

Beatrice: Independent woman who sang with feeling



Beatrice in 2010

Well known and loved resident Beatrice Malta died in December 2015. She had lived in Fitzrovia for over 50 years and she always said how much she loved living here. She first lived for 20 years in York House in Berners Street that at the time was staff accommodation for the Middlesex Hospital. On retirement she moved to Haddon House in Hanson Street where she remained until her death.

Beatrice was born in Portugal in 1925. At 18 she worked as a waitress in France for two years, learning the language fluently. She came to London in 1962 to escape an unhappy marriage (her husband was a gambler). At that time this was a very courageous and unusual thing to do for a woman to travel on her own. She was a kind of personal and political refugee. It is probably unlikely that she would have been allowed to return as there was a dictatorship in place in Portugal then and women did not usually have their own passport so usually had to travel as a wife.

"I came here on my own when I was 36, and I didn't have a job or accommodation, and was without any friends but I knew English, so I slept on a little chair in



Victoria. At that time nobody stole anything so nobody bothered me. I had a few tears of course."

Beatrice found a job looking after the children of a Jewish family in Finchley. "They were lovely people. I worked there for two years with them and they treated me as one of their own. I learnt a lot of the Jewish faith, it was very interesting."

Beatrice then got a job in the catering department at Tooting Bec Hospital. She was not too happy there and a friend who worked at the Middlesex Hospital in Mortimer Street encouraged Beatrice to join her there. "I was the first Domestic Supervisor who could speak English and Portuguese. I spent a lot of the time interpreting as well. I never ever regretted a minute. I worked in the Middlesex for 25 years. I loved the hospital work, I never thought I would love it so much."

For the final four years of her career Beatrice worked at the hospital for women in Soho, then retired at 62.

She continued working part time to supplement her pension at the Berners Hotel in Berners Street (now the London Edition hotel) as an evening house keeper, a freelance interpreter for Harley Street private doctors and working for the Wedgewood China shop, off Regent Street.

Beatrice was always very candid about talking about matters of a private nature. "I came here at 36 on my own free as a bird." As a young woman she met Malcolm, a widower from Cornwall. "He said to me: 'I would like to take you for dinner.' I said: 'Thank you very much.' He was eight years older than me. When we went to the restaurant I thought to myself 'well he has got a Rover, he has got money.' We sat and he said: 'what would you like to eat Beatrice and drink?' I said: 'Champagne please Malcolm.' I added: 'Because you know I wouldn't have ordered it if I knew you couldn't afford it but I'm sure you could afford it.' He said: 'Oh yes, my dear, no problem.'

"I am very independent. Also to me it's respect. You see when you're married you do everything and people don't respect, you. With the second time everything was my way. I said to Malcolm: 'I will not be used now to wash pants, socks or make a breakfast, not anymore.' "So I said to myself why not? We had a ten year

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affair. He used to go to Africa for business. He said to me: 'Beatrice, I will take you to Africa with me and we will go together.' I said to him: 'Do you mind Malcolm I have lots of things to do here.'

"I liked him, but I didn't love him. He said to me: 'I like you, but I like you more because you know what you like in life.' He died in an air crash. He was a lovely man we had a wonderful ten years together."

Beatrice also gained a reputation and made regular appearances as a singer. As a young woman her father paid for her to study Italian operatic technique. She sang soprano, but over time her voice lowered to mezzo soprano. She enjoyed singing, especially Italian opera, but her repertoire included popular and Portuguese songs (she even made a record of Portuguese songs).

She sang in restaurants and the Spanish clubs on Tottenham Court Road and Edgware Road. In her later years singing became a hobby. She continued performing for charity events at the Covent Garden Concert Artists' Association and the Salvation Army.

José Mendonça adds:

In 2010 one Sunday morning I was sitting in Saint Charles Borromeo Church on Ogle Street waiting for the service to begin. From behind me I heard some chattering which disturbed me, so I turned around to ask the person talking to please shut up. The person gave a frosty and aggressive response. After the service we met up and noticed each other's accents. We were both from Portugal. This was my introduction to Beatrice. It was the start of a very strong and warm friendship. We shared meals together in each other's flats. She came along to some of my partner's musical events and I accompanied her to some functions. As her sight and mobility deteriorated in the last few years I took her out for walks. I still find it hard to comprehend that she has passed away. She was such a character and positive force.



Beatrice in her own words:

"I like things that have some difficulty. I don't like things that are easy to me; they are of no interest."

"The neighbours are very nice; I feel that they care for you. This is a nice neighbourhood, but I cannot call everyone I meet a friend or invite for a cup of coffee; I am very particular."

"I find this area very interesting; it is very old and fashionable. And it has got lots of history"

"Fitzrovia to me is like a mother or father that look after your sons."

"Oh I love dancing every morning; I put on a cassette for my exercise for my leg."

"I was dancing, singing, eating, drinking and spending." "You don't need to see to sing; you need to have feelings"

"As the people say, if you live happy you must live with a church, a pub and a market. We have everything here; we have Sainsbury's, this church here on Ogle Street and we have two pubs on my street."

Ebb and Flow in Fitzrovia
Interviews with pensioners in and around Carbarius Street, W1
collected by
Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association



This obituary was prepared with interviews from the Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association's oral history project in 2010. "Ebb and Flow in Fitzrovia", is available from FNA, 39 Tottenham Street, W1T 4RX (£5)

Enhanced images of the Fitzrovia Mural displayed

The Fitzrovia Mural, painted in 1980 by London-based artists Simon Barber and Mick Jones, was commissioned by Camden Council and created in consultation with the local community. The mural covers the entire side of a building on Tottenham Street and faces Whitfield Gardens, on Tottenham Court Road. It is one of the largest and most popular pieces of outdoor art in London.

The artwork, painted in the style of Mexican artist Diego Rivera, is a colourful depiction of people living and working in the neighbourhood and a playful satire poking fun at property developers, planners, and the drudgery of modern office work. But over the years its bold colours have faded with the ravages of wind, rain and sunlight, while the lower part of the mural has been defaced with graffiti.

Now Camden Council have committed the money to restore the mural as part of the planned regeneration of the Tottenham Court Road area, known as the Camden West End Project, leading up to the opening of Crossrail in 2018.

The high-resolution photographs by Nigel Moore reveal the mural's full diversity, its artistic quality and intricate detail. The Fitzrovia Mural exhibition is at Arup, 8 Fitzroy Street until 11 March 2016. A booklet about the mural is available from Arup.



Illustrations of mid-Victorian London



The Workmen's Train: Workers hurry to catch their morning train to work. Steam trains depicted by Gustave Doré at Gower Street station (now called Euston Square) on the Metropolitan underground line, which opened in 1863.

In 1869 the journalist Blanchard Jerrold and French artist Gustave Doré produced an illustrated record of the 'shadows and sunlight' of London. They spent many days and nights exploring, often protected by plain-clothes policemen. The ambitious project, which took four years to complete, was eventually published as *London: a pilgrimage* with 180 engravings.

Both were transfixed by the deprivation, squalor and wretchedness of the lives of the poor,



Fox of Fitzroy Square

By Guy O'Connell

A wild animal again roams Fitzrovia. It is perhaps the largest untamed mammal seen 'round these parts since building started on the ancient hunting grounds we at *Fitzrovia News* call home. It has so far eluded capture on camera, despite the best efforts of your correspondent, whose account follows.

At around 10.30pm on New Year's Eve, as revellers headed to the many bars around Fitzrovia, a small brown dog circled Fitzroy Square. A large moon hung in the last skies of 2015. In the silvery glow, the dog's companion spotted the distinctive red brush of a fox. It flicked slightly as the animal's tongue licked at a puddle beneath the large road sign marked "Fitzroy Square" on the north east corner of the famous London landmark.

What a photo! The fox raised its head; its own eyes meeting

the camera's as its long sleek body followed the line of the street sign. All was framed perfectly — fox, and Fitzroy Square.

The animal stayed proud at its puddle for sixty seconds or more, allowing multiple shots perfect for the front page of *Fitzrovia News* and perhaps for many a year to come on the walls of our many readers homes. But the wily animal perhaps knew what the human did not ... the camera failed to record a single foxy frame. The fox of Fitzroy Square had not been shot.

So your correspondent offers a pint in a Fitzrovian pub to the human who can capture the best photo of the carnivore in Fitzroy Square before May 13. Send us your picture to news@fitzrovia.org.uk or tweet us @FitzroviaNews or post to our Facebook page.

Harry Hyams

Property developer Harry Hyams died on 19th December 2015.

His Centre Point tower saw him become, for some, the unacceptable face of property development in the 1960s.

Already a successful entrepreneur, he took advantage of council proposals for a (never built) roundabout at the junction of Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road to gain a lease on land there.

The 35-storey tower was completed in 1966 but remained empty for the next 14 years, because Hyams wanted to rent it out to a single occupier. Even as an empty building, its initial value of £5m more than quadrupled, but Centre Point became a focus for homeless charities, who claimed the London property boom encouraged owners to keep buildings empty.

Hyams shunned publicity, and even held his company's annual general meeting on New Year's Day to discourage anyone from attending.