitted for human ears. But my own years of jazz experiences, both as a listener and as a part-time musician, have taught me that there are as many degrees of crudity and subtlety contained under the generic label of "jazz" as there are in any other art form, although the basis of its attraction is instinctive rather than acquired - a characteristic which may, or may not, apply to other art forms.

I would like to elaborate on this point. Most of the people I've known who were passionately interested in jazz had been so since childhood, and for many others it seems to have been an involvement since early adolescence. Indeed, I was myself one of that serious-minded group of converts who developed their passion during the post-war jazz "boom", and I look back with some warmth upon those years of the late forties and early fifties when I gained such rich experiences from my growing commitment to jazz. I was fortunate, too, in sharing these with a small and exclusive group of my peers, many of whom are still my firm friends.

How and where my interest was originally stimulated, I don't know. My first consciousness of jazz seems to have been stirred by listening to a recording of the late "Fats" Waller playing and singing "Ain't Misbehavin'", a performance which had the distinction of being the first jazz record which I ever purchased. I also recall a sensation of weakness at the knees when I first heard Louis Armstrong's Hot Five - I believe it was a request for some distant serving soldier during a war-time "Forces Favourites" broadcast.

The consequences of those minor, half-forgotten incidents were much wider than their immediate significance would seem to imply. In a sense, they enriched my life, and probably went some way towards changing it. From the moment that listening to jazz brought from me a spontaneous and instinctive response, certain inevitable consequences seemed to follow.

For a start, a new interest, once recognised, found me seeking out fellow jazz-lovers, and saw much of my time searching the air waves for jazz on ancient radio sets which were only capable of picking up a distant and hazy echo of the American Forces Network's "Jazz Hour", from which I heard for the first time, and detested, the "modern" bop sounds of Charlie Parker. Time was to prove wrong my youthful assessment of the greatest genius of jazz improvisation, but those were early days and

the rich scope of jazz was yet to be discovered.

Finding fellow enthusiasts wasn't difficult. At that time, jazz clubs were springing up all over the country, concerts were regularly promoted in the larger urban centres, and a new generation of jazz groups was appearing in pubs and clubs throughout the country. These were made up of would-be "amateur" musicians, whose enthusiasms tended to be much more in evidence than their musical skills. I was to become one of these.

I was fortunate in encountering several contemporaries whose jazz commitment didn't stop at the record player or radio. There was an embryo jazz group, and I was prevailed upon to take up an instrument and play - just like that! When offered a clarinet for thirty shillings and a trombone for three pounds, I accepted the former for the equivalent of a whole week's wages at the time.

We gathered in church halls, pub rooms and, indeed, in any premises where our noise would be tolerated. We practised, argued about musical policy and choice of numbers, and eventually achieved the minimal level of performing standard which seemed to merit a public appearance. So the jazz-loving public of the North West found itself in possession of yet another embryonic New Orleans-style group to join the existing numbers of crude but enthusiastic amateurs whose Saturday nights were devoted to beer and jazz in darkened rooms, where their experimental efforts were a part of the growing-up process for a whole generation of followers, whether they liked jazz or not.

The mid-fifties found me in Nottingham, and quickly installed in the ranks of the Mick Gill Imperial Jazz Band, a legendary group which had existed from the very beginning of the post-war jazz revival. During the next few years, I played with several well-known local groups, specialising mainly in freewheeling "Dixieland" jazz, where technical limitations can usually be well hidden in ensemble playing. In more recent years, I've occasionally put together my own group, "Jazz Column", mainly to keep my hand in, but most of my energies have been expended in writing about jazz for the local and national press, and less and less have I played. But, however much I try to tell myself that I'm a retired musician, I just can't give up the idea of wanting to play.

So what's the attraction? Clearly, it's a time-consuming activity with more disappointments than rewards. First of all, there's the problem of finding similarly minded musicians who share one's own musical enthusiasms. Not surprisingly, given the independent nature of the jazz fan, this isn't easy. Then there are suitable premises to be found, and Nottingham is surprisingly lacking in this particular commodity. Even with these major hurdles surmounted, there's the problem of building up a following, and jazz fans willing to listen to semi-pro musicians engaged in public practice aren't so easily persuaded to come a second time.

Even a successful and long-standing group - and here in Nottingham we have the Mercia Jazz Band as a prime example of that rare animal - has its difficulties of personnel and policy, which, together with the necessity to develop and progress, makes the task of playing jazz formidable indeed. What usually happens is that members of a successful group settle for what they can do best, sell their product to an audience

which seems to enjoy their music, and proceed to enjoy themselves without stretching their musical ability too much.

For me, the problem of playing jazz has been one of development. In the early years, I was content to play within the boundaries of my existing technical ability - which was limited to say the least. I had fun, like other musicians, and enjoyed the accolades when they came. But nagging at the back of my mind was a desire to improve my playing, and to venture into areas where I hadn't been before. I was held back by two factors. First of all, an unwillingness to devote long hours to hard and systematic practice - and I knew that this was essential if I were to make any musical progress at all. Secondly, it was necessary to develop in the company of other musicians, and this meant rehearsal - long and arduous rehearsal.

Unfortunately, jazz musicians are notoriously reluctant to spend a significant amount of time in this kind of activity, especially if they are fully employed in some other occupation and regard jazz playing as a relaxation. It is probably a combination of these factors, one arising from my own idleness, the other from that of my fellow musicians, that I have virtually dropped out of active jazz participation in the sense of playing with bands, and have concentrated instead on writing about jazz.

But I can't give up entirely the idea that I may one day play again. Like old Bunk Johnson, somebody is going to tempt me out of retirement, fit me with a new set of false teeth, and place a brand-new musical instrument in my hands with the words, "The world awaits", or something like that. What a dream! You see, way back there in the dark confines of my mind is the memory of what playing jazz can be like, and those readers who have themselves been musicians will know what I mean. There's a subliminal aspect of the task which can't be easily expressed in words.

It's something to do with the fundamental character of jazz as an improvised form of music. Its success or otherwise depends very much on the quality of the contribution which an individual makes in relation to what is happening around him. For me, as a "front line" player, this means that I am able, through solos, to express myself within certain limitations of either a technical or musical nature. Within these constraints, and so long as I don't actually depart into nonsense or dissonance, my contribution will be regarded as legitimate by other musicians and by listeners.

This gives me a degree of freedom for instant creativity which is permitted in very few artistic settings. Having once experienced the exhilaration of that kind of freedom, it's difficult to acknowledge that the opportunity may have gone forever. At the moment of launching into a solo, a jazz musician ventures into unknown territory, and at the end of his exploration he will have learned something about himself, about music, about participation with others, and about sheer uninhibited pleasure. In which other activity can this range of experience be encompassed within such a short space of time? In sex perhaps? That may be one of the reasons why jazz playing is so difficult to give up when once experienced - it's rooted in the life force. I wonder if that's what Pater meant with his "All the arts aspire"?

ROBERT ABBOTT

Living in Lady Bay

It's a frozen orange sucker world
Sitting on a wobbly seat
Waiting for puberty

Breezes blow stamp collections
To infinities of Malay Straits,
Penang tigers roam the lower reaches of Rutland Road
And Queen Victoria has landed in Ropsley Crescent

Cats are humming in a bricked-up laundry,
Swans strut proudly like dying ballet dancers
By a lifting bridge Dutch Delft.
Demolition comes too soon for all of us

Chimneysweeps are out all day
Saturday fishing
And Sam The Orchard with the magical hen
Says "I am the Eggman" long before fashion

So I weep by a bus stop by request with a gritty eye
A Number 14, maroon and cream, throws diesel dust at dogs
The zebra lady in white comes across with an American smile
Poppies for growing up in peace, it's an American world

Mr Passchendaele grunts on his sticks, a grandad patch, one eye
He will, but I won't, ever have to die
Living in Lady Bay
Scratching at lifespans

J.R. CRAWFORD

The old woman considers

In that Western isle I was told
That every cloud had a silver
Lining; and surely through that summer
Spent staring at the sky I sold
My time, sun-blinded, growing old,
Neglectful of the dream-weaver
Looming dark and shuffling closer,
With each shuttle's swing more bold.
For only on one August evening did
I trace a glistening edge soon after
Heavy rain as the sun stitched
In ephemeral threads a gossamer
Net across the sea. Bull-nosed
Rathlin, salt-etched soldier,

Was charging through the East
Whilst to the North translucent
Islay, weightless, clear and innocent,
Slim as a needle, lay at peace.
Silhouetted cormorants slid with ease
Into the net, but in their free ascent
They tore the lining, shred the light
Into ragged strips. Nature destroys
What she creates, and when I looked
Again her delicate cloud-embroidery
Had dissolved. The sea, released,
Unpicked the final stitches, turned grey
And left me - emptied and suspended
Between this night and fading day.

Mentor

I cannot follow:
To travel in his furrow
Is to mire my feet in

The clay of derivation.
His ploughshare cuts too
Rigid a path, the glistening

Ridge a relentless reflection
Of forked humanity in
His darkening wake.

But why should I thirst
To pursue such terminal
Severity? My keening

Over his art merely
Mirrors my consciousness -
His certain strike

Unmasks the maggot
Beneath the sod, the
Cancer in the womb.

No, as his steel sharpens
And peoples the wound
I shall turn from the sun

To strip my own pasture;
And to the uneasy
Sibilant music

Of his undeviating blade,
Head sunk, shoulders hunched,
I shall scratch my trade.

KATHERINE KIRK

A day in Nottingham

Dear Editor :- I wonder if you would be interested in my poem of Nottingham for your magazine Nottingham Quarterly. I often write poems but this is the first one I have written on Nottingham. I am ten years old and I go to Underwood C.E. School. Yours sincerely, Katherine Kirk.

The fields grow less, the houses more,
There're cars and buses by the score.
All sorts of people walking past,
Some go slowly some go fast.
The cars rush by with hums and hoots
Past W.H. Smith and Boots.
The Victoria Centre, a place to shop,
With escalators to the top.
Woolworths, Pearsons, Skills as well
And many more shops I could tell.
The lions in the Council Square
They look so faithful lying there,
And

pigeons,

pigeons,

every

where

fly past the fountains, through the air.
The Council House so big and grand
On top of Burtons it does stand.

In rock beneath the Broad Marsh shops
Some new caves have been found,
Built by men so long ago
Into the sandstone ground.
From way up high on sandy rock
Nottingham Castle looks down,
Built one hundred years today
On the highest point in town.

We hurry down the busy street
Tripping over people's feet
To the bus station, it's starting to rain,
Climb on the bus and it's back home again.
The houses less, the fields grow more,
We're back in the country as before.

STANLEY MIDDLETON

Two poems

Ruskin, (I read,) disapproving
Of architecture and decoration
In Rome churches, nonetheless
Went there with docility
For the "secret sake of Miss Tollemache",
Though he never got within
Fifty yards of her. As soon as I
Read that, I was sixteen again,
Knew exactly, renewed the painful
Pleasure, but could not remember
Either the name or the face
Of the girl I felt the pang for.
She was dark, Roman-nosed,
And beautiful. I do not think now
She existed. But she and
Miss Tollemache and Ruskin
And I combined, momentarily.
I am still shaken.

The philologist, Herbert Coleridge,
Learning that he had not long
To live, said, "I must start
Sanskrit tomorrow." Strong

Words. The composer Haydn
Put on his Sunday suit whenever
He sat down to write. These
Men had the just idea: sever

Everyday, death or your gardening
Clothes, from what you sense
You can do best. Did one master
Verbs, one crotchets quicker; hence
The unassimilable humdrum crackpot fence?

Prospect from Eastwood

Lawrence hated them, these red rashes
Of houses scarred across the Erewash valley,
These small brick prisons of the spirit, barring
Beauty from their doors with a coal-bruised scowl,
Pale hills peaked with colliery tips,
And colliers coughing in abrasive air.

How he raged, once born in this bleak bower,
How he raged, and yet they stand here still,
Humped, crouching in November mist,
Or wincing when the spring sun flares.

From them he fled, seeking their withered roots
In the world's secret places, sea and Sardinia,
Mornings in Mexico, yet all his dawns
Of language flamed with the anger of these skies
Reflected from pit-head glare and the midnight train
And the pulse of his fathers throbbing in sullen mines.

All his journeying was a return to this;
Through all his wanderings he never strayed from this back yard
Choked with the refuse that a merrier England grieves for
Over and over each new summer. May his hearth
In a side street of a town in this sour valley
Burn like a phoenix in its grave of ashes.

The Birthplace

"There's not much to see," said the old man
With a pitying smile as I asked the way
To Lawrence's birthplace. "Turn down that jitty
And you'll find it soon enough."

Eastwood on Sunday afternoon:

The Nottingham Road deserted and only an uncertain sun
To greet me as I stepped off the bus.

Shop windows dozed, next week's Super Savers
Hid in their cartons waiting for Monday's shoppers;
The Top Twenty slept, silent in bright-sleeved grooves.

Only the newsagent's was open,
With a flush of pin-ups and comics in the window,
While above the door an ad for the News of the World proclaimed
"All human life is here."

Off the main road,
Down a steep, narrow street the birthplace lurked,
As if even then the astonishing child
Was being shunned as was the man
He later became.

Above the door a simple plaque
With his name and dates of birth and death.

I did not knock:

The way to this past was at another door.
But at least no turnstile barred the way,
No uniformed and misinforming guide,
No stall burdened with brochures and special editions
Corrupted the imagination's encounter
With the reality
Of this lost genesis.

Appearance

I thought I'd make an appearance today,
So I did.

No-one was shocked,
It didn't become a news story.

I guess I'm not special,
But only to me;

I am reaching a height,
But only of my own.

This appearance in the snow,
Passing words among the flakes,

Walking in the purity
And aching with the cold of life.

Gran

Me Granny's not well,
Well, worse than usual.
Her breathing is increasing
To a bubble in her throat.

But she's sitting it out,
Eyes wide to the world.
Her mind is still hers,
She's giving nothing over to rest.

Bless this little lady,
A giant of my past.
My grandma is ailing,
I give her my hand to grasp.

The future of independent cinema

INDEPENDENT FILM MAKERS ASSOCIATION

FORTY YEARS AGO, the cinema in Britain was flourishing, particularly in terms of exhibition. This is no longer the case. Nobody needs to be reminded that cinemas all over the country have been closed at an increasingly depressing rate in the last twenty years, although those which remain have generally been doubled, tripled, or quadrupled - in practice, providing more screens for very many fewer people.

This article aims to explore some of the background to that decline and to describe existing and potential developments within "British cinema" which offer alternatives to historical domination by the whims of British, United States and multi-national investors.

The production of film as a world industry has been dominated by the United States, and was generally established world wide by the late 1920s. The major challenge to its economic profitability, and therefore its survival as a business enterprise and ideological "machine", came in the post-war period. The industry was hit very badly by television and the rapid growth of a range of other leisure objects - consumables and activities allied to a greater private mobility. Identifying television as its principal rival, Hollywood countered with a range of technical devices - wide screen, 3D, sensurround. More recently, it has taken over the role of producer of TV material. The most recent strategy has been the total packaging of "blockbusters" - films like "Jaws", "Close Encounters of the Third Kind", "Star Wars" and, to a lesser extent, "Annie Hall". Even before they reach the screen, the public is subjected to a massive advertising campaign which perhaps costs as much as the film itself, and ironically often utilises television to the full. This is accompanied by a range of other products - books, toys, clothes etc. Without the massive financial profitability of these films, the American industry and its closely affiliated, if not directly owned, distribution and exhibition chains throughout the world, would very rapidly be in crisis.

In this context, the British film industry - production, distribution and exhibition - has declined, although the specific conditions of that decline involve not only a variety of "local" factors but also precise forms of American cultural and economic imperialism.

In bare figures, cinema admissions fell from 1,396 million in 1951 to 215 million in 1969; the number of cinemas from 3,034 in 1960 to 1,581 in 1969. Whole sections of the population rarely visit the cinema any longer: for example, the middle-aged, the old and, perhaps particularly, the lower income groups hardly ever see films except those on television.

This massive decline in attendance had severe repercussions as it became increasingly apparent that the domestic market alone could not sustain traditional feature film production: investors - not least the huge Rank company - began to look elsewhere for a higher rate of return on investment. By the late 1950s, Rank had not only discontinued its production programme but also merged its two release circuits, Gaumont and

Odeon, into one smaller circuit. By 1955, the famous Ealing Studios had closed, unable to guarantee sufficient profit from its six features a year; many other independents - small production companies and minor cinema chains or individual screens - were also forced to close, leaving Rank, ABPC and those American companies still able to maintain the supply of feature films in virtual control of the "British" cinema. Perhaps worst hit by cinema closures have been towns in rural locations and the suburbs of larger cities.

What of the "revival" of British cinema in the "swinging London" decade of the 1960s and the independent companies chiefly responsible for indigenous production - Bryanston, Allied Film-Makers and Tony Richardson's Woodfall Films? Each ran into instructive problems: in spite of making such box office successes as "Whistle down the Wind" and "The League of Gentlemen", Allied Film-Makers simply could not afford anything but smash hits - a slow earner spelt disaster. Bryanston and Woodfall set up a joint independent company with the object of producing low budget productions, but, once again, problems, chiefly with the principal distributors, sent this idea to the wall. For such films as "Tom Jones", "A Hard Day's Night", "Darling", "Accident" and "If" producers turned to international, principally American, sources of finance. This set a pattern of international capital for so-called "British" products, with few exceptions since.

This situation was made even more critical, especially for workers in the industry, with the advent of America's own financial crisis in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which resulted in the closure of many studios in Britain, MGM's at Boreham Wood being one of the principal examples.

Government enquiries and efforts at reviving the industry have been conspicuously piecemeal since 1948. Neither the Eady Levy, a scheme aimed at funnelling some of the box office money back to the producers, nor the development of the National Film Finance Corporation - always inadequately financed - has been incisive or drastic enough to produce any real effect. One obvious element which determines the function of cinema in this country lies with the distribution and exhibition companies. Exhibition is now effectively in the hands of two companies. The government has never attempted to alter this situation. The latest in a long line of government committees, that headed by Sir John Terry in 1975, looks no more like pushing for the drastic action required than any before it. A radical document produced in 1973 by the Association of Cinematographic, Television and Allied Technicians, under the title of "Nationalising the Film Industry", has been ignored.

The present position is indeed very gloomy, as John Ellis, writing in the recently produced British Film Institute Production catalogue, neatly but rather depressingly explains:

"The blame for the decline of the British commercial cinema, decline that is more spectacular than anywhere else in the world, can fairly be attributed in the most part to the activities of the major companies, Rank and ABC/EMI. It is due to their policies that Britain provides the largest single foreign market for the American companies (10.4% of foreign earnings: France for example provides 6.9%). They have preferred to keep buying from the American distributors rather than experimenting with the importation of films from other countries for their smaller

auditoria (soft-core porn is the exception here of course). The reasons for this large-scale destruction of the British commercial cinema are two-fold. First, the demand for profitability imposed by parent companies means that no long-term investments into creating audiences can take place. It is not possible for the majors to educate film tastes towards a greater diversity than exists already by providing those films which, to begin with, will make a loss. The thinking that is concerned with profitability is at once short-term and conservative. The second reason is that these companies have not fully come to terms with the new nature of the cinema. It is no longer a mass art form, this role has been taken by television. However, it remains the only audio-visual medium that has the freedom to question and challenge prevalent moralities and beliefs, as well as to experiment with systems of representation. Those sorts of cinema that are expanding instead of contracting have this attitude. The cinema of pornography and violence works at the very edge of acceptability, exploring and exploiting a crisis in traditional beliefs about sexuality, human relationships and the human body. The avant garde challenges prevalent beliefs about politics, about art and about narrative. The majors hardly penetrate these fields. The avant garde is anathema to them; they have only just begun to experiment with art cinemas. Their cinemas show soft-core porn and films of violence much more readily, though they both (particularly Rank) still hanker after the image of the "family cinema". They are bound to this out-moded image of cinema, and to an economic policy which rules out long-term investment in development of the institution of cinema. These are the reasons why the commercial cinema in Britain has declined rather than contracted and developed to perform a new role. It is in these conditions that a flourishing film culture has developed outside the commercial cinema, and now begins to present a challenge to the fundamental aesthetic, economic, social and political beliefs that support that cinema."

In the last sentence, Ellis points to more encouraging and fairly recent developments in British cinema - as yet barely recognised and certainly not welcomed, either by the industry or its heir, television. A range of so-called "independent" practices has developed over the last decade: from art schools through a flowering of the avant garde and experimental; from agit-prop groups like Cinema Action, the London Women's Film Group, Liberation Films and The Other Cinema, attempting to create oppositional forms of production, distribution and exhibition; from a number of co-ops or workshops (notably the London Film-Makers Co-op - set up in the 1960s) which have also developed alternative/oppositional production and exhibition models. The dubbing of all this work as "independent" might be rather misleading, since much of it can only occur with government funding through institutions like the British Film Institute, the Arts Council and Regional Arts Associations. Therefore there is a relation, although obviously not a direct one, to the state. This relationship and the repercussions it might have for future practice are worthy of much more study.

Much of this work can be fairly located within the notion of an ideological struggle against the methods of production and forms of representation of the massively dominant world film and TV industries - "Hollywood - Mosfilm", as Godard has dubbed it. Many independent film-makers,

perhaps the most interesting currently at work in Britain, are attempting to make films which pose both an alternative to, and radical critique of, film which is construed as manipulative and illusionistic; film which (in over general terms) functions within ideology to bind the viewer into fixed class, sex and racial positions. In this sense, many independent film practices have developed from and within an analysis of art/film/society/viewer which takes the Marxist concept of historical materialism and ideology as crucial analytical tools.

However, although there is this radical element to "independent film culture", that term serves to cover a very wide range of film-makers - for instance, the Association of Independent Producers (AIP) is a group of film-makers many of whom have worked in the industry, but find financing low budget features virtually impossible. Their brief is to seek finance and to persuade the government to revive the production/exhibition aspect of the industry without necessarily moving outside notions of "profitability" and the production of fairly conservative formal and political work.

Of the more radical groups, the Independent Film-Makers Association (IFA), a national body with regional groups, perhaps represents the focal point of a worthwhile future development of British film - in terms of producing films which engage with specific problems for often quite specific audiences. The building of audiences which find this work useful and productive (principally at the moment elements within the Labour movement, the women's movement and other radical social and political groups) is a slow task. Ultimately, however, it is essential if alternative/oppositional film-making and screening is eventually to relate seriously to sections of a wider public.

At present, the entire economic fabric of independent film production/exhibition/distribution is very frail. Government funds are channelled from the British Film Institute to its own Production Board (one of the principal funding bodies for independent production over the last twenty years) and to Regional Arts Associations, which in turn channel money to film-makers and exhibitors. The Arts Council has in recent years also considerably increased its spending on film production and exhibition. Even so, the total for independent film production is still less than half a million pounds per year, of which the Arts Council has nearly £300,000, much of it to be spent in the rather restricted category of documentaries on the arts. The simple fact at present is that independent film, if it is to occupy a crucial role in British life in the future, urgently requires substantial funding increases at every level. One hopes for, but increasingly despairs of, the appearance of a government committee which would really engage with the overall problem of film in the country and perhaps think in terms of large elements of nationalisation under workers' and producers' control as being the way to build the future.

How does this very briefly sketched, and therefore rather distorted, analysis relate to our own local situation in Nottingham? To begin, virtually all the local district cinemas have vanished over the past few years, leaving principally the ABC/Odeon nexus, programmed from elsewhere, as the main provider of new-release material. Their sole concern is, of course, that of screening profitable products rather than in any sense serving particular city or community needs. The same is

inevitably true of the other remaining cinemas - for example, the Classic and the Savoy, which are able, in some instances, to programme interesting second runs, double bills and so forth, but inevitably run into financial trouble if they stray very far from outrightly commercial criteria.

The next layer of exhibition is therefore the Film Theatre, one in a network established by the British Film Institute in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This is a three-day week operation which is drastically under-financed for the sort of tasks it could potentially perform in addition to screening major "art" films. These tasks might include: involving a "constituency" in series of screenings which aimed to be productive in a variety of ways, instituting debates around film, its varieties, history, function and uses; enabling a range of groups to mount their own programmes or single screenings for particular audiences; providing a focus for independent film-makers to introduce, explain and discuss their work to a wider public. The Film Theatre is battling against, on the one hand, a rather unsuitable venue, and, on the other, only a fraction of the subsidy from the British Film Institute which would be required if these sort of activities were to occur on any significant scale.

All this work - given that the precise context of film screening is a major factor in determining how it is understood and used - requires back-up in terms of extensive programme notes, documentation and available books and study materials. Such an approach has been initiated in recent months at the Film Theatre, principally through the "Challenge to Imperialism" season and accompanying booklet and discussion sessions. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons - principally financial but also the rather large size of the theatre for smaller audiences - this sort of work has been reduced and in the future the Film Theatre will mainly be concentrating on screening new European film with some of the more interesting American second runs.

A new cinema seating about sixty-five to seventy people, which should be operational shortly at the Midland Group, represents one of the most exciting developments in Nottingham at present - assuming the British Film Institute finds the urgently required funds to enable the cinema to be opened. Beginning with a "Women and Film" season in the autumn, and continuing with a major retrospective of independent and avant-garde work in 1979, the Midland Group cinema will be able to offer the public some real alternatives. It is hoped that a whole range of events around the screenings will be possible - for example, visiting film-makers, lectures and discussions.

The Midland Group/East Midlands Arts Film Workshop is also the "home" of the East Midlands IFA Group, and their close relation to the cinema will undoubtedly be highly productive in the future. It is also to be hoped that the cinema will be available for a variety of screenings suggested and mounted by other groups in the city - at present, there is no other suitable venue.

The Film Theatre, the Midland Group cinema, the Workshop, and to some extent the IFA Group itself all rely for survival upon government subsidy through the British Film Institute and East Midlands Arts. At present, the level of subsidy to the regions has scarcely reached survival proportions let alone allowing scope for significant development. We

can only hope that this situation changes over the next few years.

To finish on an optimistic note: the developments at the Midland Group could provide a pattern for the future, in which film-makers and audiences combine to produce a film-making exhibition practice to suit the actual needs of communities throughout the city and wider areas of the East Midlands. It will certainly provide the possibility for the development of a progressive "cinema" in Nottingham.

Some useful addresses

Independent Film Makers Association (East Midlands), c/o Robert Sheldon, Midland Group, 24/32 Carlton Street, Nottingham. Tel. 582636.

Midland Group/East Midlands Arts Film Workshop: same as above.

Nottingham Film Theatre (Douglas Tansley, John Robson) Broad Street, Nottingham. Tel. 46095.

Film Officer (Alan Fountain), East Midlands Arts, Mountfields House, Forest Road, Loughborough, Leics. Tel. Loughborough 218292.

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The following is a short selection of books and periodicals dealing with the British cinema, plus some useful catalogues of independent work. Most of these are held at the University, Polytechnic or County libraries.

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A Mirror for England. Raymond Durnat. Faber & Faber 1970.

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Screen, Spring 1976: The future of the British film industry.

Spring 1977: The Independent Film-Makers Association Annual General Meeting.

Catalogues

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British Film Institute Productions 1951-76.

The Other Cinema Catalogue.

The London Film-makers Co-op Catalogue.

Yorkshire Arts Association Productions Catalogue.

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CHRISTOPHER WEIR has written articles for a wide variety of publications. He lives in Nottingham, though he recently spent a year in North Wales to complete a course in Palaeography and Archives Administration at Bangor University. He is married with two children.

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.