Oxford Street pedestrianisation threatens to move congestion and pollution into side streets

Residents and business groups want traffic reduced not displaced

Residents from Fitzrovia, Marylebone, Mayfair and Soho have voiced concerns over Mayor of London Sadiq Khan’s plan to pedestrianise Oxford Street.

Residents groups told London Assembly Transport Committee members in the summer that pedestrianisation is not desirable and it is not practical to provide alternative bus, taxi and delivery vehicle routes without moving pollution and congestion into the smaller streets either side of Oxford Street.

Representatives of residents told Fitzrovia News that they welcome the Mayor’s desire to reduce congestion and pollution and want to work together to realise his aim to improve Oxford Street, but without adding to the already high levels of pollution and congestion in nearby streets. They say the Mayor should reduce motor traffic in the neighbouring areas not just Oxford Street.

Businesses in the West End, Transport for London, and Westminster City Council also hold the view that traffic reduction and not pedestrianisation should be the aim, otherwise the problem would just be shifted from one street to neighbouring streets.

However, residents and business groups were surprised when London deputy mayor for transport Val Shawcross announced in July that City Hall hopes to complete pedestrianisation by 2020. Pedestrianisation would be completed in stages with the eastern end of Oxford Street done first.

Residents and business groups fear that buses and taxis could be diverted along Wigmore Street, Mortimer Street and Goodge Street.

Wendy Shillam of the Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Forum wrote to Val Shawcross saying that if pedestrianisation of Oxford Street results in a permanent diversion of taxis and bus routes along neighbouring streets “it would be devastating”.

Jace Tyrell of the New West End Company which represents traders in Oxford Street was cautious about the plans: “We look forward to seeing and discussing detailed proposals for Oxford Street following Ms Shawcross’s statements but feel very strongly that any form of vehicle-free zones must lead to a genuine reduction of traffic, rather than large scale re-routing down smaller residential or commercial streets.

“In addition, it must be accompanied by a full economic assessment to measure the impact on businesses and the shoppers and workers who travel to the West End every day via public transport,” he said.

Campaigners for a traffic-free Oxford Street have welcomed the plans but Westminster City Council told the West End Extra that “the plans described by the deputy mayor for full pedestrianisation are currently unachievable without significant impact on those who live, visit or run a business in the area.”

Oxford Street is a major route for buses and taxis but private vehicles are already banned from 7am to 7pm except Sundays. Around 270 buses travel along the street every hour and 15,000 taxi passengers are picked up, set down, or carried every day. Community and business groups fear the traffic could be displaced into side streets.

A public consultation on the Mayor’s plans to pedestrianise Oxford Street will be carried out later this year.

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Flattering fitz from the 40s page 8

A taste of Indian culture page 5

Banksy, page 11
Dear Val,

I represent Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Forum. Our forum is a 200 strong group that represents both residents and businesses in Fitzrovia. We are united in order to create a neighbour- hood plan for the area. One crucial aspect of our plan, triggered by strong public support, is to improve the streets where we work and live. There is no public green space in our area, little sitting out space and hardly any pedestrian streets. We suffer from some of the worst pollution of any residential area in Europe. We are in the middle of writing policies that will go public this autumn. So far public con- sultation has strongly prioritised the greening of streets, the reduction and calming of traffic and the improvement of arrangements for pedestrians.

In particular we wish to enhance the Great Tichfield Street / Mortimer Street hub of our area. This has become a dynamic focus for local and special- ist shops, small businesses and provides the area’s vitality. But it is already strangled by the fact that Mortimer Street is a by- pass street for Oxford Street. There are over 4000 people living in very dense flats in this area. Our population is not dominated by West End Wealthy, but by ordinary people, many of whom have lived in the area for years, whose children attend the local school and who work in local businesses. Many people live in social housing, or housing for the elderly. They cannot choose to move out of the area if it becomes more even more devasted by traffic.

The announcement that pedestrianisation in Oxford Street shall go ahead leads us to fear the implications for our area, especially Mortimer Street and Newman Street. While the Crossrail project has gone ahead we have had several long term bus diversions through our area, along Mortimer and Newman Street. This has resulted in lines of jammed buses belching out exhaust.

If the pedestrianisation of Oxford Street results in a perma- nent diversion of taxis and bus routes along these streets it would be devastating for the area.

We support a reduction of traffic in Oxford Street, and have no support for improvements to any residential area. In fact, we too wish to look at traffic calming schemes and support improvements to Great Tichfield Street and Mortimer Street, which is the social and economic hub of our area.

Unfortunately it is not just Oxford Street that subjects the population of Fitzrovia to life threatening pollution. Mortimer Street and New Cavendish Street are highly polluted as well. This pollution is exacerbated in the centre of London because of the urban heat island effect, which can trap a bubble of polluted air, stopping it dissi- pating, as it might do in greener parts of the capital. I am sure that enlightening traffic engi- neers in the GLA have already considered these limitations and are proposing alternatives. For example a bus hub at Tottenham Court Road and a further hub at Hyde Park Corner would be well supported by our commu- nity.

We are especially concerned that All Souls’ Primary School, our excellent local primary school, lies only yards from the Mortimer Street/Newman Street junction. The prospect of divert- ing transport onto a minor road and increasing pollution levels so close to an area where chil- dren are taught, is not worthy of the new GLA administration.

The FitzWest Neighbourhood Forum is doing all it can to improve the environment for our inner city residents, existing businesses and the hun- dreds of thousands of new visi- tors that will be attracted by Crossrail 1, Crossrail 2 and HS2 which also arrives at our doorstep. We seek help from the GLA to achieve that result, not hindrance.

Please, can I have your assurance that no scheme will be approved which diverts public transport and taxis through the streets within our area?

Wendy Shillam, Chairman
Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Forum Executive

 Corrections and clarifications
If you think Fitzrovia News has made a mistake please tell us by email news@fitzrovia.org.uk or contact us at our office.

Many news articles first appear on our website which is updated weekly. Edited ver- sions are then published in the printed paper which is pub- lished quarterly.

Fitzrovia News deadlines
Our deadline for news, features, letters and adverts is normally two weeks before pub- lication. Sometimes we accept articles later.

The next issue of Fitzrovia News will be out on Tuesday 6 December.
Deadline is Friday 18 November

 filmed paper which is pub- lished quarterly.

To take action now, email Valerie Shawcross (val.shawcross@london.gov.uk) and tweet @valshawcross

Email Sadiq Khan (Mayor@london.gov.uk) tweet @SadiqKhan

For tweets use the hashtag: #oxfordstreet

Say if you want to be person- ally informed about any future consultations.

Describe your good ideas — you will have some! Say what you are specifically concerned about: is it pollution, road safety, disability access, or business working?

Say what your special needs are: have you got children, breathing problems, reduced mobility, or a business to run? Ask for a reply: And if you don’t get one, let Fitzrovia News know!

Pedestrianisation of Oxford Street

Pedestrianisation of Oxford Street may sound like a great idea. The Mayor of London made it his manifesto commitment and the plans are being drawn up. But it needs to be a great idea for local residents and businesses as well as the global tourists the Mayor is apparently hoping to attract.

But we don’t want to have the surrounding streets even more congested, polluted and less safe than they already are. So we need to speak out — not to complain — but to say what we actually want.

The first consultation ended on 29 July, and especially if you missed that, you need to make sure you don’t miss your chance to have a say. Keep reading for some ideas about how you might do that.

Pedestrianisation is planned to start at the eastern end and end some- time in the middle of 2019 from Tottenham Court Road to Oxford Circus. Then it’s the western section up towards Marble Arch. Around Marble Arch itself is going to come last.

The bus traffic-jam along Oxford Street is apparently going to be sorted out by a “par- adigm shift”: with “inter- changes, turn-backs and changes to the routes”; and by having a Hopper ticket, so you can get on and off buses for one price.

There are going to be two acces- sible Crossrail stations at Tottenham Court Road and Bond Street. But many less mobile pedestrians won’t want to (or can’t) walk, and carry their shopping, between these.

Thinking around this needs to be as radical as with the buses. Just adding taxi-ranks in the side streets, and having taxis cir- cling for a place in the ranks is going to further increase conges- tion as well as reducing road safety. Since the Mayor has much less power over taxis, this is a very significant issue.

Then there’s pollution. We have very high levels of pollu- tion locally. Well above the recom- mendations for health.

The paradigm shift needs to extend from transport to actual- ly reduce pollution across the West End.

The London Assembly and the Mayor must consider health, disability, road safety, and busi- ness needs. Most importantly, they need to actually listen to local resi- dents and business people — not just tell people that a consul- tation period has closed.

Take action now: email Valerie Shawcross (val.shawcross@london.gov.uk) and tweet @valshawcross

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Brain boffins search for missing link with the local community

Those researching into how the brain works and affects behaviour, at Howland Street's new centre, wish to give talks to the local community.

Six leading scientists from all around the world are working at the Sainsbury Wellcome Centre for Neural Circuits and Behaviour at 25 Howland Street. The full complement of scientists is expected to reach 150 along with many dedicated support staff.

“We are interested in giving talks in lay terms on any topics people are interested in, and the community wants to know about,” communications manager Alice Taylor-Gee told Fitzrovia News.

“Our research is into which part of the brain affects which behaviour. Taxi drivers, for example, are stronger in that part of the brain which works out how to get around from A to B.

“When people can no longer recognise close friends and relatives we need to find out what happened to that part of the brain.

“If we understand how the brain ticks it may help other researchers to understand about people with dementia, and then maybe able to fix it.”

The centre is also working with the world of neuroscience research through art installations at street level. These highlight visual illusions and how the brain processes signals.

There is also an area open to the public where stunning neuroscience images are projected.

And the colonnade running the length of the front of the building features 950 white translucent polycarbonate pixels which look different when viewed from one side or the other. From the east (Charlotte Street end) it shows the score of Bach’s Musical Offering (1747): Ricercar a 3 which is considered an extraordinary expression of the human mind and so reflects the creative capacity of the mind.

From the other end they show 11 separate winners of the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine affiliated with University College London. The portraits play with illusion.

There is also an artist in residence for a year. This is Wayne McGregor who explores through dance how the brain works during different movements.

The whole building was designed by Ian Ritchie Architects who visited laboratories around the world, and designed it to encourage cross collaboration between scientists by allowing them to see what others are doing.

Bitter fight for sweet hut

A popular street trader is resisting being forced out of business. Many know and have been helped by Bobby Long (pictured), aged 77, who has sold sweets from his hut on the pavement outside Goodge Street station for 43 years.

Bobby said: “Both the manager of the station and the manager of the adjoining KFC shop are happy for me to continue trading. I am always up to date with the rent, I have given thousands of people help and directions over the years.”

Yet in July he came back from holiday to find an enforcement order from Camden Council pinned on his hut ordering him to remove it within four weeks.

At first he was told it was because the hut was a few inches to big. So he planned to make the adjustment and brand it as the smallest sweetshop in London.

The Camden New Journal reported Jonathan Simpson, Camden Council community safety chief, saying: “The Council can no longer issue Mr Long with a trading licence without the permission of the freeholder. Since his licence lapsed in March we are working on and advising Mr Long on the options available to him.”

Bobby told Fitzrovia News: “I have had lots of letters of support. I don’t make a fortune from the sweets, which are just £1 a bag, but my motivation is mixing with the community and helping them.

“Last week I started logging the number of times I gave directions to people who are lost. It was over 40 a day, many from people coming out of the station, others asking the way to the British Museum and other places.

“When the Middlesex Hospital was open in Mortimer Street I was always directing patients to it, many of whom came back to thank me after their treatment and became friends. It was almost like performing a social service. I used to have a charity box for the local children’s hospital as well.

“I feel very much part of the community and am devastated at being treated in this way.”

Local traders and the community have supported the campaign to prevent the eviction, and hope a solution can be found so Bobby can continue trading on the site even if with a different sized kiosk.

Triangle site plans put on hold

The controversial redevelopment of the triangular site at Tottenham Street and Cleveland Street has been put on hold while the owners and their property developer partners have a rethink on its future.

Last year Westminster council passed plans to completely demolish and redevelop the commercial site which was originally built as part of the Holcroft Court housing block in the mid-1960s.

Boarding and scaffolding had surrounded the vacant site since the beginning of the year and covered up the wall with a Banksy mural.

But work to demolish the building never got very far and the developers were also mulling over a modified planning application.

However, in August workers started to take down the hoarding.

Fitzrovia News understands that the approved plans to develop the site will not be going ahead and its future has been put on hold.

As we went to press developers Dutchesse Properties had not made a public statement on their intentions.

Plans to redevelop Tottenham Street building published

Camden Council has published its own plans to redevelop the building containing the Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Centre on the corner of Tottenham Street and Goodge Place.

The council owns the Grade II listed building and wants to convert the basement into a small flat, change the advice centre on the ground floor into commercial premises, and add a mansard roof extension for more housing.

If approved by Camden’s own planning department it will mean the Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association (FNA) will have to vacate the premises. Currently the FNA which provides welfare and housing advice, comments on planning and licensing applications and publishes Fitzrovia News, has no alternative accommodation to deliver its services.

The FNA has operated from the building since 1975.

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Students search for genetically modified prize

A team of international students at the University of Westminster hopes to take first prize in a synthetic biology competition to be held this autumn in Boston in the United States. The team of thirteen students from Britain, Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America will compete in the International Genetically Engineered Machine (iGEM) Competition in October.

The team believe they can create a process to produce ALA — a non-protein amino acid — that is cheaper and produces a high yield of the desired method.

Dr Anatoliy Markiv, senior lecturer in biomedical sciences at UoW, told Fitzrovia News that the Boston event is a great opportunity for the students to tackle real-world problems in a global environment.

“The iGEM competition is about sharing ideas, working as a team and having fun in unique competition settings. Students who participate usually get engaged in real science projects and go on to become scientists in the future. Westminster has been involved in the iGEM since 2011. Our team last year has won a gold medal for the renewable energy project and we are aiming to go for gold this year as well.”

The students are excited about the competition and the team leaders explained how the experience can improve their careers.

Amritpal Singh from India and a graduate in BSc Biochemistry, said: “iGEM is one of the best experiences you could possibly have. You’re given the chance to independently lead, research and carry out a project that fascinates you. The giant jamboree which is held in Boston allows us to present our research to thousands of academics, students and biotechnology companies. Science is a highly collaborative field and making connections with people you meet will work in the future, from academic to our fellow peers is an amazing opportunity and something that would not be possible without the iGEM experience.”

Paulina Brajer from Poland and a graduate in BSc Biological Sciences said: “The iGEM competition is a student led project where the team is responsible for sponsor-ship to fund the project and outreach to teach the wider community about synthetic biology. These aspects give students an experience that gives an insight into the real world of science and lets students acquire a variety of skills. This is my second year participating in the competition and the experience has been rewarding and helped me in many aspects as a student as well as being offered an MSc.”

Camila Gaspar, a Brazilian and Spainish student and a graduate in BSc Biochemistry, says: “It has been an amazing experience with endless learning curves, and it’s preparing me for the academic life as I know I will be using those skills during MRes and further to PhD.”

The students are supported with funding from University of Westminster and the Quintin Hogg Trust to meet many of the costs of the project, but they are also crowdfunding to cover the remaining expenses. You can sponsor the students by visiting www.thewestminsterigem.com. Follow them on facebook.com/westminsterigem and twitter.com/westminsterigem.
Oh Calcutta! Films and music on menu

By CLIFFORD SLAPPER
A cultural and culinary ambassador from the Indian subcontinent has set up shop on Tottenham Street. Her name is Shrimoyee Chakraborty (pic
tured right) and her restaurant, Calcutta Street, is hosting live music and film screenings.
Shrimoyee (Shrim to her friends) grew up in Calcutta, then went to study at Mumbai’s Sophia College, followed by a move to the UK for a master’s degree at Manchester’s Business School, before settling in London a couple of years ago.
In India she was a television presenter, an economics analyst, and creator of a highly popular food blog called Shrimoyee’s Scrapbook.
She has already created numerous successful restaurant pop-ups throughout London, but this is her first permanent restaurant. She aims to show people the delights and diversity of true Indian cuisine beyond the standard formula of London’s Indian restaurants.
Her menu features street food from Golpark, alongside hearty food from her family’s home on Gariahat Road.
Shrim is on a cultural mission too, to educate Londoners on the art, literature, music and cinema of India. To this end, she already has a music curator on board, and there are plans for a mural of David Bowie (1947-2016) alongside the Bengali poet, painter and composer, Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941).
The books on which each bill is carried to the table are beautiful and colourful imprints brought from Bengal.
There will be film screenings and bottomless brunches on Sundays at Calcutta Street. The waiters and manager’s job titles are the Indian terms for “little brother/sister” and “older brother”, respectively. Staff training has included being sent to watch great Indian films such as those of Satyajit Ray.
Shrim has decorated the restaurant totally with Bengali artworks by Jamini Roy and with beautiful pieces brought personally by her from her home town of Calcutta, with a “chandelier” made by her from hand-fans.

Opening and closing

Closed
Fat Lorenzo’s Italian restaurant 5 Clipstone Street
Moba Asian café 53 Goodge Street
Tsuzumi 93 Charlotte Street
Stef’s Italian restaurant 3 Berners Street
Nyunya Oriental cuisine 11 Warren Street
Flyer Alarm printers 11 Howland Street
CAFÉ Rouge 264-266 Tottenham Court Road
Café Rive Gauche 20-21 Warren Street

Opened

Honest Burgers 117 Tottenham Court Road
Samarkand Uzbeki restaurant 33 Charlotte Street
Yobii sushi Market Place Great Castle Street

Cafe celebtrates 20 years on
On 22 September Italia Uno will celebrate 20 years since it first served customers at 91 Charlotte Street.
The Italian cafe run by Felice Bracco and his family is famous for serving up freshly made sandwiches and for being a home from home for Napoli football fans.
Expect apect of Italian fun and of course football colours on display all week.

News in brief
Workers at takeaway delivery firm Deliveroo in dispute over pay held several days of protests in August outside its offices in Torrington Place.
Property developer Derwent London thinks its rental income will be clipped as a result of the vote to leave the European Union.
Media company Scrub, which specialises in supplying pro-audio technology to post-production houses, has moved from Berwick Street in Soho to larger premises on the corner of Wells Street and Margaret Street.

Central London Action on Sexual Health (CLASH) has moved from Warwick Street in Soho to new premises in Mortimer Street, Fitzrovia. A ticket tout who claimed to be operating out of offices in Eastcastle Street has been jailed after he took out numerous memberships at football clubs using various aliases and bulk buying tickets for each fixture. One of his victims paid £600 for four tickets to see Watford v Aston Villa in April 2016; tickets originally costing £40 each.
Westminster Council has given a premises licence to The Middlesex Hospital Chapel (aka Fitzrovia Chapel) to allow alcohol to be sold, and for the performance of plays, films, live music, and dance. The council also has granted a licence for the chapel to be used for civil marriages and civil partnerships.

Punters who are missing a drink in Fitzrovia’s most famous watering hole will likely be in for a pleasant surprise when the Fitzroy Tavern is expected to re-open after an extensive makeover by Samuel Smiths is completed this autumn. Expect a return to snug, etched glass, big lanterns, mahogany furnishings, and an extra floor for supping ale.
Camden Cyclists meet at Primrose Hill Community Association, 24 Hopkins Place, NW1 8TN from 7.30 to 9.30pm on Monday 26 September to discuss improvements for cycling.
Word from the Streets

By CHARLOTTE STREET and her family

Minder on manor

Dodgy second hand car dealer

Arthur Daley finally came into contact with those of his profession in Warren Street in an episode of Minder on ITV4 recently. His "dogbodiesguard" Dennis Waterman, whose premises were on the premises, had his hair cut long before he was famous. The episode, entitled "In", was first broadcast in 1962 (available on DVD, Series 3, Episode 13).

Did you see Jagger in 1966?

A photograph in our last issue enquired if any children recognised themselves as Mick Jagger was interviewed by police outside 96 Great Portland Mansions in Huntley Street. Born in 1931 he collected milk for many years at 28 Gordon Mansions in Huntley Street. Born in 1931 he collected milk for many years at 28 Gordon Mansions in Huntley Street. Born in 1931 he collected milk for many years at 28 Gordon Mansions in Huntley Street.

Have a bash

How would you like to "whack a banker" and so wreak your revenge on the fat cats? If so go to Sowergate Pier on the Suffolk coast. It is one of the eccentric machines designed by local artist Tim Hunkin.

Dada Dastard

The original Dada artists of 1916 will be turning in their graves. They were anti-war, anti-bourgeois and indeed anti-art. So what would they make of furniture branded in their name at Uniform at Whittington House on the corner of Chenies Street and Alfred Place. But the real killer would be the dastardly use of a professional commercial artist to design a pictorial sign (above) on the ledge outside its premises to proclaim: "This is not a seating/res area." I am glad to see this is largely ignored by tired folk queuing for the Rada Studios next door. Just round the corner is an equally pompous anti-social sign. "Bikes chained to these railings can cause obstruction and are a danger to pedestrians. Any bikes chained to these railings will be removed. We accept no liability for damage to the bicycle." This is in Bloomsbury Terrace, Huntley Street. Can anyone链条 give us an example of how they have been endangered by a stationery bicycle securely chained to a railing?

Hair raising

A free haircut and a pint of beer has finally overcome my brother Perry's aversion to attending barber shops. The special offer was from The King's Canary at 81 Great Titchfield Street to mark the opening of the all night tube service on August 19.

The offer was from midnight until 5 a.m. to the morning, normally well past Perry's bedtime. There was a lot to shear away as he had let his hair grow long ever since his favourite barber, also in Great Titchfield Street, died 15 years ago. The same barber, incidentally, that saxophonist Trevor McDonald used when ITN was in Wells Street.

Skiffle star

Sad to hear of the death of Karl Dallas, the marxist christian musical journalist and skiffle group player, who lived for many years at 28 Gordon Mansions in Huntley Street. Born in 1931 he collected milk at the age of seven for the elected Spanish republicans in their fight against the military fascists. Later he joined the Young Communist League, and then became a christian at All Souls, Langham Place, attracted by the liberation theology, without renouncing his communism.

Celebrity watch

Celebrity watch. Australian television chef, John Torode, sipping a coffee at Nero in Charlotte Street. Also seen wandering down Little Portland Street was Will Gompertz (yes that is his name), the BBC TV arts correspondent. He used to be the boss of the Tate Gallery, but even he would agree he is no oil painting (but then again neither am I).

Lottery winner

A lottery millionaire is walking our streets. A winning ticket was sold at Castle News, at 35 Eastcastle Street, as proudly proclaimed by a certificate displayed behind the counter.

Divorce party

Want to celebrate your divorce with a party? If so the Vasis restaurant at 56 Maple Street advertise their ability to cater for this. Presumably the bride's family on one side and the groom's on the other.

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The Incredible Broken String Band

Two broken guitar strings by Matt Carol failed to stop his band, LitFM, going down a storm at the Phoenix pub in Camden Square. Watch out for them in future. Matt and other members of the band work for the Bricklayers Arms in Grease Street where they also rehearse.
Radio character who produced Hendrix and Thatcher

By JOHN AXON

Many older readers will see the name Bill Bobb and allow themselves a nostalgic smile, particularly former devotees of Turkish restaurant Efe’s in Great Titchfield Street and the sadly dwindling number of erstwhile regulars of Goodge Street’s Northumberland Arms, now trading as The Draft House. Bill Bobb, BBC music and later current affairs producer passed away in April. Bill was a musician (guitarist who morphed into a banjo player during the great Trad scare of the late fifties) turned live music producer whose unbeatable CV boasts such names as Jimi Hendrix, The Who, Cream, Status Quo, The Bee Gees, and Margaret Thatcher. More of her later.

The always debonair Bill was rightly considered a legend in his own lunchtime and quite often far beyond, a raconteur par excellence who to the delight of loyal friends and saloon bar acquaintances alike was blessed with total recall of his 25 years at the BBC. Bill knew everyone and was happy to share his experiences and his sheer joy in making a living from what started as a hobby and became a lifetime’s work.

Typical of his stories was his, er, experience with Jimi Hendrix. As a favour for old mate Chas Chandler, formerly of The Animals but then starting in Rock and Roll management, Bill agreed to book a recording session in Broadcasting House that would announce the arrival of the guitar superstar. As producer of the phenomenally successful Saturday Club which pulled in a weekly audience of nine million, Bill was required to record a number of live sessions, as what was known as Needle Time (the playing of commercial record releases, which was subject to restriction in an agreement between the BBC and the British Phonographic Institute).

Bill took a chance on the raw Seattle based musician, unsigned to any label and, incredibly, unrecorded at that time. The session duly took place but was recorded at such a fierce volume that it interrupted a live recital from a string quartet, so the first time Jimi Hendrix was ever heard in this country was in disharmony with Brahms on the old Third Programme. Bill was delighted with the session and he, Chandler and Hendrix celebrated in a Margaret Street hostelry where they too invoked Brahms, and indeed Liszt.

After the 1967 formation of Radios 1 and 2 Bill pitched his tent in Radio 2 land, continuing with live sessions but later became senior producer on the Jimmy Young show, whose mixing of light music, recipes and requests came to include politics. Hence the interviews with Prime Minister Thatcher which became media sensations as the seemingly informal chats often had greater substance than one might have expected. Bill managed to be on the end of a handbagging when he offered the PM Perrier water, live on air. “Have you no BRITISH sparkling water, Bill?” The banjo player was banjaxed.

Local firm goes global

Cardboard, the local firm that makes promotional material for film, is going global.

Based in Percy Street it is now expanding into the Australian and American markets. This is in addition to working for those in Germany and other places. “This is our fifth year in Fitzrovia, and we are doing very well with local studios,” said Jason Casey. “Now we are expanding into other countries.

“In Australia they have been looking for people who are less formulaic and more creative, which is what we are. We have had four jobs there in three months and have just got a fifth one.

“And we are on the verge of a new deal in Los Angeles.

“So it is potentially a real growth area for us and is already making a name for us in all parts of the world.”

‘Au revoir’ to Warren Street

Staff (pictured right) at a cafe in Warren Street said farewell to their customers for the last time in June. Slava, who took over the Cafe Rive Gauche 31 years ago, spoke with fondness about “It’s been a fantastic time in a lovely area with lovely customers,” said Slava.

The owner of the building has plans to redevelop.
Changing times for historic pubs

Historic pubs are closing in the area at an alarming rate. Perhaps the most famous is The George at 55 Great Portland Street, which dates back to at least 1809, and has been a regular haunt for BBC folk for generations. It has been sold by Greene King and been boarded up for a few weeks now and the rumour is that it is going to be turned into a restaurant.

Another Greene King pub to be sold is the George & Dragon at 151 Cleveland Street. It dates back to at least 1826 and continued to be run as a pub before the street was built.

By Pete Whyatt

Perhaps the most famous is The George at 55 Great Portland Street, which dates back to at least 1809, and has been a regular haunt for BBC folk for generations. It has been sold by Greene King and been boarded up for a few weeks now and the rumour is that it is going to be turned into a restaurant.

Another Greene King pub to be sold is the George & Dragon at 151 Cleveland Street. It dates back to at least 1826 and continued to be run as a pub before the street was built.

I called in to the Revival Retro Boutique on Windmill Street to meet the business owner. While I was waiting to chat with Rowena, I was able to see her in action dealing with a customer. I was pleasantly surprised to see how she engaged with her customer in a genuine and friendly way. She just the right item of clothing. Using her eye for detail and knowledge of her range of stock she was able to give her buyer just the right hints and ideas so the customer left with an item she was really delighted with.

Rowena Howie started her working life as a travel agentadvising customers on Trans Siberian Railway journeys but her hobby, swing dancing, turned her life and career around.

Rowena realised there was a gap in the market and started her business from home in 2009. Her business began with an initial credit card purchase of a small amount of stock that she sold to her dance friends. When she discovered her stylish retro clothes and shoes had a wider appeal than just that community the business began to grow. Two years later Rowena opened her first shop in Kingly Court off Carnaby Street then moved to her present shop in Fitzrovia in 2014.

“We sell new items sourced from around the world. The thing they have in common is they are inspired by the era of music that I love to dance to, the 1920s to the 1950s. The style harks back to the stylishness of a previous era, think of old Hollywood, glamorous parties and film premieres with screen legends such as Ava Gardner, Rita Hayworth, Katherine Hepburn. The clothes I sell are flattering and feminine, classic and elegant styles from a bygone era,” she says.

Many people who pass the shop think Revival Retro is an “as new” shop selling pre owned designer wear, but the items are neither true vintage nor authentic reproductions. All the clothes are new, available in a range of sizes and made for modern women’s bodies. The boutique offers designs that are not widely available in the UK. Many are imported from USA.

Rowena and her staff provide a really personal service. She believes in reviving feminine tailoring, flattering cuts and well placed details, building a look from there. “You don’t need a penchant for vintage to love our shop. Our selection of flattering dresses has a wide appeal irrespective of having ‘vintage inspiration’ or being a ‘1940s design’. What matters in our store is being able to select from a range of styles and sophisticated looks. Our ability to cater for different shapes and the fact that we stock an inclusive range of sizes is impressive. Our dresses look amazing on curvy women.”

“Revival Retro is first and foremost a bricks and mortar store. An independent shop with passionate and committed staff. We love what we do and the personal touch is very important to us.”

“In 2013 we won a Time Out Magazine Love London award for best shop. The nominations for 2016 have just opened and we encourage everyone to come down to Windmill Street to try us out and if you enjoy yourself please nominate/vote for us to win this year.”

Revival Retro has been selected as one of 100 small businesses from across the UK to be celebrated by Small Business Saturday, a nationwide grassroots campaign to encourage consumers to ‘shop local’ and support small businesses in their communities.

The Revival Retro Boutique, 30 Windmill Street, Fitzrovia, W1T 2JL. revival-retro.com

“I nearly sold an elephant to Michael Jackson”

Anna-Maria Thetford has managed the Darren Baker Gallery 81 Charlotte Street since July 2013.

“I love working in Fitzrovia,” she said. “Out of all the districts I’ve worked in Fitzrovia is my favourite because it still has a community, there are still independent businesses around and you can travel the world by eating the many cuisines available here. I especially like some of the old pubs that retain their old world charm and atmosphere.”

Anna-Maria has worked in the art world for 19 years. “The painting that first seduced me into art was the portrait of Matisse by Derain at the Tate Gallery,” she explained.

“Backpacking around Europe for gap year before studies I visited all the major galleries in European cities when I came back I studied History of Art at university for three years.”

“Throughout my interesting career I’ve worked in many galleries including the Harrods gallery where Michael Jackson visited and nearly bought a large elephant. I also bumped into David and Victoria Beckham literally.”

“Darren Baker Gallery is a contemporary art gallery, which welcomes both established and upcoming artists working in different fields. We welcome visitors and browsers please feel free to pop in and say hello.”

“The gallery aims to break down the barrier between artist and viewer / collector by being accessible and unpretentious.”

“This summer we held our summer bazaar which featured celebratory summer cocktails, live artist demonstrations, and special offers and discounts. We’re having an end of summer event on Thursday 8 September from 6 to 8pm, which will feature a few surprises including a live artist demonstration from Millena DeMille.”

Flattering fitz from the 40s

I nearly sold an elephant to Michael Jackson

All boarded up: The George on the corner of Great Portland Street and Mortimer Street.
When Henry Kissinger got an earful

By Jennifer Kavanagh

Did you know that Doris Lessing lived in Holbein Mansion, Langham Street from 1958 - 62? She rented a flat from her publisher, Howard Samuels, for £5 a week. Doris Lessing (1919 – 2013) was one of the foremost post-war British novelists, the author of some fifty novels, plays and volumes of poetry and autobiography. She was the recipient of numerous literary awards, culminating with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2007. She was also an active campaigner against nuclear arms, and an opponent of apartheid which in 1956 led to her being banned from South Africa and Rhodesia (where she had been brought up). She belonged for many years to the British Communist party, until the Soviet invasion of Hungary led her to resign her membership.

In the second volume of her autobiography, Walking in the Shade (Harper Collins), she describes her Langham Street flat:

“The flat was tiny, six small rooms, and the building was hideous, with a grey bare cement staircase. On the fourth floor you opened the door to a narrow corridor, which bisected the flat. Opposite the door was a minute kitchen, then the bathroom, with its hissing and clattering gas geyser, and two other little rooms on that side. On the street side was my tiny bedroom, and a larger room, the living room. There was no way that flat could be made more than tolerable.”

It was in this flat that she received Henry Kissinger, who was later to become National Security Advisor and Secretary of State for the Nixon and Ford governments. He wanted to meet members of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) while he was in London, and in those years Lessing’s flat was something of a headquarters for the internationalist New Left. Their conversation didn’t get very far. When he began praising a new nuclear weapon precise enough to kill only a targeted 100,000 people and called it a “kitten bomb”, Lessing was shocked and said that “anyone who could use the word ‘kitten’ to describe such a weapon of war showed a lack of moral feeling and sensitivity and that just about summed up everything which was wrong with American foreign policy.”

It was also while she lived in Langham Street that she wrote The Golden Notebook, widely regarded as her masterpiece. In both her life and her magnificently rich and diverse work the personal and political were entwined. A feminist and social activist, she was attracted by Sufism and also wrote most movingly about mental breakdown. For a whole generation she described and interpreted a time of shifting certainties.

Doris Lessing was one of the most important writers of the post-war period. So why is there no blue plaque on Holbein Mansions to record her stay?

Jennifer Kavanagh used to run a literary agency from an office in Langham Street, and now lives there. She is a Quaker, the creator of the board game, *Journey Home*, and the author of a number of books including one novel, *The Emancipation of B.* Follow her on Twitter @jenniferkwriter

www.jenniferkavanagh.co.uk

Recycling clothes, shoes and textiles in Fitzrovia

There are two recycling bins in Fitzrovia that accept clothes shoes and textiles for recycling, both are situated on the northern end of Cleveland Street. One is at the junction of Carburton Street at the northern tip of the triangle site. The second is outside Howard House.

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By MIKE PENTELOW

The reckless and eccentric behaviour of the Soviet spy Guy Burgess (1911-63) in Fitzrovia and the surrounding area is described in two new biographies of him. They are Stalin’s Englishman, The Lives of Guy Burgess, by Andrew Lowrie (Fleder & Stoughton, £14.99) and Guy Burgess, The Spy Who Knew Everyone, by Stewart Purvis and Jeff Hulbert (Biteback, £25).

Burgess, along with fellow spies Kim Philby and Donald Maclean, was recruited in 1934 by Soviet agent Arnold Deutsch, who was researching psychology at University College, London in Gower Street. And the Russians instructed Burgess to join the university’s School of Slavonic Studies to befriend fellow pupils who might be MI6 officers.

Burgess got a job with the BBC at Broadcasting House in the Talks Department in 1936, with a reference from his old Cambridge professor of history G M Trevelyn, who said Burgess had “passed through the communist measles that so many of our clever young men go through, and is well out of it.”

At first Burgess lived behind Broadcasting House at 4 Duchess Street (on the north east corner with Portland Place), then nearby at 5 Bentinck Street in Marylebone.

His job was to suggest and book people to give radio talks. Among those he earmarked included some communists, such as fellow spy Anthony Blunt, and Francis Klingender, who ran the Artists International Association centre at 84 Charlotte Street. But also, at the suggestion of the Russians, he invited members of the British secret service such as author David Footman. They dined in the Langham Hotel at 1 Portland Place in 1937 after Deutsch suggested they strike up a relationship (to ease Burgess later getting into MI6). But Deutsch did not yet fully trust Burgess so got another of his agents, Kitty Harris, to eavesdrop on their conversation. Footman later gave a talk on Albania, A Fish and a Motorcar, which was broadcast a couple of months later.

Burgess liked to hold court and sometime we were so late coming back to our offices that we were ticked off.” He also observed: “Guy drew brilliant cartoons, which he showed us before passing them under the table at the Talks meetings in the afternoon. Sir Richard Maconachie [head of department] would usually see and ask for the paper to be passed up, and after a good natured reproach, proceed with the meeting.”

During the evenings Burgess would visit seedy nightclubs, such as the Moonglow Club in Percy Street, where he picked up black American soldiers. He also frequented the White Tower at 1 Percy Street where he could be drunk and truculent. The Gargoyle Club at 69 Dean Street was another haunt, and he was a member of The Thursday Club who also worked with him, described him as “very intelligent until six in the evening. When he was in his cups, he made no bones about working for the Russians.”

Lord Arran observed him stopping a cab outside Buckingham Palace “to symbolically urinate against a statue.” And he would “enliven boring news briefings by handing around half naked pictures of his latest male conquest.”

After a drunken brawl in a night club in 1949 Burgess was pushed down two flights of stone stairs by his crony Fred Warner. Burgess broke his elbow, cracked his skull, and dislocated three ribs. Instead of calling an ambulance they took a taxi to Flat 3, 10 New Bond Street, where Burgess lived. He groaned all night and it was only in the morning they thought of phoning a doctor who got him taken to Middlesex Hospital in Mortimer Street, where he spent ten days. He also befriended a doctor at this hospital.

In 1950 he was moved to the British Embassy in Washington, USA. At his farewell party before leaving he was advised by one of the guests: “Don’t be too aggressively left wing, don’t get involved in race relations, and above all make sure there aren’t any homosexual incidents which might cause trouble.”

He famously replied with a mischievous grin: “What you mean is I mustn’t make a pass at Paul Robeson.”
The Great Beast

A short story by SUNITA SOLIAR

The Abbey of Thelema is cold. It stinks of cat piss. She wishes Raoul could see it for what it is a decrepit house, blighted and cracked, with no windows and overgrown weeds at its entrance. But Raoul waits at the altar, keenness jutting from his bony face, his deepocketed eyes fixed on the cat that Crowley holds out to him.

‘Please, Raoul,’ she says. ‘Let’s go.’ There are the occult books and Raoul muttering about Black Mass, his breath pungent with absinthe, but she draws the line at drinking cat’s blood. ‘It’s daft. That cat’s not possessed by anything. It wants a good meal and a wash. That’s all.

Crowley’s mouth tightens. His toadstool-shaped hat is on crooked, exposing his hairless head. She knows he is threatened by the look in her dark, marmoset eyes. She is the only fast thing in a slow world, and she is tied fast to her husband.

‘Do not listen to the woman whose mind is impaired,’ Crowley says, the cat’s claws scrapping against the bulge of belly under his cloak. ‘She is the symbol of your weakness.’

‘I don’t have brain damage,’ she says. ‘He made that up. Raoul, you know he made that up.’ She tugs his arm. ‘Come on.’

Crowley keeps his eyes on Raoul. ‘You have great potential,’ he says, keeping his voice low and hypnotic. ‘Liberate this cat from evil.’

Betty pulls harder on his arm. It is wiry and firm. He thinks she’s magic itself. Can’t you see it’s lies? His eyebrows, which always seem to meet in the middle in photographs, like a bird drawn with two pen strokes, give him the appearance of simple focus that does not include her.

She says, ‘Let’s go home. Let’s go back to London. We’ll have a pint at The Fitzroy. We’ll go dancing.’

Crowley sneers. She has seen him look at her like that before. She was doing her Tiger Woman trick, crawling on all fours with glasses of whisky on her back, while Raoul and the others watched. She heard Crowley pour filth into his ear. He called her mind the smut when it was happening on the floor of The Abbey.

He raises the cat, and Raoul’s eyes follow his movements. The sleeves of Crowley’s cloak fan out as he lifts the cat high above his head. Betty’s own cloak is bright, with blocks of yellow and green. She helped Roger Fry design it with two pen strokes, give him colour that takes her even further back to Limehouse and the gaudy traditions and excellence in music. The parish would be delighted to welcome you to all or any of our liturgies if you are able to join us in ‘one of the ten buildings that have changed the face of Britain’ (English Heritage).

It’s all theatrics,’ Betty says. ‘That’s all he is.’

Raoul raises the cat above his head as Crowley did; then he brings it down on the altar.

‘Stop it,’ she tells him. ‘He isn’t magical. He’s a crackpot.’

Crowley takes the knife. The cat screeches. Blood pops and sputters. Raoul is covered in it. Betty runs out, out into the night.

Crowley sneers. She has seen him say goodbye to a dream.

She waits for him at their rentapartment. She will come home eventually. He will see that Crowley has no power, that he is a fraud. Maybe not today, but one day. Then he will come back to her, she will have him again. They will return to England. Raoul will write poems again. They will be happy. They will save him – it is in her gypsy blood. As his breathing becomes shallow, she whispers, ‘Please don’t take him away. Please don’t let that devil take him away from me.’

When Raoul stops breathing, the sun is full and bright in the sky. The heat and his not breathing take the feeling out of her legs as she sits with them curled under her, the cloak bunched around her knees. When she gets up, her lips are dry. They split as they pull apart. She gets a pistol from her suitcase and returns to the Abbey.

Crowley lies on the floor, eyes open and smiling, his cloak lifted to expose the coarse hairs on his thighs. She points the pistol at him and fires. She misses. How does she miss? She is a good shot. She has had practice. He laughs. He fires again; the gun jams. No. He does not have the power to stop a bullet. He does not have the power to ruin her. No. He is not magical.

He gets to his feet and picks her up, carrying her like a rag-and-bone man’s hoard and dumping her outside. It cannot be that he is removing her. She came here to kill him. The door of the Abbey closes on her. She must go home. She must tell people. No, he is not magic; he is evil.

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Parish office: 020 7636 1788

FAMILY VALUES

Arguments confuse, but I choose ‘Remain.’ I don’t want us just to be a little grey island out at sea, shrugged in the rain, the kid in the playground who won’t join in. We should stand together with our fellow Europeans, side by side against those who would harm us.

I have this lovely station across the road, a fairytale castle connecting us to the wonderfully varied, historic and beautiful continent of Europe, via a magical tunnel underneath the sea.

Venice, Florence, the Greek Islands, the Alps – who would not want to be a part of that?

Sovereignty, economy, but did you know that we all descend from Charlemagne? We’re a family.

Broken now by a sadness of pencils, as loveless kisses in the wrong box say goodbye to a dream.

Banksy moves

A Banksy mural (above) has moved within the area. It used to be in the front window of the Freud Communications at 55 Newman Street. But they have now moved to 1 Stephen Street where he can still be viewed from the street.

Bloomsbury ward councillors’ surgeries

6:00 - 7:00pm first Friday of the month at Fitzrovia Community Centre, Foley Street, W1W 6DN
6:00 - 7:00pm second and fourth Fridays of the month at Murchmont Community Centre, 62 Murchmont Street, WC1N 1AB

Third Friday of the month is a ‘loving surgery’. Get in touch if you would like us to conduct the surgery at your street or building.

Adam Harrison, Sabrina Francis, and Rishi Madlani
Contact 020 7974 3111 or adam.harrison@camden.gov.uk

Sabrina Francis@camden.gov.uk rishi.madlani@camden.gov.uk

Illustration by Clifford Harper

‘She draws the line at drinking cat’s blood’
Eric Coates: the popular composer who proved his critics wrong

SUE BLUNDELL, author of the play The Man from the Sleepy Lagoon, describes the life of the man who was told ‘you’ll never earn a living writing tunes’

Born in Nottinghamshire in 1893, Eric Coates had been scribbling down melodies since he was six years old. By the time he was 19, his dearest wish was to go and study at The Royal Academy of Music in London. But his father, a country doctor, was determined that his fifth and youngest child should join a local bank. ‘I was in despair,’ Eric records in his autobiography, Suite in Four Movements. Eventually Coates senior relented, and Eric was enrolled at the RAM as a student of organ and composition.

This marked the beginning of Coates’ long association with Fitzrovia. Now on Marylebone Road, the RAM in those days was on Tenterden Street, Hanover Square, just south of Oxford Street, and its students used to socialise in the cheap cafes in the area.

Later, when Eric found work as a viola player in the orchestra of the Queen’s Hall, Langham Place, he joined the ranks of the scoffericians who ate at Paganini’s restaurant at 40-48 Great Portland Street, and, rather frequently, drank at The George pub on the corner with Mortimer Street. This was known among exasperated musical directors as The Glaport, because of the difficulties they had in extracting players from its depths at the end of rehearsal breaks.

Coates seems to have been blessed with a keen awareness of his own abilities, and how far they extended. When Frederick Corder, his composition tutor at the RAM, asked him to sketch out an idea for a symphony, Coates replied, ‘Oh I can’t do symphonies.’ Light music was what he was good at, and of the two of them spent the rest of the tutorial discussing Arthur Sullivan’s comic operas.

On the other hand, Coates could be doggedly protective of his own music. Years later when he heard one of the assistants at Chappell’s on Bond Street telling a customer that Coates’ work wasn’t up to much, he protested to the director. The assistant was sacked and sales of Coates’ sheet music began to climb.

And though he loved hearing his tunes being banged out on a pub piano, listening to them being mocked by a bishop was quite another matter. One day in the gardens at Oxford Circus station he saw an elderly cleric in purple disappear into one of the stalls. Then a sound emerged which Coates eventually recognised as his own Knightsbridge march. ‘Excuse me, but this is how it should go,’ he announced when the bishop surfaced. And he proceeded to play it for an hour.

Though his compositions were beginning to be popular, Coates continued playing viola at the Queen’s Hall. Built in 1893, this was Britain’s premier concert venue, home to the promenade concerts since 1895. In 1912 Coates was promoted to principal violist, and in the promenade concerts since 1919. In 1912 Coates was promoted to principal violist, and in this role he eventually clashed with Sir Henry Wood, the QHO’s conductor. Wood, incidentally, was another musician who knew Fitzrovia well. He was born at 413a Oxford Street (now 59), grew up in rooms over his father’s jewellery and pawn-brokering business at 255 (now 185) Oxford Street, and later lived in a flat at 1 Langham Place.

One of Henry Wood’s pet hates was the deputy system. Players would find someone to take their place if they got engaged or were off sick. When Wood banned the system, 40 members of the QHO walked out in protest and set up their own orchestra, which they named the London Symphony Orchestra.

QHO players still used deputies if they thought they could get away with it. Coates once accepted an invitation to conduct one of his own compositions at the London Palladium, and found a substitute viola player to rehearse a tricky piece by Richard Strauss with the QHO. But Wood chose this occasion to look over at the violas, and later that evening he gave Eric a sound ticking off. Coates would dearly have loved to give the viola at this point, but he was married by now and didn’t think he could afford it.

‘Old Timber’ may also have been jealous of Coates. Eric’s son tells a story about a prom concert where the orchestra was playing his father’s ‘Wood Nymphs’, with Coates as usual on the viola. ‘Encore! Encore!’ the audience roared. Wood wasn’t conducting that day, but as he disapproved of encore requests was sent off to ask his permission. Meanwhile the orchestra played ‘Wood Nymphs’ again. Wood couldn’t be found anywhere. When there were more calls for an encore Coates himself went off with the conductor to pound on Wood’s office door. There was definitely something going on inside, but no reply came. So they went back and played ‘Wood Nymphs’ for the third and last time.

The following summer, in 1919, Coates received a letter from the manager of the QHO. ‘Sir Henry Wood regrets to inform you that your services will not be required for the forthcoming Promenade season. This was a disaster for Coates. He and his wife Phyl were forced to leave their home at 39, Berners Mansions, 34-36 Berners Street, close to the corner of Mortimer Street, and move to a cheap bedsitting room in Hampstead; and Phyl went back to her former work as an actress.

Things slowly improved. In the 1920s and 30s Coates’ work became increasingly successful, especially after he brought out some American-style syncopation into his pieces.

When the BBC transmitted his ‘Knightsbridge’ march, the last movement of his London Suite, at the beginning of the radio programme In Town Tonight, they received 20,000 letters in one week asking for the composer’s name. More signature tunes followed. ‘Calling All Workers’ was used to introduce Music While You Work, and ‘By the Sleepy Lagoon’, adopted in 1942 with added seagulls, still signals the start of Desert Island Discs.

This last piece was famously inspired by a distant view of Bognor one balmy summer’s evening. One of Coates’ last works, the ‘Dam Busters March’, formed the overture for the film The Dam Busters, released in 1955.

Much of Eric’s music reflects the hustle and sounds of London, and ‘Langham Place’ and ‘Oxford Street’, from his London Again Suite, testify to his great love of the West End. The countryside is wonderful for dreaming, he tells us, but London is the place for work.

One day in the 1930s Eric and Phyl bumped into Sir Henry Wood and his wife at the St George’s Hotel and Phyl was going to recite a couple of poems by Alfred Lord Tennyson. But as soon as she began, Wood chose this opportunity to tell her she’d never have had the courage to give him the sack. ‘I would have walked past the place’, he tells us, ‘I used to feel slightly sick.’
Author of socialist classic spent his childhood in Fitzroy Street

By MIKE PENTELOW

The author of what became a socialist bible, ‘The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists’, lived in Fitzroy Street from the age of five to nine.

As a painter and decorator by trade he took the name of Robert Tressell - after the trestle which is used in the building industry.

His real name was Robert Noonan who was born in 1870 and died in poverty in 1911, being buried in an unmarked pauper’s grave in Liverpool, three years before his novel was published.

In fact his surname at birth was registered as Croker, after one of Noonan’s descendants explained to you if it is your first visit.

By consulting marriage records and electoral rolls Sarah has established that Robert’s mother married Zumbuhl in early 1875 in Poplar, east London, and the latter was a registered voter in Fitzroy Street in 1878 (see extract above).

And Fitzrovia News consulted St Pancras ratebooks to establish that they lived in Fitzroy Street from 1875 to 1879.

They then moved to 27 Elmore Street off Essex Road, Islington, for some years. By 1890 Robert, aged 20, was living in Queen’s Road, Everton in Liverpool, employed as a sign writer, and was jailed for six months for stealing £50 worth of silver and kitchen equipment.

Soon after he was released he emigrated to South Africa. There he joined a brigade of the United Irishmen to fight against the British in the Boer War. Then he and his daughter Kathleen sailed back to Britain in 1902 and settled in Hastings, where much of the novel is based.

Noonan had to work from 6am until late at night for under 3p an hour, and experienced at first hand how cut-throat competition in the industry caused poverty and misery for those working in it.

One of those whose lives have been changed by reading his book is Ricky Tomlinson, who had to taste the bad wine). He cast him in films such as Riff Raff, and Raining Stones. Ricky played Bobby Grant in the Channel 4 soap Brookside from its start in 1982 for six years. He is now best known as Jim in the television comedy, the Royle Family.

Born in 1959 he was raised in the Everton area where Noonan had lived as a youth half a century earlier.

Others to have lived at 37 Fitzroy Street include playwright Bernard Shaw from 1880 to 1882, and Scientology founder L Ron Hubbard from 1956.

Taiwanese well worth queueing for

BAO, 31 Windmill Street

Now: here’s a thing. If you have time to queue (no booking) and don’t mind a stool, (no chairs with backs), you’d definitely don’t mind a stool, (no chairs with backs), you’d definitely

By the DINING DETECTIVE

Taiwanese bun, two of which your menu and we were lucky enough to be standing next to someone who worked in Bao and was coming here on her day off! So we had good news about what we ordered – and indeed you can also order a beer in the queue while waiting for your turn comes before too long, and in you go. There, along with the chopsticks and the serviettes, you will find a pencil provided to mark your order on the menu which a friend member of staff will explain to you if it is your first visit.

A BAo is a steamed, filled Taiwanese bun, two of which companion dishes. Momo Aubergine rice bowl (£5 flavourosme and filling), Pickled Cabbage (£2), Crispy Prawn Heads (£2, but the eyes stared at me accusingly so that I couldn’t eat them), and Fried Chicken Chop & Hot Sauce (£4.50). This was so delicious we ordered a second one and I hope Bao won’t be offended if I describe them as the thrill of your first Kentucky Fried Chicken when you were ten only much tastier.

A small wine list with pleasant, mostly European, wines (at about £5 a glass) and when I sent the first glass back as perhaps from a bottle having been open too long, I watched. In two minutes the barperson tasted it, opened a new, different red at once, and gave me another glass, which tasted fine and cost the same. I call that service.

A service charge of 12.5% was added: still the bill was less than £80 for two and you could have a much cheaper meal if you don’t drink (although they do also serve interesting-looking cocktails). When we added a little more, the wait person came back and told us service had already been added. “For the pleasure of your extra serv-ice,” we said (it was to the one who had to taste the bad wine).

Give it a go, you won’t be sorry, and you’re pretty sure to go back again!
Shelter in tube stations from blitz had to be fought for

By ANN BASU

During the Blitz the people of Fitzrovia, like other Londoners, occupied the Tube stations to use as bomb shelters. Although the authorities at first wanted to ban it, the public quickly forced them to back down and accept what was in effect a people’s occupation.

During the intermittent London bombings of 1917 people had sheltered in the Underground, so it was expected that Londoners would head to the Tube when war broke out again in 1939. As Mike Home explains in The Northern Line: “This time round the government feared that a ‘deep shelter mentality’ would develop, with people refusing to come out. At the outset of the war the use of Underground stations was therefore banned.”

However Londoners, rather than accepting the official line that the Tube should remain available until the end of the war, occupied tube stations. Some MPs at first the public quickly forced them to back down and accept what was in effect a people’s occupation.

The government dithered over the question of deep level shelters before the war and for many months did nothing to provide them. Some MPs pressed very strongly for government action to protect the population, as did the Liberal Megan Lloyd George, David Lloyd George’s daughter and the first female Welsh MP. But others, such as Conservative MP Sir Ralph Glyn, opposed the provision of deep shelters in tube stations as potential hindrances to the flow of traffic. Sir Ralph, speaking in a Civil Defence debate on April 5, 1939, was concerned that the debate too much favoured the general public: “There is a great danger that people will get an impression… that we are paying too much attention to the protection of individuals here, and not giving sufficient attention to what really matters most—our offensive and defensive power.”

Sir Ralph also believed in looking ahead at future uses for such shelters: “You must devise shelters which will bring in some sort of commercial return in time of peace, such as car parks.”

But when the bombings began in August 1940 the people simply decided that they and their families felt safest in the Underground and, helped by political activists, occupied the tube stations ignoring any attempts to stop them. Tottenham Court Road, Goodge Street and Warren Street were all occupied and became heavily used.

Ted Bramley of the Communist Party, in the pamphlet Bombers Over London (the destruction included the ‘bomb era’ of V2 bombings in 1944) described the improvements: sanitation was provided, ventilation and heating was looked after, overcrowding was reduced by encouraging people into less-used shelters, and first-aid posts operated in the larger shelters, with a sick-bay, a medical officer and a nurse in cases where patients had to be isolated.

Local resident Max Minkoff had vivid memories of sheltering on the platform in Warren Street tube station, recalled on a Jewish Museum audio (No 319) that his family were allocated bunks in the station by organisers: “We had to go to the underground in the evening to get our bunks, we had to go seven o’clock, six o’clock, whatever it was, straight after work.”

Max’s father stayed at home with one of Max’s brothers, sleeping in the basement under a table.

The Tube shelters were a vital refuge: the locality, abutting major railway lines, was heavily bombed both in 1940-1941 and in the doodlebug era of V2 bombings in 1944 (the destruction included the bombing of Maples, the big furniture store in Tottenham Court Road, and much of Howland Street, where my mother’s family had lived). For many in Fitzrovia the Tube became a world in itself; a world that ordinary people had claimed and helped to shape.

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ILLUSTRATION BY CLIFFORD HARPER

with her family’s regular platform neighbour, a German woman, over infringements caused by the woman’s many belongings overflowing into their own little patch.

The Tube sheltered many thousands of Londoners each night during the bombing, while continuing to circulate people around the city. Eight new deep shelters, sheltering up to 8,000 people each, were eventually constructed under tube stations including Goodge Street; but they weren’t opened to the public until 1944.

Many people, of course, still had to rely on Anderson shelters in back gardens, indoor Morrison shelters or other types of surface or basement shelter; the Tube played a vital role in the West End but it was far from able to protect everyone.

The Tube shelters became a part of wartime mythology, drawn by Henry Moore and locked into generations’ memories. Domestic life, at least for some Londoners, took root below the street surface.

And for communities in Fitzrovia the underground shelters were a vital refuge: the locality, abutting major railway lines, was heavily bombed both in 1940-1941 and in the doodlebug era of V2 bombings in 1944 (the destruction included the bombing of Maples, the big furniture store in Tottenham Court Road, and much of Howland Street, where my mother’s family had lived). For many in Fitzrovia the Tube became a world in itself; a world that ordinary people had claimed and helped to shape.

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Two cinemas and a theatre close

between Percy Street and

names, had been at number 30

cost £15 million and took seven

years to build and had original-

ly been planned as a luxury

hotel. After financial difficulties

 arose the plan was changed to a

hostel in order to qualify for a

£7 million grant from the

Department of the

Environment, and a £2 million

loan from Camden Council.

A poignant photograph by

Erica Davies (left) showed chil-

dren barred from Fitzroy Square

Gardens wishfully watching another child playing inside.

There was a feature about an

international cricketer who was

then living in Cleveland Street

and working for Middlesex

Hospital in Mortimer Street. He

was John Pulle (right) whose

international career with Sri

Lanka (when it was called

Ceylon) lasted from 1928 to

1945. He was the opening bat,

and could also bowl and keep

wicket. Among his illustrious

opponents was the great

Donald Bradman of Australia.

Felicia Browne holds a child, 1936.

A local art student was killed

fighting against Franco’s fascists

in the Spanish Civil War on

August 25, 1936.

Felicia Browne, born in 1904, a painter

and sculptor who had been

taught at the Slade School of

Fine Art from 1920 to 1928,

where she was awarded the

Certificate in Drawing.

Then she went to Berlin to

learn metal working and stone

masonry where she witnessed

the rise of the Nazis.

Back in London she joined the

Artists International

Association, the centre of which

was at 84 Charlotte Street, and

the Communist Party. She then

travelled in Russia, Hungary, and

Czechoslovakia sketching

peasants. In early 1936 she

worked as a dishwasher in a tea

shop, to raise funds for the

party, and recruited fellow

workers into the trade union.

The opening night was to be

October 15 with a film called

Levellers in Cromwellian times.

A season of films about outlaws

Kelly and Robin Hood. Tickets

in Fitzroy Square closed, while a

new one opened in Great Russell

Road. The rents at the new one,

however, were so high that there

were only 110 temporary

guests out of the capacity of

880.

The rents were £18 a week

for a single room, and £26 for a

small double one. This com-
pared to £9 a week for students

at YMCA hostel in the area from 1851 to

1864. The sign is still there. Do

you know where it is?

How do you know

Fitzrovia? I & J Goddard manu-

factured and sold pianos at this

building in the area from 1851 to

1864. The sign is still there. Do

you know where it is?

No prizes, but for the answer

look under the Dining

Detective picture on page 13.

Looking back through our archives

40 years ago

Two cinemas and a theatre close

From Tower, June/July 1976:

Two cinemas and a theatre

closed down in Tottenham Court

Road as a result of the Gort

Estate redevelopment, all

between Percy Street and

Stephen Street.

The Berkeley, under various

names, had been at number 30,

since 1913, and La Continentale,

also under different names,

at number 36, since 1912.

The Open Space Theatre at

number 32 had not been there

long but was hoping to reopen

of Lord Delfont.

Dectective picture on page 13.

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WHAT’S ON AROUND FITZROVIA

LIVE MUSIC
All Saints Church, 7 Margaret St: Charles Andrews organ recital, Sept 18, 7-10.30pm (follow-
ing Evensong).
The Albany, 240 Great Portland St: The Albany (thealbanyw1w.co.uk): Blush (five stories about revenge pornography), Sept 22-Oct 22, 5pm. 1 Foley St: music every Wednesday evening.

THEATRE

CINEMA/FILM
Petrie Film Club, 100 Oxford St: Free film screenings for over 55s, £1.75.

TALKS
Edeone, 30 Tottenham Court Rd: The Assasination Bureau, Sept 22, 6-7pm. War Horse, Oct 25, 5-7.30pm. I Claudius, Nov 17, 6-8.30pm. Dishonoured, Nov 25, 6-8.30pm. (Book at events.petrie@ucl.ac.uk or 020 7679 4138).

EXHIBITIONS
All Saints Parish Room, 7 Margaret St: John Lewis & Waitrose Arts and Crafts Club Exhibition, Sept 13-25.
British Museum, Great Russell St (britishmuseum.org): Free: Courting to contract: love and marriage in the 18th and 19th centuries, until Oct 27.

LIVE COMEDY
The Albany, 240 Great Portland St: Mondays at 8pm.

OTHER EVENTS
London Walks (walks.com): £10, £5 concessions, at various locations.

ART GALLERIES
Featured exhibitions. A full list of all galleries is on our website.

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EMAIL NEWS@FITZROVIA.ORG.UK BY NOVEMBER 19 FOR THE DECEMBER 2016 ISSUE, AND PUT “LISTINGS” IN THE SUBJECT BOX.