

FitzroviaNews



Fitzrovia News is produced by residents and volunteers and distributed free to all businesses and residential addresses in Fitzrovia

Issue 119, Winter 2010

Campaign group celebrate 40 years

The Charlotte Street Association celebrated 40 years of campaigning to preserve the character of Fitzrovia and fighting for more social housing. Guests at the Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Centre, who included Frank Dobson MP, Professor of Government and Politics Tony Travers, Bloomsbury ward councillors and Camden's cabinet members, paid tribute to the group's tireless efforts to preserve heritage, social amenity and create new open space.

Sewing club

Mothers at All Souls' Primary School have worked together to buy their first sewing machine to start up a sewing club, writes Helena Roden.

They were brought together by Duda Boric the school's Parent Support Advisor. During their regular coffee mornings the parents decided they wanted a sewing class. The group ran a food stall to raise funds. Over 20 parents brought cakes, samosas and freshly cooked crêpes they raised £123 and were able to purchase a sewing machine.

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A PROPER BIKE SHOP

Workers seize control of bicycle shop

By Linus Rees

A bicycle shop in Fitzrovia has been bought from the owner by the shop workers. The long-established shop on the corner of New Cavendish Street and Hanson Street was bought by three shop workers in September this year.

Fitzrovia Bicycles, formerly known as Cavendish Cycles, is now run by three bicycle mechanics – Alex, Tom and William – who specialise in repairs of all kinds. They had previously worked in the shop for three years and felt they would be better off running the shop themselves rather than being employees. "We thought we could do a much better job at running the business than the previous owner," said William Taylor.

So they formed their own company, arranged some finance, and put their own money where their collective mouths should be.

William is a fine artist by trade and has put this creativity into the shop. Tom Hipwell also comes from an artistic background being a graphic designer. Alex "phaser-gun" Polakowski is the mechanical expert and overseas all the repairs and bike-building. What they lacked in business knowledge they sought advice about. But the three of them learnt an



Bicycle barricade. Fitzrovia Bicycles is now being run by the workers who believe they can do a much better job than the previous owner. Picture: Linus Rees

awful lot from the mistakes of the previous owner.

Alex announced the shop takeover on the popular London Fixed Gear and Single Speed forum back in August saying: "I know a great deal of people on this forum have frequented the shop in the past and some of you who've been in recently may well have noticed that our stock levels have been poor if not somewhat non-existent, and to anyone who we've let down I can only apologise. Unfortunately we've been at the mercy of the current owner, who

for some reason didn't seem to be willing to put in the money to keep decent parts in stock. So when offered the chance to take over we've jumped at it.

"The most notable initial change will be the shop name, it'll be changing to Fitzrovia Bicycles. Although the Cavendish Cycles name seems to be quite well known, we're also keen to mark a fresh start. It may take a few months for things to change to how we want them to be, as funds may well be tight for us to start with,

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Historic pub is victim of brewers' cull

An historic 200-year-old pub has been closed in Rathbone Place. It is the Black Horse which has been serving ale since 1809, writes Mike Pentelow.

Barriers now surround it on the corner of Evelyn Yard and a notice advises customers to go instead to the Marquis of Granby, which is also owned by the Nicholson's pubs chain, part of brewers Mitchells & Butlers of Birmingham.

A brass plaque describing the history of the pub has been purloined.

A mass cull of pubs has been mounted by the brewery which has sold 49 individual pubs and 333 "non core" pubs since March, raising over £500 million. This has helped increase profits by 26.1 per cent in the year to the end of September to £169 million and an operating profit of £322 million.

Huge developments, yet no strategic plan

Four re-developments next to each other at the heart of Fitzrovia are to be developed in a haphazard fashion without any vision to bring about either open space or connecting paths, writes Pete Whyatt.

Planning applications for sites at the former Workhouse in Cleveland Street, the UCL Windeyer building, Howland Street, Astor College Charlotte Street and a mental health centre in Tottenham Mews have been submitted.

All these developments are next to each other but are being treated without any strategy or co-ordinated view, says the Charlotte Street Association campaign group, who are calling upon Camden Council to treat the developments as a combined whole and to deliver public open space and pedestrian amenity



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Editorial Team

Mike Pentelow:
editor and features editor
Linus Rees:
assistant editor and fundraiser
Pete Whyatt:
news and production editor
Fiona Green:
arts and listings editor
Brian Jarman:
writer and sub-editor
Barb Jacobson:
associate editor
Jennifer Kavanagh:
associate editor
Bertie Dinnage:
associate editor
Chris Webb:
sub-editor

Contributors:

John Axon
Children of All Souls' School
Sally Beerworth
Ms Fish
Clifford Harper
Joseph Healy
Denise Julien
William Robert Lee
Sam Lomberg MBE
Max Neufeld
Guy O'Connell
Jess Owen
Helena Roden
Sunita Soliar
Robert Taylor
Sandra Wheen
Kipper Williams

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Women and the city

We've known for a while now that undergraduates work as prostitutes to pay for their degrees. Now, prostitution has moved into the middle classes. The most successful being women in the caring professions like nurses, as they are able to give emotionally. And let's not be naïve, there are men who also work in the sex trade, servicing both men and women.

But the former does not sit well with me. It makes life for women who are not that way inclined far more difficult, because what is considered "as normal" has changed, leaving a vacuum where protocol used to exist. I truly believed that no woman chooses to become a prostitute, and so, was not to blame for having fallen into that trap. How out of touch am I? Men are starting to believe that propositioning women for sex is acceptable and normal.

I was very surprised to be propositioned in my local bar (which I won't name at this point) so I complained to the owner, expecting support and reassurance that it would never happen again. I received neither. He told me that he could not

control what his customers say, and his attitude towards me was patronising and offensive.

Unable to put the situation out of my mind, I made some inquiries on the legality of prostitution in bars. The Licensing Act of 1964 that prevented licence holder from allowing the licences premise to be used for prostitution no longer applies. Prostitution is no longer illegal.

If people are allowed to sell their bodies for sex, then why are people not allowed to sell part of their bodies; like a kidney? The law does not permit it because the selling of human parts is considered immoral. And, as our legal system pairs rights with duties, then, if some people have the right to sell their bodies for sex, on whom does the duty fall to protect those who choose not to?

The bar owner made me pay for daring to complain. His attitude towards me was no different to racism; the intent was to demean, humiliate and degrade. Real men know when to put their egos to one side. Bullies don't.

Denise Julien

Bloomsbury ward councillors' surgeries

6.00-7.00pm on the first and third Fridays of the month at
Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Centre, 39 Tottenham Street, W1T 4RX
And on the second and fourth Fridays of the month at
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Hanway Street conservation area under threat from giant clothes retailer

The ancient lane of Hanway Street is threatened with major disruption by plans to turn it into a loading bay for a major new store in Oxford Street, writes Pete Whyatt.

If allowed it will mean 12 to 15 deliveries a day by 18.5 tonne lorries that are 12 metres long from 7am until 9pm from Mondays to Saturdays, and 10am until 6pm on Sundays, plus two overnight deliveries between 7pm and 7am by 40 tonne lorries in Oxford Street.

As each lorry will take about ten minutes to enter and another ten minutes to manoeuvre out it will mean the road being blocked for about a third of the time during the day.

Hanway Street was designated as a conservation area in 1990 because of its "intimate character and charm, created by the narrow, curving streetscape and piecemeal way in which it has developed".

Construction on the vast 85,000 square feet Primark clothing store opposite Tottenham Court Road station (where Virgin, Zavvi and Sports Direct used to be) started earlier this year and it is expected to be open by Christmas 2011.

The company, a subsidiary of Associated British Foods, has applied to site a loading bay in Hanway Place (off Hanway Street) to both Camden and Westminster councils. They have to apply to both authorities because although the site is in Westminster, Camden roads and pavements are affected.

It is being proposed that part of the street be widened to allow

two-way traffic for the heavy goods vehicles.

This would completely destroy the character of the street which is a quiet road of small scale shops and bars, with a "Victorian feel". In fact Camden council plans to develop this feel by creating a series of lanes to house boutiques and small shops from Oxford Street to Charlotte Street (through its Site Allocation Preferred Approach which is now in consultation).

Hanway Street and Hanway Place include residential accommodation, and the proposed bay will generate considerable noise nuisance. Residents fear it will cause other problems.

Lorries turning into Hanway Street from Tottenham Court Road (as proposed) will require a wide turning circle and block two lanes of traffic on Tottenham Court Road - just as is the case when buses turn from Tottenham Court Road into Great Russell Street. As Hanway Street and Great Russell Street are opposite each other, there will be utter chaos whenever a bus is trying to turn into Great Russell Street at the same time as a lorry into Hanway Street. This will be added to if a lorry is trying to turn out of Hanway Street or a taxi is dropping someone off.

At present there is considerable pedestrian traffic on Hanway Place, and so the removal of one of the pavements will be unsafe. Pedestrians will be forced to dodge between the lorries, which could well lead to accidents.

There's a mouse in the house

In truth, there's always been, but parts of Fitzrovia are like a Greek Island holiday for the little creatures, writes Guy O'Connell. The house mouse (*Mus Musculus*, *Mus Domesticus*) long ago found a place in the small flats and restaurants of our home turf. They are a part of life, but they contaminate food and they spread disease. Residents divide on how to deal with them. One friend has a live trap, and releases any captives in Regent's Park (think "Shawshank Redemption.") Another has a snap trap, which he baits with peanut butter. The mouse in his place eats the nutty lure most nights, while the device itself only ever seems to snap on his toes as he stumbles into the kitchen for a midnight trip. My neighbour has invested in a cat, and whatever it does to the mice, it's also learnt to poop at will on our window-ledge. Bingo, no more mouse droppings, just cat poo instead. There may be much to admire in a

mouse. Wikipedia claims that the female of the species has five (count them) five pairs of mammary glands and nipples. They can squeeze through the smallest of holes, down to 6 mm, and scarcely ever need a drink. But Camden Council warns that they are a health hazard. Our high score of pubs restaurants and multi-occupancy houses mean that the mouse population is a real part of life here in Fitzrovia. Council officials advise that "where more than 15% of properties in a block have problems with mice, we recommend the whole block be treated as one programme." Here at FN we're conducting a small, mouse sized survey, do email us to let us know if you see more of the mouse now than in the past. What should be done? While you're thinking about it, here's an old proverb "never throw a stone at the mouse, and break the precious vase."

Store Street shops still mostly empty but The Bedford Estates hopeful of new tenants

By Linus Rees

A parade of shops along Store Street remains mostly boarded up after landlord The Bedford Estates raised rents and refurbished the shop units over the past year. The Bedford Estates is however hopeful that the shops will be let over the next few months. A restaurant and offices will also be built on the former Bloomsbury Service Station and will be completed at the end of 2011.

As previously reported (*Fitzrovia News*, summer 2009) residents and businesses in Store Street had feared that much of the street would be empty and that the street would resemble a ghost town.

Mark de Rivaz, steward of The Bedford Estates, told *Fitzrovia News* "We wanted to turn around what was a tired street to look at. The previous leaseholder of 80 years, the Hill Tenants Association (named after Percy Hill), had not done much to maintain the buildings. Yet they were only paying £100 a year for each building in the parade." The 80-year lease on the shop and residential units expired at the end of 2009. "We took back control of all the buildings and renegotiated rents with the occupiers. The tenants were faced with paying market rents. As a result many of them left. Many of the previous businesses really couldn't be sustained commercially." A previous shop tenant who left the street told *Fitzrovia News* that The Bedford Estates was a "greedy landlord" and doubted that the currently empty shops along the street would be let very soon.

Mr de Rivaz, however, said the Bedford Estates were confident that the empty shop units would soon be let: "The main parade of shops along Store Street will have new occupiers as well as some returning occupiers. We are currently still negotiating with possible tenants but there will likely be a new bookshop, art gallery, Sicilian delicatessen, flower shop, and restaurant. And of course, already opened is the Store Street Espresso. We want a mix of uses along the street."

There will also be two pop-up shops open for a few months over the Christmas and the spring period.

Oxford Street buses could be routed through Fitzrovia



A taxi turns right into Great Portland Street. The busy junction with Mortimer Street could have 40 double-decker buses an hour during the day and 20 an hour during the night pass through it. The bollards and traffic lights on the pedestrian island would have to be removed to allow the buses to be able to turn into this narrow street.

By Linus Rees

Transport for London (TfL) are proposing to re-route buses through part of Fitzrovia and remove traffic bollards at a busy junction next to a Post Office to allow the buses to turn into a narrow street. Residents and small businesses in Great Portland Street will suffer the through-traffic that the Mayor of London, Westminster City Council (WCC) and the New West End Company Business Improvement District (NWECD-BID) don't want in Oxford Street and Regent Street.

TfL's proposals are partly a response to the Mayor of London's effort to reduce the amount of buses travelling along Oxford Street. In a statement TfL said: "This complements work with the City of Westminster and the New West End Company to enhance the area through traffic management and urban realm initiatives. Routes 8, 25 and 55 currently terminate at Oxford Circus and come into service on Vere Street and then run via Oxford Street west. It is proposed to divert them so they no longer serve the Oxford Street west of Oxford Circus but instead run via Cavendish Square, Mortimer Street and Great Portland Street back to Oxford Street east. It is hoped to

introduce this before the end of the year for routes 8 and 55, subject to consultation. Route 25 would also be diverted, on conversion to double-deck operation in 2011."

This would mean that buses would travel east along Mortimer then turn right to head south along Great Portland Street at the busy junction outside the Post Office. Mortimer Street is two lanes one way heading east, while Great Portland Street is a narrow two-way street. To allow the buses to turn the traffic island on the southern part of the junction.

Yoram Blumann of the Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association has called upon Westminster City Council to scrap the proposed route changes. Mr Blumann said residents will experience seven days a week and 24-hour a day disturbance; and small businesses will have their deliveries disrupted. "These bus routes are unacceptable to local residents and business people," said Mr Blumann.

"Buses travelling at a rate of up 40 per hour during the day and 20 per hour after midnight each day would significantly harm residential amenity and may put at risk the livelihood of small businesses in this area. The possible improvement in

Oxford Street would come at the expense of local residents and businesses living near by. We are sure that this is not what the Mayor had in mind, nor the NWECD-BID spearheading the project. The regeneration of Oxford Street was meant to enhance and support the immediate areas bordering Oxford Street without inflicting adverse impact," Stated Mr Blumann.

Councillor Jonathan Glanz stated: "I support the objective of reducing buses [along Oxford Street] but also recognise the concerns of residents in relation to displacement. As West End Ward Councillor I have expressed and continue to express my concern and support in this area. Westminster City Council would like to see buses reduced throughout the length of Oxford Street and we are encouraging curtailment of buses at either end of Oxford Street and a reduction of overall numbers," added Cllr Jonathan Glanz.

Fitzrovia resident and local government expert Tony Travers told *Fitzrovia News* "My general view is the small streets of Fitzrovia are entirely inappropriate for bus routes and, indeed, other through traffic."

TfL will carry out a pilot along the route and an environmental assessment in December 2010.

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Fitzrovia Transition

Fitzrovia Transition received a £500 grant from Camden Council's Community Green Fund. The grant is to provide training, promotion for community events, and start-up administration costs.

Fitzrovia Transition is a local initiative to strengthen community ties between residents, neighbours and businesses, united in the goal towards a lower carbon economy, and promoting "a greener environment and lifestyle".

Transition Towns offers a positive and achievable locally-led vision of resilient communities in the face of higher fuel costs, climate change, and increasingly fragile global economies. There are now over 2000 Transition Towns globally, and 8 out of 13 of the local wards in Camden host Transition Initiatives.

"It's great to see Camden and other councils putting their support behind Transition in line with their Sustainability objectives," said David Hannah of Fitzrovia Transition. "It shows they get it, and are willing to foster the growth of on-the-ground local projects with seed funding, advice and support from their sustainability teams".

Fitzrovia Transition was started early this year by Fiona Green. "I started with just a few leaflets, and a handful of people at the first few meetings". However, attendance started to steadily increase. "Local businesses and organisations have been fantastic in providing meeting venues and support".

A viewing earlier this year of documentary film "The Power of Community" – about how Cuba responded to a complete loss of oil imports by "growing food everywhere imaginable" – attracted Fitzrovia Transition's largest turn out to date. Future projects are planned to promote urban gardening skills, rooftop gardens, apple-pressing, fruit drying and canning, workshops to develop further local ideas and skills – as well as acoustic music events and friendly pub meet-ups.

The next Transition Fitzrovia meeting is January 13th, 2011 from 6 to 8 p.m. at Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way. All are welcome – admission is free, and you can bring refreshments to share and a friend – or just come along.

For more information, visit www.transitionculture.org or e-mail admin@b-prep.co.uk.

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Cycle shop

... continued from front page

but bear with us and we're hoping to make the best of it. We're seriously looking forward to making some exciting changes, and no doubt we'll keep you all posted on developments," he told the forum readers.

Alex told *Fitzrovia News*: "We do all sorts of repairs and we do it very quickly in our own workshop here. If you bring it in early we'll do it the same day. We also do repairs and service for the Brompton folding bicycles as we an authorised service dealer."

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Homelessness set to rocket in area

Fears of overcrowding, rough sleeping, and damage to communities and schools

By Mike Pentelow

Ninety per cent of those hit by the government benefit caps will live in Westminster and Camden, warned Karen Buck, MP for Westminster North.

Fears of increasing homelessness, overcrowding, people sleeping rough, and damages to communities and schools were all expressed at the conference she was addressing.

This was organised by the Westminster Community Network and held at the Indian YMCA in Fitzroy Square in November.

The caps on housing allowances from next April will have "a profound effect on people in Westminster, more than anywhere else in the country," said Karen Buck.

Nearly 3,000 people in one bedroom flats will have their benefit cut by £78 a week, 1,360 in two-bedroomed flats by £140, and 550 in three-bedroomed flats by £260, she said.

Increasing council housing rents to 80 per cent of the market rate would double the rents in Westminster, she added.

"Social housing has fallen by 20,000 in Westminster over the last 30 years," she declared.

"There is a real danger of

people sleeping rough or sharing more to a room.

"I have real concerns about people holding down jobs, pensioners surviving, and particularly people with children and their connections with local schools.

"I want cases, because the argument with the government will be driven by real stories rather than statistics, and practice rather than theory. Get in touch with me through email (buckk@parliament.uk).

"The entire increase in housing benefit over the last decade has been because of an increase in the number of cases, not tear-away inflation in rents."

She also pointed out that 30 per cent of those receiving housing benefit were at work but were so poorly paid they needed the benefit to bridge the gap between their wages and their rent.

When the total benefit allowance is capped at £500 it will hit 50,000 homes nationally, she said, "and nine out of ten of those will be in Westminster and Camden."

Alastair Murray, deputy director of Housing Justice, said there were 5,500 people on the housing waiting list in

Westminster, and the number of people sleeping rough on the streets had increased to 120.

Overcrowding will result from the latest benefit changes, he added, with four children under the age of eight being allowed to share a room, and the age for adults sharing rooms increasing from 25 to 35.

A third of all those sleeping rough in Westminster were long term, said Nik Ward of Westminster council's Rough Sleeping Team. He urged people who wanted help for people sleeping on the streets to phone the Westminster Helpline on 020 7641 3841.

The plight of low paid workers faced with higher rents was highlighted by Shirley Springer, chief executive of Westminster Citizen Advice Bureaux.

"Low paid workers in bars and restaurants in the epicentre will be severely disrupted as they now claim housing benefit to top up their pay. There will be severe disruption not only to them when this is stopped but also to their families, their schools, social networks and health care.

"The council are encouraging them to negotiate lower rents, but that is not realistic, and rent

When the total benefit allowance is capped at £500 it will hit 50,000 homes nationally ... and nine out of ten of those will be in Westminster and Camden, warns MP

arrears can be seen as making yourself intentionally homeless.

"We need to collect evidence on the impact of real life cases."

The disruptive effect the cuts could have on the community in Fitzrovia was raised by Helena Roden.

"If people with families, some with a lot of children, are forced out of accommodation and out of the area it will affect

our single primary school (All Souls)," she declared.

"This will have a knock-on effect on the income of the school and the education we can provide. The school budget is determined by the number of pupils there are each January.

"Many are Bangladeshi people who are long established in the area and have strong stable traditions based on living at home with parents. Without that support of looking after elderly parents there will be a knock-on effect on health. If families are rehoused miles away and their parents are still living here the elderly will have a hard time.

"Children won't be able to grow up in the area any more where they are part of a strong community."

She also called for the wages to be pushed up for the low paid in the area's many bars and restaurants.

The Westminster Community Network asked for real life examples of those affected to be supplied to it by phoning 020 7723 1216 (ask for Daniel or Keri) or emailing wcn@awcvs.org.

Fitzrovia News will also be interested to hear of any cases on fitzrovia@news@yahoo.co.uk.



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*Camden, Islington, Westminster [the wards of Regents Park, Marylebone High St, West End or St James] and the City of London [the wards of Farringdon Without, Farringdon Within, Aldersgate, Cripplegate, Bassishaw, Cheap, Cordwainer, Walbrook, Vintry, Queenhithe, Castle Baynard, Bread Street, Coleman Street, Dowgate]

What the proposed housing benefit limits will mean

By Robert Taylor

Private tenants in Fitzrovia who are receiving Local Housing Allowance (LHA) face some very stark choices indeed next year.

From April 2011 LHA rates for all housing benefit claimants will be capped as follows:

£250 per week for a 1 bedroom property

£290 per week for a 2 bedroom property

£340 per week for a 3 bedroom property

£400 per week for a 4 bedroom or larger property

To make matters worse, from October 2011 LHA rates will be based on the thirtieth percentile, which basically means only 30 percent of properties in a given area will be affordable to benefit claimants, rather than 50 percent as before.

Then from April 2013 LHA rates will only increase by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rather than the higher Retail Price Index (RPI). Also, tenants who have been claiming Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) for more than a year will have their LHA cut by 10 percent, and if you are 35 years of age or under you will only be able to claim the rate for a shared room in a property. Which means that you will not be able to claim housing benefit and live on your own until you reach the arbitrary age of 36!

In fact, these cuts are so controversial that not only have they been condemned by tenants groups like the Camden Federation of Private tenants and homeless charities like Shelter and Crisis – but landlord groups and London's Mayor Boris Johnson – who provocatively described them as "Kosovo-style social cleansing".

So, what will happen to private tenants living in central London who will not be able to afford their rent?

The government expects the following to happen:

1. The tenant will negotiate a lower rent with the landlord
2. The tenant who works and claims LHA will make up the

difference out of their own pocket

3. The tenant will move to a cheaper outer London borough or out of the city altogether

What is likely to happen:

1. According to a recent survey conducted by London Councils very few landlords will be willing to reduce the rent – especially if the claims of 5 tenants currently chasing every property in the private rented sector is true

2. Part-time or low-paid workers will be extremely unlikely to have any spare cash available to make up the difference

3. If large numbers of tenants do move to other boroughs or outside London it will increase the rents in these areas

And the ones that don't get mentioned:

4. More people will become homeless thus putting a greater strain on already cash-strapped local councils and other services

5. The capital will become an even more divided city than it already is with the centre becoming a ghetto for the wealthy and the edges a ghetto for the poor

What should you do if you are a Camden private tenant in receipt of LHA and think it will not cover your rent next year?

1. Don't panic – and get in touch with somebody who can give you advice as soon as possible

2. We can be contacted on: 020 7383 0151, the council's Private Sector Housing Advice Team on: 020 7794 5801 (they have a lot of experience of negotiating with landlords) or get in touch with a local group that gives housing advice such as the Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association on: 020 7580 4576

Camden Federation of Private Tenants, 11-17 The Marr, Camden Street, NW1 0HE.

We can also be contacted by email on: admin@cfpt.org.uk

Robert Taylor is organiser of Camden Federation of Private tenants

The joy of Marshall Street Baths



Breath control: Ms Fish pleasures herself in the restored and re-opened 30m pool. Photo: Budgie Smuggler

By Ms Fish

Ah, the pleasure of again swimming in that beautiful, 30 metre marble-lined pool, after 13 years of closure! The Friends of Marshall Street Baths is to be highly commended for managing to save this relic of by-gone civic pride. Westminster's coat of arms, emblazoned on the back wall: "Custodi Civitatem Domine" – meaning 'Guard the City, O Lord' – is a stark reminder of a time when public property and services were not merely assets to be monetised, but part of the fabric of society. This pool was mentioned several times by locals during a recent oral history project.

A shame to lose the seating on either side of the main pool and learning pool at the back, so there is no space for the kind of display and competitions the public used to enjoy in the days of Jonny Weismuller. The bog-standard grey glass panels reflected light well, but still the sides seemed cramped.

Since my student days, when I used to sneak into Marshall Street without paying, I have become addicted to having a sauna after swimming. The Health Suite here is very well appointed, with good-quality non-slip ceramic tiles underfoot and lining the steam-room. The whole, which also has two saunas, is oddly laid out: one sauna is enormous, with seating for over 30, the other tiny with room for only five – there was a missed opportunity here to build a

Turkish bath with rooms of increasing temperature. The lounge area was not as warm as it should have been, and there was the constant whiff of high strength cleaning fluid which decidedly did not add to the atmosphere.

The afternoon I went was supposed to be women-only, but there was a man on reception so none of the freedom one would expect. He also wanted to charge an extra £1 for the use of a towel. Apparently you don't pay this if you pay separately for use of the Health Suite but do if you've signed up to the 'ultimate' package which includes use of the suite. Another oddity: there is no middle charge between swim-only (£30 a month) and 'ultimate' which includes use of the gym (£49 a month). And membership, even for a resident, does not link with other Westminster sports facilities or even Nuffield's own chain. A fee of £49 a month will usually get you swimming, sauna and sometimes gym at other local authority leisure centres across London and some YMCAs. No wonder the place was nearly empty.

In the next Fitzrovia News:

A PUB GUIDE FOR THE AREA

A special pull-out section on all the pubs and bars, and what they have to offer.

...continued from page 3

Being Marvellous

God knows what the people having lunch outside the restaurant next door made of it all, writes William Robert Lee. They probably thought: "Fitzrovia's gone down a peg".

Bonnie and Clyde had come in disguised as mother and daughter. The daughter stole a bracelet and as she was about to leave the shop I grabbed her by the arm trying to drag her back into the shop with one hand and trying to shove the mother out with the other hand.

Well, the mother wasn't exactly a small woman, she got wedged in the doorway. The bracelet snapped and white pearls bounced off every surface and all over the floor.

There was another lady in the shop at the time just browsing in one of the cabinets who almost collapsed with fright. She probably only popped in on her lunch break thinking "Oh, what a lovely little shop".

Well, this poor woman couldn't get past to exit as I was swinging the thief around by the arm. Finally both Bonnie and Clyde left the shop quickly followed by me who was shouting a string of four-letter words at them down the street.

I went back into the shop and the poor, frightened lady was still there and in my best Noel Coward voice I said "I do beg your pardon. I don't normally act like that. I don't know what came over me".

Faulty checkout

Tesco's Goodge Street drew the attention of Camden's food standards department in November after an out-of-date item of food was allowed to pass through an automatic checkout and be sold, writes Linus Rees. An item past the use by date was noticed when a customer later checked the date on the label, and then made a complaint that the barcode checkers were faulty.

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Autumn term news from All Souls Primary School



Year 1 held a Collective Worship. They welcomed us all in all the different languages they speak in the classroom.



Year 5 taught us about Diwali.



Year 1 went on a trip to a fire station



Year 6 learnt about the great fire of London through drama.

The following is a diary entry by Ellie (Year 6) about the great fire of London.

Sunday 2nd September 1666.

Dear Diary,

I woke up startled by the screams of people far away. Anxiously, I ran to look out of the window feeling nervous because I did not know what was going on. Children and people ran as fast as wolves from huge waves of fire. Desperately I packed my cheese and wine to run as fast as I could to get to the other side of the river.



Above and below: The whole school have been involved in writing projects. Year 2 had a week of reading the story "Where the Wild Things Are", Maurice Sendak, and wrote their own versions of the story.



Drinking fountains proposed

Councillor Jonathan Glanz has proposed a network of drinking water fountains throughout the West End by restoring existing water fountains (such as the one outside Great Portland Street station), and the introduction of new fountains, writes Pete Whyatt.

Jonathan told Fitzrovia News: "I have received the support of local residents and businesses and I am hoping the new fountains could be paid for by developers and the older fountains restored with help from the Drinking Water Fountains Foundation with support from the West End Ward Budget.

"Such fountains would provide a healthy alternative to other forms of drink. This would also reduce packaging, deliveries, collection of waste and landfill space. They would serve young and old, residents and visitors alike. They could also provide a much needed opportunity to hydrate those affected by excessive alcohol consumption.

"Their reintroduction would make the West End a more welcoming place for the millions of visitors expected for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, World Pride, and the Olympics and Paralympics in 2012, and produce a lasting effect for the future."

Carb based loyalty programmes

By Sally Beerworth

I find myself with a friend in the lobby of the Charlotte Street Hotel; it was not really an accident that we ended up here...we would have found our way back here blindfolded and via hot coals if we had to.

The hotel needn't have spent so much money on expensive flowerpots and flags out the front: the bar snacks they serve tell me everything I need to know about the place.

You can tell the kind of place you are sitting in by eyeing off the bowls on the bar. In today's case, shiny silver bowls designed to fit one well-manicured hand. I am not actually sure what is in my bowl exactly, in fact I cannot even tell you what food groups are represented. But I know it's good.

It looks like a Disney toy has exploded in there (I feel equipped to make this observation having put my brother's Mickey Mouse in the blender some years ago.) I am unsure what the green and orange pieces taste like, but if ever there was a mark of quality, surely these bits were it.

There is a correlation between the volume of colours in a bar snack bowl and how much you are likely to be stung when the bill comes. In my case I was definitely looking at a second mortgage to pay for my vodka and coke, a tipple traditionally enjoyed by those who don't worry about anything as trivial as a glass. I would feel pretty silly telling the homeless guy around the corner that, for the same money, I could have bought several bottles of vodka. I just know he would be fascinated by my price analysis on potato-based spirits.

While you wait for your takeaway (seems pretty appalling, even by my standards, to get something delivered a whopping 50metres,) at the little bar in the Curry Leaf they offer you four-day-old newspapers and some Bombay Mix. I am not sure that this food is really worthy of capital letters. I do find that my appetite for aubergine served in litres of oil is however greater after a couple of helpings of their bar snacks.

Or it may be that I just worked up an appetite whilst



helping them fold napkins; they gave me a lesson recently whilst I waited. I would have asked for a discount on my order, but it turned out I was not half as skilled as their waiting staff...this will not be surprising to anyone who has ever worked with me. As soon as I left, some poor waiter not only had to hunt and gather the Bombay Mix I had sprayed around the place, but they also had to rebuild all my linen bishops' hats. The church has enough problems to deal with, without having to worry about the way I had represented their wardrobe.

In one of my favourite Fitzrovia pubs the bar man will open a bag of crisps if you sit at the bar and drink with him. I feel a little bit like I am prostituting myself...but I am not sure who gets more out of the deal? Either way, whenever I am tossing up which pub to take my laptop to, his one seems to come to mind. It is a carb based loyalty program. It's not a posh pub; so there are no wheat based rainbow snacks, but crisps are all I am looking for sometimes. Please note, I have not mentioned the name of his pub for two reasons – firstly I am unsure whether his boss knows what he gets up to, so I don't want to cut off the hand that feeds me, so to speak. And secondly I don't want any of you turning up there and taking the crisps that I have worked so hard to be offered.

I have a friend coming over tonight and I was going to serve nibbles. Now that I have looked at the quality of my own bar snacks, I don't like what they say about me as a host. So I empty my handbag and pour out the snacks I have collected from the Charlotte Street Hotel. After all, I don't want her thinking that I am cheap.

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Radical wrote his most important works in New Cavendish Street

By Barb Jacobson

Thomas Paine, the most influential democratic agitator and pamphleteer in history, lived for brief periods in London over the course of a peripatetic life. He first came to London as a journeyman staymaker in 1756, then on behalf of the Excise Officers in the few months before he left for America in 1774. When he came back from America a very famous man in 1788, Paine often stayed in London until he left for good in 1792. The project he brought with him, his design for an iron bridge, soon gave way to the promotion of revolution.

Most of these addresses are unknown. Paine seems to have stayed in a variety of temporary lodgings, mainly in Soho and the City. There is one definite address however, for the last and possibly most important months Paine ever spent in London: No. 7 Upper Marylebone Street, on what is now 148 New Cavendish Street in Fitzrovia.

This was the home of his friend Thomas 'Clio' Rickman. Rickman was a versifier on famous people and events, with largely republican themes, a bookseller and bookbinder. His house became a centre for local writers and artists with a

New research reveals Thomas Paine lived at number 148, not 154

republican bent, including William Blake.

No. 7 Upper Marylebone Street is where Paine wrote the second part of *Rights of Man*, his most famous book in Europe. Rickman had a brass plate attached to the table Paine used, (now displayed in the People's History Museum in Manchester), and lived at No 7 until his death 1834.

Since then both the name of the street has changed, and the numbering, and there has been some confusion about where exactly No. 7 Upper Marylebone Street was. No. 154 New Cavendish Street has been identified as 'the place where Thomas Paine wrote *Rights of Man*' in several publications, but recent research at the London Metropolitan Archives disproved this.

Richard Horwood's 1799 map of London clearly shows No. 7 as the third house east of Ogle Street. Building tax records of time confirm that numbers 9 and 10 were on

either corner of Ogle Street, as in Horwood's map, and also that Rickman lived at number 7. Horwood's map and satellite pictures of the area combine to show that J.J. Highwood House, or 148 New Cavendish Street, occupies the site of the old 7, 8, and 9 Upper Marylebone Street.

The mis-identification of 154 New Cavendish may have come about because there is one letter from Rickman published in Joshua Reynold's correspondence which gives his address as No. 4 Upper Marylebone St, the present 154, one of the three original Georgian terrace houses left. This is, however, the only document among dozens of others which gives Rickman's address as No 7.

Since the building isn't the original one where Paine and Rickman lived, the place is ineligible for a Blue Plaque from English Heritage. Perhaps Westminster Council could be persuaded to install one of their green plaques, as it did for Olaudah Equiano on Riding House St. This is certainly the most important of the many places Thomas Paine lived during his various stints in London.

Barb Jacobson is secretary of the Thomas Paine Society.



The eastern end of 148 New Cavendish Street, Fitzrovia, where once stood number 7 Upper Marylebone Street and where Thomas Paine once lived. Photo: Linus Rees

Obituary: Harold "Brookie" Brookstone

Friends of long-time Fitzrovia resident Harold "Brookie" Brookstone were saddened to hear of his death this autumn. Sue Blundell spoke fondly of Brookie: "He was the leading light in the local Westminster ward Labour Party, and kept it going when many of us were leaving. Never a Blairite, he remained loyal to the Party and worked hard for it. He was an active trades unionist and a principled, witty and likeable man. It was always fun to talk to him. Last time I met him I asked who he was going to vote for in the Leadership election, and he said, 'It'll be either someone called Milliband or someone called Ed. Or both.' I will miss him a lot."

Poetry Winter Resolve

By Sandra Wheen

Today is the very nadir of the year.

A grudging twilight
Holds us in its maw.
The wind and rain
Like coughs and colds
Combine to bring us down.

Bring on more lights
To brighten up the day!
But lights within are best.
Endeavour like a rod of steel
Joins us to better times,
Brings focus to the gloom.

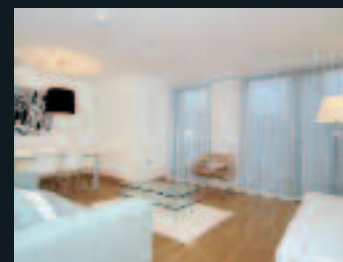
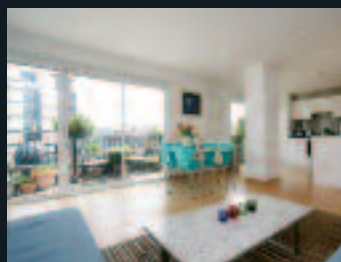
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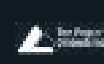


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'Free and easy' taverns created the music hall

The genesis of the Music Hall is generally held to be in the 'Free and Easies' of London Pubs. These were Tavern Singing Clubs, unintentionally created by the 1843 Licensing Act, which prohibited the performance of drama outside the 'Royal' theatres. Such establishments had existed long before the 1843 Act, but they took on a slightly different character when 'drama' became respectable and began playing to wider audiences.

There were several such establishments in Fitzrovia. For two of them we have a fascinating insight through the diaries of Charles Rice. He earned his living as a messenger at the British Museum, supplementing his wages as a singer in concert halls throughout central London.

He appeared at two in Fitzrovia: the King's Head at 79 Great Portland Street, and the Red Lion at 2 Tottenham Court Road on the corner of Hanway Street.

The King's Head was known as 'Macdonald's' to distinguish it from another establishment of the same name in Old Compton Street. In 1840 it passed into the hands of a man called James Brewster. By 1845 it was run by James Wilcox, in 1848 by Charles Leneve. The Red Lion was just behind the site later occupied by Mortons' famous 'Oxford', generally regarded as the first of the modern halls.

The King's Head had operat-

JESS OWEN writes about two local ones

ed for at least fifty years. It did not feature in any of the Licensing Applications so we can assume it was a fairly quiet establishment. A Red had been in the area since the previous century.

Rice was not impressed by a visit to Great Portland Street shortly before the change of ownership. He was offered a residency there in 1840. "Evening to Brewster's.....awful piano, good player, Mr Blackman. Heard a Mr Roberts sing 'Matrimonial Sweets' & a Mr Thornton sang same song throughout in a kind of rough falsetto. Both parties unapplauded. A gent murdered 'Calder Fair' sacrilegiously. I received the offer of Mondays if I liked, for sixpence. Refused it, & came away".

His time at the Red Lion was more convivial. He attended several 'Benefits' on the premises. In January of 1840 he 'went

to the Benefit of a very gentlemanly, honest young man of the name of Watts... The Room was very queerly attended.'

The diaries offer an insight into the repertoires on offer to the public before the generation of Music Hall 'proper'. They catch a moment when there is a transition between the older convivialities of the Free and Easy and a more formalised music industry. With one exception, all of Rice's repertoire can be found as the popular penny sheets known as broadside ballads.

Singers would undoubtedly seek to accommodate the tastes of their audiences, a factor especially important to a semi-professional performer such as Rice. His main songs included Billy Taylor, St Anthony and My Lord Tomnoddy.

Billy Taylor dates from at least 1804 when it was sung at



The Nightingale, one of the tavern singing clubs.

both Covent Garden and Drury Lane. A fine broadside was published by Laurie and Whittle of Fleet Street, dated Sept 24 of that year. It was popular enough two years later to provide the tune to another song "Dicky Day The Cruel Cobbler". The tale is of a young man, parted from his sweetheart by the press gang.

The composition came at a time when propaganda in favour of the armed forces, and the navy in particular, was reaching its zenith. The wars against revolutionary France had precipitated a major famine across the country and were very unpopular. Propaganda pieces went hand in hand with 'loyal' associations to promulgate a warlike spirit amongst the population at large. Radicals were forced onto the defensive, though in Westminster, they rallied around Parliamentary politics and carried the famous election of 1804.

'The Temptations of St Anthony' does not survive in many editions as a ballad. It had originally appeared in Bentley's of Jan 1838, with a striking illustration by George Cruikshank. One text that does survive, in the Firth collection, reveals it to be a bright bravura piece that must have been a lot of fun to perform.

The ballad is lengthy, and details much misbehaviour by various imps, which must have given the performer much opportunity for mugging and horseplay with the audience.

"An imp came then like a skeleton form,
Just come out of a charnel vault--

His jaws with gristle were black and deform

But his teeth were as white as salt,

He grinn'd full many a lifeless grin,

And wagg'd and rattled his bony tail--

His skull was deck'd with gill and fin,

And his eyes were like the eyes of a snail,

He took his stand at the good saint's back,

On tiptoe rum he stood a space,

And cock'd down his India rubber eyes,

To squint and gaze upon his face.

The succession of grotesques fails to move the studious saint.

But finally, his resolve crumbles. The punch line to the song is:

"There are many devils that walk in this world

Devils great, and devils small

But a laughing woman with two bright eyes,

Is the worst devil of all".

Rice's third 'standard' is in the same vein as 'St Anthony', only with a more political twist. The ballad also started life as a poem in "Bentley's Miscellany", first appearing in June 1837 as No V of 'Family Stories--- (The) Hon Mr Sucklethumbkin's Story".

Bentley's was not a particularly radical journal. It had none of the fire of Petrie's 'Man', Owen's 'New Moral World' or Robert Nicols' "Leeds Mercury". Yet it patently shared a loathing for the landed classes with such publications. Victorian England was a country seething with class antagonism. The monarchy was duly loathed, the 'new' queen having only been given the job because her cousin, the rightful heir, threatened to unleash a reactionary 'militia' against those who had felt the middle classes ought to have a share in the franchise. The high price of food was widely attributed to grasping landowners who had artificially inflated its cost during the Napoleonic wars of a generation earlier.

Tomnoddy had remarkable longevity as a piece. In The 1860's it was parodied by the playwright Robert Brough. His version was a staple amongst the Radical clubs of London. It was perpetuated by the Social Democratic Federation finding its way into early 20th century socialist song books. Until recently the term 'Tomnoddy' circulated as a term of abuse for those who thought themselves better than others due to 'birth'. The radical populism of the early 'halls' was voluntarily eradicated as the owners sought 'respectability', to safeguard their licences from 'moral reformers'.

Quotes in the text are from L. Senelick (Ed.), Tavern Singing In Early Victorian London: the Diaries of Charles Rice, Society For Theatre Research, London 1997. <http://ase.tufts.edu/facultyguide/fac/lsenel01.drama.htm>; <http://www.str.org.uk/books/books.html#memoirs>



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Real nightmare inspired writer

Some people start writing to follow a dream. For Juliet Ace, who went on to write for such national treasures as *EastEnders* and *The Archers*, it was to escape a nightmare.

'When my mother died, I helped lay her out,' says Juliet, who lives in Hanson Street. 'My father wanted me to, but I shouldn't have done it. I had nightmares.'

'I wrote it down – it was a cry from the heart. It came out in dialogue. Before that I'd barely written a letter.'

Someone took it to a BBC reader, who told Juliet she should write. It became a TV play called *The Captain's Wife* starring Patricia Hodge. After that she went on a writing course which changed her life. But it wasn't to be a fast change.

'After about three years I had enough rejections to paper a lavatory,' says Juliet. 'But gradually the rejection slips changed to letters and the letters became longer. I never gave up.'

The road from her upbringing in Llanelli in South Wales had already been a long and winding one.

She describes her background as odd and schizophrenic. Her father was middle-class, public school and English-speaking, and her mother's family were 'sort of peasants' and Welsh-speaking from a little village.

'On my father's side they used the right cutlery and had melon forks, on my mother's side it was toasted cheese on a fork in front of the fire.'

So right from the start, Juliet was used to different voices. She had older sisters and was regarded as the dumb one of the family. She used to spend a lot of time in the attic telling stories to her dolls and acting them out.

And it was acting that first attracted Juliet. Her mother was adamant that they should all have 'something solid' behind them, and so she went to teacher's training college in Coventry, specialising in music and drama.

From there she got a scholarship to the Rose Bruford acting school, spent three years teaching to 'give something back' for her training, took a deep breath, and decided to give acting a go.

'I didn't have the temperament,' says Juliet. 'The only time I got work was when people happened to see me perform. I was hopeless in auditions – wracked with nerves.'

She got some walk-on parts, children's productions and two seasons at *The Grand* in Swansea, where she nursed her ailing mother. Then she came back to London, and got a job in a school for teenage boys with special needs.

It was a stressful, at times dangerous, job and here again her sense of drama stood her in

EastEnders and *Archers* followed in road to the top

By BRIAN JARMAN



good stead.

'I wore tight black trousers tucked into knee boots, black jumpers and put my hair up,' says Juliet. 'They thought I was Honor Blackman from *The Avengers* and could do judo.'

It was at this time she got an evening job as an usherette that would introduce her to the world of actors and writers where she would eventually find her home. Her flatmate was understudying Joan Sims and they all used to go to a club called Buxton's behind the Haymarket Theatre.

Then came marriage, a move to Dartmouth where her husband lectured at the Naval College, and two children. Gradually the writing took off.

She was asked to write for *The Archers* and inject some humour into it. Keen to do her own research, she befriended a local farmer. He said he'd show her tuppings, which Juliet thought was rams having their tails docked, rather than being introduced to ewes.

Juliet wanted him to spare no details, so somewhat forensically the farmer pointed out that a ram's testicles, unlike a man's, hang equally.

'What about that funny little one over there?' asked Juliet.

'Oh, that's Malcolm,' said the farmer. 'He's what we call a teaser. We send him in first to get the ewes warmed up.'

Needless to say, Malcolm soon made an appearance in *The Archers*.

Juliet's next big break came in the early 1980s when she was asked to write for *The District Nurse* starring Nerys Hughes and filmed in her native Wales. It was here she teamed up with the famous editor and producer

duo Tony Holland and the notoriously forthright Julia Smith (they'd worked on *Z Cars* together).

Two years later they went on to create *EastEnders*, and took Juliet with them. She wrote three episodes in the first year, got a contract to write six in the second year, and stayed with it for nine years. It brought a new reality to the world of soaps.

From the start, Tony wanted it to be as authentic as possible.



JULIET ACE, pictured by Charles New

The writers read as much as they could about life in the East End.

'In *Neighbours* or something you could have someone having a brain tumour one week and running a marathon the next,' says Juliet.

The *EastEnders* team wanted to give issues proper weight, to ensure that they were characterised. One storyline about cot death spanned two years.

The episode that Juliet remembers having the most impact was when Michelle told her grandmother she was pregnant, and asked her what women did in her day.

'In the same episode, Sharon is in the pub chatting up Lofty, really flirting with him. Den overhears and slaps her face, just as Angie comes in. Angie slaps Den's face and he slaps hers.'

Mary Whitehouse complained about the violence. But they were just trying to reflect real life. Angie and Den became the most famous husband and wife in the history of soaps.

At the age of 72, Juliet is still writing – compiling the memoirs

of actor Terence Rigby, who died two years ago. She met him in Buxton's all those years ago, and 'walked out' with him for a while.

She moved to Fitzrovia four years ago from Camden. She loves the fact that it's home to many writers, actors and producers she knows, and old boyfriends used to live here so she felt a certain nostalgia for it.

Her career has encompassed award-winning soap and drama for TV, radio and film, in both English and Welsh.

But ask Juliet about her proudest achievement, and she tells about a carpenter she taught to read and write in Dartmouth, before literacy programmes were common.

Years later, she was walking past a building site and someone came out of a portakabin, whistling and waving at her. It was her carpenter, who'd become site manager. His literacy had opened doors for him.

'It spurred me on to think I could also break out and keep at it like he had, and become a writer,' she says.

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Growing up in Charlotte Street

Sam Lomberg MBE grew up in Charlotte Street during the 1920s and 1930s. Here he relates more memories from his childhood.

When my Father asked me what I would like for my fourth birthday, I replied "A dog please". "We'll see, but let's keep it as a surprise for your Mum". Dad knew that Mum might not be keen on the idea since a dog can be messy and needs looking after, and what happens when we go on holiday?

However, prior to my birthday, Dad asked me to take a bus ride. "Where to?" He replied vaguely, "To the park or somewhere". Mum was busy and pleased to see the back of us. The moment we were out of the house Dad turned with a smile and said, "We're off to Club Row".

I was in heaven! Club Row was an open-air market - where you could buy almost anything. You had to be careful not to be cheated and much of what was on sale was stolen. They used to say they would steal the shirt off your back as you entered, then sell it to you on the way out!!

We found the section where there were a number of 'merchants' selling animals. As we passed, one held up a puppy - "Luverly little dog, guv, just right for the boy - 'ere 'old it yerself sonny". I'll never forget that moment. A small, warm ball of fluff, all white except for a touch of brown and a blue ribbon tied around its neck. I loved it right away. The blue ribbon was supposed to indicate it was a male. Dad took a look, "Are

you sure it's not a bitch?" he asked, "Of course not guv, that's why he's got a blue ribbon - look for yerself"

"Is it a present for the boy?" He must have been a psychic - "Tell yer what guv, if it's 'is berf-day, you can 'ave it for a dollar". "Matter of fact" Dad said, "It is for his birthday". "Well, what d'you know?" He stuffed a threepenny bit into my hand, "Get yerself some sweets sonny and have a 'appy birthday". What a salesman! Dad was hesitant, "I hope it's a healthy dog" - "Its father was a champion, but he got mixed-up with the wrong woman", the peddler answered with a smile - "He'll be a good watchdog and good company for the lad". Dad handed over five shillings and off we went. The bus conductor remarked on how cute 'she' was. "It's a he not a she" I told him. "They all are in Club Row," he said.

As we entered the house, Dad was nervous of what Mum was going to say. When I walked in and showed her the puppy, she blew her top. Dad tried to placate her - I heard Mum say "It can stay here for today, but get rid of it tomorrow". I was desolate, but Dad said "Don't worry, tomorrow's a long way off". Bobbie stayed with us for fourteen years, and we soon discovered 'he' was a 'she'!

Although I was born in the West End, I was no 'townie'. We didn't get to the coast or countryside much, so I had to be content with Regent's Park. When I obtained my bike, I rode to places like Epping Forest, Hadley Woods or Sarrat, to feel free of London and enjoy the air.

My friend and I would cycle to the coast. It was heaven and I promised myself that one-day I would live right by the sea. One evening my Mother announced that we were moving. I was jubilant, but not for long! We were just moving to nearby Fitzroy Street. Dad hated travelling to work and he adored the cosmopolitan life of the West End. He loved his Sunday visits to the local café where he could eat real French croissants and drink 'real coffee' - Who needed the countryside when you had Hyde Park? And what was better than listening to the brass bands in Regent's Park? - Or the joy of strolling along Oxford Street.

Bobbie could sense something was happening and sniffed suspiciously at the removal boxes. I took Bobbie to take a look at our new home. There was something about the place I didn't like. Bobbie showed her disapproval, she turned and went to the front door. She obviously shared my views. That night I tucked Bobbie into her basket - she gave



In the 1930s Sam Lomberg cycled all over London and the south east on his bicycle. Picture: courtesy of Sam Lomberg

me a goodnight 'kiss' which turned out to be a farewell one, because next morning we found her dead. I guess she had decided she didn't want to move. Now maybe all this is pure coincidence - but it is possible

Bobbie sensed the house was not lucky? Draw your own conclusion, but during one of the first air raids on London, the house suffered a direct hit.

Ten years ago

A plaque to anti-slavery campaigner Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797) was unveiled at 73 Riding House Street, where he lived in 1789 and wrote about the brutal treatment he had received as a slave.

An article by Jim Clayson first appeared in Fitzrovia News in 1992 about how Equiano had been captured as a young boy in Nigeria and forced into slavery. Equiano finally gained his freedom and wrote about his first hand experience of the barbarity of slavery.

Equiano also lived at 37 Tottenham Street (when it was No 13) next to the Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Centre, where he is included in the mural by Brian Barnes.

Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association representative Mike Pentelow said the association was proud to have taken the initiative in proposing the plaque. It was especially appropriate in Black History Month, he said, as many black people had played a role in the multicultural history of Fitzrovia. These included William Davidson who was executed for the Cato Street Conspiracy which was planned in a pub in Grafton Way, and Thabo Mbeki who fought for the abolition of apartheid while



CYNTHIA WILLIAMS

working for the African National Congress in exile at 51 Rathbone Street from 1967 to 1970.

Actor Burt Caesar read extracts from Equiano's writings, poet Yvonne Bailey read a poem she had written about him, and the Ian Hall quartet played a specially composed Equiano Fanfare.

Many were shocked to hear of the death of Cynthia Williams, a stalwart of the Fitzrovia Play Association, who had been born in Ireland in 1925 but came to London as a child and had lived in Riding House Street for over 50 years. As a tribute to her great work she was incorporated into the neighbourhood centre mural.

(from Fitzrovia News, December 2000)

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HEARTS IN PARIS

The cold is beginning to hunch over Grafton Street and stiffens Nina's fingers as she draws. Her model, a rich Russian friend, lies on a thin rug. A black movement in the corner jolts through Nina and she is on her feet, bashing at the floor with a can of petrol.

'Are you sure you don't imagine them?' the Russian asks.

Nina puts the can down. 'They told me I could only have the place for seven and six if I housed the bugs.' Her stomach grouses, making her woozy, and she looks out at the weedy light. 'I hate winter.'

Her friend lights a cigarette. 'You haven't seen a Russian winter. One cannot survive without furs. This cold is romantic.'

Nina's eyes linger outside. 'There's nothing romantic about being alone.'

'Where do you want to go, Nina?'

'Paris.'

The Russian gives her a cigarette. 'Why not?'

'That thing you call dyengi.'

'Ah, you need money?' She blows out smoke. 'I have twenty pounds doing nothing in my bank. Would you like it?'

'What a life you lead!'

'Take it.'

'Be serious.'

'I am.'

'You would have to buy something.'

'I will buy this drawing.'

'For twenty pounds?'

'I'm very rich.' She waves her cigarette like a wand.

'Even so, I have to exhibit here in December.'

'So? Go! As one woman to another, I wish you a season of scandalous passion. Come back in time for your exhibition, in time for Christmas. What do you say?'

Every night in Paris the sculptors and art critics drink liqueurs and stay out until the black, mirthful sky stumbles into morning. Nina dances in red or

A short story by SUNITA SOLIAR

yellow stockings, and the scent of Christmas and cheap red wine jingles in the air.

For weeks, Nina watches a young man at the Rotonde. He is a gorgeous god, with hair the colour of weak sunlight. Nina's heart blisters, as though from lying too long on the beach.

She catches his eye now and he smiles. The cold blows in her friend, Arthur Ransome.

'I didn't know you were in Paris,' she says.

'Been here a couple of weeks.' Ransome's moustache muffles his words. 'Meet my friend, Basil. He's an aristocrat, you know.'

Basil tries to be mysterious in very old clothes, a black hat and a cloak.

'You're a charming woman,' he says, in a voice of velvet drapes and marble floors.

Nina pulls her hand away. 'Your shoes are dirty,' she says.

'Yes. I'm incapable of putting them outside the door at night.'

He steers her to a corner and they drink small plums in kirsch. All the time she watches the young man in the corner. He talks now to a small group of writers, whom Nina recognises. There is more kirsch, and she begins to laugh at Basil's jokes, to find him handsome.

She asks, 'Is it true you pursued a friend of Arthur's, then left her for a French woman?'

'She probably had a lucky escape.'

'Scoundrel!'

'I thought I loved her. But



Illustration by CLIFFORD HARPER

'As one woman to another, I wish you a season of scandalous passion'

you, one could be sure about you.'

The god's lips glimmer and she wants to catch his eye again. 'Goodnight,' she tells Basil.

'Wait! What if I asked you to marry me?'

'You need to clean your shoes first.'

'You could organize that.'

'I can do that without marrying you.'

'Will you?'

'I'll send you a postcard every morning reminding you. Goodnight.'

For weeks Nina sends Basil postcards and they go out to salons and cafés. She could almost love him but there is always the blond: she skips meals so she can afford a drink at the Rotonde and watch him. Sometimes she sees him watching her, but that is all, and soon it is days before she must return

to England. She goes up onto the roof. He is there, leaning down over the street.

'It's quiet up here,' he says.

'I'm sorry.'

'I did not mean for you to go. Stay.'

He tells her his name is Edgar, that he is Norwegian. 'I wanted to speak to you.'

'I leave next week.'

'Must you?'

'The money has run out.'

'It always does.'

He tells her he is an artist's model and he does not know many people here. His words are like fluttering spring petals and she giggles. He kisses her, and the world is warm and perfect and wonderful. They hear footsteps and fly apart. It is Basil.

He says, 'I've come to escort you home.'

'Don't go,' Edgar says.

Nina and Basil travel together to London. He asks her again to marry him. And again. The more she says no, the more persistent he becomes.

The exhibition is in Holland Park next to the ice rink where lovers, with muffs around their necks, hold hands and collide into each other. People pause at Nina's painting, *The Dead Soul*, and she hopes that someone will want it, that someone will pave the way back to Edgar. But they all move on to look at the lights of the park's beribboned Christmas tree.

'They think it's vulgar,' she says.

A light snow dusts Basil's cloak. He gets down on one knee. 'Nina Hamnett, will you marry me?'

Nina looks at the tree. London is a cold and hungry place and here is Basil offering something at least. The sound of the skaters grates, and she reaches out her hand. 'Please get up.'

'I mean it, Nina. We could live in Paris.'

She looks away from him to the skaters.

'I see,' he says. 'Who is it?'

'He was at the Rotonde.'

Basil's eyes tumble to his shoes. 'I could have given you the money to stay.'

'I couldn't have accepted that.'

'Why not?'

'Because you are a man.'

Basil smarts, his eyes like embers. 'Let me do this.'

'Why?'

'Because you made me polish my shoes.'

Nina looks down at them. 'Only if you take *The Dead Soul*. And let me pay you back.'

'Alright.'

'I'm sorry I called you a scoundrel.'

Basil makes what he can of his frayed smile. 'Come on. I smell chestnuts.' He buys two packets and gives Nina one.

'Merry Christmas,' he says.

She puts the chestnuts' heat to her cheeks. New snow is fleecing the world. She blinks it out of her eyes, and in the rink the lovers skate on.

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WHAT'S ON AROUND FITZROVIA

TO CONTRIBUTE TO THIS COLUMN: For the next issue email events by end of February (for listings from March to May) to fitzrovia@yaho.co.uk and put "Listings" in subject box.

ART GALLERIES

Alison Jacques Gallery, 18 Berners Street (www.alison-jacquesgallery.com): Until Dec 18 - Graham Little; Jan 19-Feb 19 - Robert Mapplethorpe.

Asia House, 63 New Cavendish Street (www.asiahouse.org): Until Feb 12 - The Tiger in Asian Art.

Building Centre, Store Street (www.buildingcentre.co.uk): Until Dec 22 - 2010 Sustainability Awards.

Contemporary Applied Arts, 2 Percy Street (www.caa.org.uk): Until Jan 8 - Made to Cherish, Best of British Craft; Jan 22-Feb 13 - Domestic Contemporaries.

Coningsby Gallery/Debut Art, 30 Tottenham Street (www.coningsbygallery.com): Until Dec 11 - Celebrated posters by Vince McIndoe.

Curwen Gallery & New Academy, 34 Windmill Street (www.curwengallery.com): Until Dec 23 - Winter Treats, and David Haste.

Diemar/Noble Photographic Gallery, 66-67 Wells Street (www.diemarnoblephotography.com): Until Jan 8 - Photographs by Lisa Holden.

Gallery at 94, 94 Cleveland Street (www.galleryat94.com): Until Jan 15 - Natasha Barnes.

Josh Lilley, 44 Riding House Street (www.joshlilleygallery.com): Until Dec 8 - Vicky Wright; Dec 14-Jan 7 - Gifted, curated by Ben Street.

Morton Metropolis, 41-42 Berners Street (www.morton-metropolis.com): Date to be confirmed soon - Alberta Reguara.

Paradise Row, 74 Newman Street (www.paradiserow.com): Until Dec 23 - Anna Bjerger, A Perfect Throw; Jan 14-Feb 20 - Light Work, Part 1; Feb 25 - Adam Broomberg & Oliver Chanarin.

Pilar Corrias, 54 Eastcastle Street (www.pilarcorrias.com): Dec 8-Jan 8 - Philippe Parreno.

Rebecca Hossack Gallery (1), 2a Conway Street (www.r-h-g.co.uk): Dec 7-19 - Peter Clark. Dogs are for Christmas Not Just for Life (Part 2).

Rebecca Hossack Gallery (2), 28 Charlotte Street (www.r-h-g.co.uk): Dec 7-13 - Reg Gadney new paintings; Dec 19-24 - Christmas Exhibition.

Regina Gallery, 22 Eastcastle Street (www.reginagallery.com):



THE PRETTY THINGS at the 100 Club on December 17 (see right)

Dec 10-Jan 22 - Maria Serebriakova, Suspicious Garden; Jan 28-March 12 - Claire Fontaine, Fighting Gravity.

Rollo Gallery, 5 Cleveland Street (www.rolloart.com): Until Feb 11 - Regina Jose Galindo, 12 Years.

Thompson Gallery, 15 New Cavendish Street (www.thompsongallery.com): Dec 8-23 - Helen Wilson, Solo Exhibition.

Woolff Gallery, 89 Charlotte Street (www.woolffgallery.co.uk): Dec - Various artists, Winter Show; Jan-Feb - Marcus Egli, Solo Exhibition.

THEATRE

Bloomsbury Theatre, 15 Gordon Street (www.thebloomsbury.com): Dec 10-12 - The Nutcracker; Dec 14-Jan 22 - George's Marvellous Medicine; Dec 15-22 - Nine Lessons and Carols for Godless People.

Camden People's Theatre, 58-60 Hampstead Road (www.cpth-theatre.co.uk): Until Dec 11 - Dean Gibbons And The Knowledge Of Death (Inconvenient Spoof); Jan 25-27 - A Kiss From the Last Red Squirrel (Elyssa Livergant); Feb 3-4 - Marie (Chloe Dechery); Feb 8-27 - Ward No 6 (Chekhov adapted by Matthew Parker).

Dominion Theatre, 269 Tottenham Court Road (www.dominiontheatre.co.uk): Ongoing - We Will Rock You.

Drill Hall, 16 Chenies Street (www.drillhall.co.uk): Dec 11-12 - Treasure Island; Dec 15-17 - Cinderella; Jan 22-Feb 26 - Staying Out Late.

London Palladium, Argyll Street, Oxford Circus (www.the-london-palladium.com): Feb 7 onwards - The Wizard of Oz, starring Danielle Hope.

CINEMA & FILM CLUBS

Odeon, 30 Tottenham Court Road: Weekly film details from www.odeon.co.uk or 08712 244007.

UCL film screenings, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, Malet Place (www.ucl.ac.uk): Jan 20, 6-7.30 pm - Wingrave.

Wellcome Library, 183 Euston Road (www.wellcomecollection.org): Dec 9-Jan 16 - Aura Satz, Sound Seam, film about enhancing hearing.

YMCA film club, 44 Portland Place (www.44portlandplace.org.uk): 2pm, Dec 22 - Capra's Its A Wonderful Life; Jan 27 - Films of Capra, Lost Horizon; Feb 24 - Films of Howard Hawks.

LIVE MUSIC & DISCO

The Albany, 204 Great Portland Street (www.thealbanyw1.co.uk): Disco every Saturday.

All Souls Clubhouse, 141 Cleveland Street (www.clubhousew1.org): Dec 12 - carol service, 6pm; Dec 24 - crib service, 4pm.

Bolivar Hall, 54 Grafton Way (www.cultura.embavenez-uk.org): All ay 7.30pm. Dec 7 - Voces de la Palabra; Dec 8 - Grupo Enigma; Dec 9 - Octavio Sune.

College Arms, 18 Store Street: Acoustic, last Friday of month.

The 100 Club, 100 Oxford Street (www.the100club.co.uk): Dec 10 - Men They Couldn't Hang; Dec 11 - Northern Soul All-Nighter; Dec 12 - Bermondsey Joyriders; Dec 15 - Tender Trap, Betty and the Werewolves, The Spivs; Dec 16 - Jazz benefit for children's hospice (11.30am-2.30pm); Dec 17 - The Pretty Things; Dec 18 - Chantel McGregor Band; Dec 19 - Christmas Mod Ball; Dec 21 - David Devant and His Spirit Wife; Dec 23 - Northern Soul Christmas Party; Dec 28 - Honeyfits; Dec 29 - The Members; Dec 30 and 31 - Wilko Johnson.

Green Man, 383 Euston Road, opposite Great Portland Street station: Live jazz every Wednesday, 7.45pm in basement.

Green Man, 36 Riding House Street (www.thegreenmanw1.co.uk): Occasional Friday night live entertainment.

King & Queen, 1 Foley Street: Folk music upstairs some Friday nights, phone 0208 340 0534 for details.

UCL Chamber Music Club, Haldane Room, Main Campus, Gower Street (www.ucl.ac.uk/chamber-music): Dec 10 - lunchtime concert; Dec 14 - Christmas concert, 6-7pm.

LIVE COMEDY

College Arms, 18 Store Street: Mondays at 8pm.

Fitzroy Tavern, 16 Charlotte Street: Wednesdays at 7.30pm in basement.

Wheatsheaf, 25 Rathbone Place:

Improvisation on Thursdays, 8.30pm, and stand-up on Saturdays, 7.30pm upstairs.

PUB QUIZZES & KARAOKE

College Arms, 18 Store Street: Quiz every Wednesday, 8pm.

King & Queen, 1 Foley Street: Quiz alternate Tuesday nights.

One Tun, 58 Goodge Street: Quiz every Tuesday night, karaoke Saturdays Dec 4, 11, 18 and 31 at 8pm

EXHIBITIONS & LECTURES

British Museum, Great Russell Street (www.britishmuseum.org): Until March 6 - Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead; until April 25 - Picasso to Julie Mehretu; until April 3 - Images and sacred texts, Buddhism across Asia; March 3 - Afghanistan, crossroads of the ancient world.

UCL exhibitions, Strang Print Room, Wilkins Building, Gower St (www.ucl.ac.uk/events): Until Dec 17 - Life, Action and Sentiment, John Flaxman on the art of modern sculpture.

UCL public lectures, Darwin Theatre, Gower Street, entrance in Malet Place (www.ucl.ac.uk/events): At 1.15-1.55pm unless stated. Jan 18 - Who enjoys shopping in IKEA?; Jan 20 - Building scientific models with computers; Jan 20 - The ingredients of a zero carbon, sero waste city (6-7.30pm); Jan 25 - Stabilising the global population, health and nutrition; Jan 27 - Lisbon 1939-45, the untold story of Portugal and the Jewish refugees.

Wellcome Library, 183 Euston Road (www.wellcomecollection.org): Until Feb 27 - High Society, drugs from discovery to demonisation; Dec 9-Jan 16 - Aura Satz, Sound Seam (see cinema/film clubs).



Evensong at Henley Lock by David Haste showing at the Curwen Gallery & New Academy, 34 Windmill Street until December 23.