

How the 'lump' system leads to slipshod building

THE HOUSE THAT BARNES BUILT...

A SEMI-DETACHED house in Fazakerley stands as an £8,000 monument to the slipshod building methods of millionaire builder Derek Barnes.

The neighbouring houses are occupied but 5 Winifred Road remains empty... and while the building faults remain so glaring the situation won't change.

The house has clearly been built at great speed. It has been completed only a few months but when a Free Press reporter inspected the house he found:

- A thick fungus-like growth on a wall by the kitchen door.
 - In the lounge, cracked and fallen plaster suggested the ceiling had come away from the wall. A thick wooden pole supported part of the ceiling.
 - In a bedroom above the lounge was a gap - one inch wide in places - between the skirting board and the floor. Efforts had been made to reinforce beams supporting the floor, near the point where they join the wall.
 - Badly fitting windows and doors.
 - More cracked plaster.
- This house is one of the thousands being built at the Field Lane site in Fazakerley by G.C.T., one of the companies owned by speculative builder Derek Barnes.

GOLD MINE

There is little doubt that this private estate, which is one of the largest in Britain, will prove to be a goldmine for Barnes.

When three-bedroom semis on the site were sold in April they fetched £5,499. And Derek Barnes was making a profit of at least £1,500 - and probably far more.

Now the price of houses has been pushed up so fast (at times between £200 and £300 in a week) that Barnes no longer prints a list of prices, in case they are out of date.

A few weeks ago the price of a three-bedroom semi had shot up to £7,999 - and almost all the £2,500 increase was sheer profit.



This garage belonging to Mr Tom Jones is fine if you've just got a motor bike. But if you have a car there are problems. You can drive the car in but the garage is so narrow that you can hardly open the car doors wide enough to get out once inside.

Even if Barnes only made a profit of £2,000 per house he would still pocket £2 million from the Fazakerley site.

Barnes' main firm, Northern Developments, is one of the most profitable speculative building companies in Britain. In six years profits have jumped from £147,453 to £2,800,000.

One reason for this upsurge is that Barnes ruthlessly cuts costs by using 'lump' labour. Non-union workers are paid a lump sum for doing a particular job. For instance two plasterers at Fazakerley are paid between £95 and £105 for plastering a whole house.

By using self-employed non-union labour Barnes is free to ignore safety regulations, can refuse to provide canteen and toilet accommodation, doesn't have to pay people if they are ill or injured in an accident, and does not provide holiday stamps.

Lump labour threatens unions, prevents training of apprentices and leads to shoddy, rushed workmanship.

For instance, two plasterers can

complete at least one-and-a-half houses a week. So in two weeks they make a minimum of £300, giving them wages of £75 each a week. A lot of money... but they have to work long hours and at break-neck speed to earn it.

Plasterers have been seen working late into the night at Fazakerley even during the dark winter evenings. Some come equipped with a small electric generator in their cars which they use to provide some lighting.

LARGE BUBBLES

But working in these conditions leads to faults and it may explain why large bubbles have appeared in the plaster at Mr Ken Simpson's new home in Elizabeth Road.

This is just one of the problems Mr Simpson and his family have faced since moving in.

Recently his wife, Margaret, was walking down the stairs when she slipped and grabbed the banister. To her amazement the banister swung away from her.

Since then the Simpsons have

had a whole new staircase and banister - and this is in a house which cost about £5,500. (Similar ones are now being sold for £8,000.)

The trouble arose because the main banister post was not fixed to the floor. Instead it hung nearly an inch in the air.

Besides this, the family have had a new window ledge upstairs, some new floorboards, and are worried about the size of cracks that are appearing.

Mr Dave Ellis owns the house next door to 5 Winifred Road (the empty house). Within weeks of moving in, thick green fungus appeared on the kitchen wall which divided the two houses.

This wall became so damp the workmen had to pull off the plaster, dry the wall and start again. Hardly what one expects in a new house.

CONSTANT DRAUGHT

Doors and windows are badly fitted and let in a constant draught. Mr Ellis can even put his fingers between the plaster and the window frame in one of the bedrooms.

While lump labour is used at Fazakerley faults such as these are likely to occur.

Mr T. Jones of Winifred Road, and Mr Ellis, have now formed an action committee at the Field Lane site to fight on behalf of the new owner-occupiers.

They realise that people who signed the contract for their houses a year ago are relatively fortunate, because most paid between £5,000 and £6,000.

Identical houses are now £8,000 to £9,000 and they could give their new owners quite a headache.

Sludge dumping report ignores deadly metals

BY MIKE PETRY

OPPOSITION to the dumping of sewage sludge in Liverpool Bay has grown following the analysis of samples collected earlier this year.

The analysis casts grave doubts on the recommendations of the Department of the Environment report on dumping, which is remarkable for its glaring omissions rather than for anything else.

The report, 'Out of Sight, Out of Mind', studied the effects of dumping in a specific area of the bay, and concluded that 'there is no justification for curbing the present tipping of sewage sludge on the designated spoil ground in Liverpool Bay.'

It also said that an increase in effluent dumping to 250,000 dry tons a year is 'unlikely to produce unacceptable effects'. Last year 40,000 dry tons were dumped and this year's total is expected to be 100,000.

But the report admits that it cannot define safe limits with any

certainty, and adds that it would take five years of study to reach any precise conclusions. (The report took a year to draw up, which, excluding paperwork meant nine months of actual research.)

The most serious deficiency is the absence of any report on non-decaying heavy metals contained in sludge, which in sufficient quantities are lethal to all life.

The report was originally accepted by five votes to four by Liverpool's Transportation and Basic Services Committee, but largely because of pressure from Councillor Mike Black, it was referred back at the full council meeting on November 15 for further debate.

SEWAGE BOATS

Councillor Black spoke of reports on 13 samples of domestic and trade effluent taken from Garston Docks and the boats carrying sewage to the bay over three months, and analysed by the City Analyst in August.

These showed significant levels of heavy metals in the sludge which, if allowed to accumulate, would seriously affect marine life and ultimately humans (through eating sea foods). Accumulation is taking place because movement of the tides is insufficient to disperse this.

The report does not mention this, and a letter from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to Councillor Black in October actually claimed: 'Dumping areas are selected to provide for suitable dilution and dispersal of the materials.'

Accumulation has meant that fish have been caught in Liverpool Bay containing concentrations of mercury close to the levels which are lethal to humans (2.4 parts of mercury per million parts of water) - and have proved lethal in Japan.

1,000 NEW JOBS

All this could be avoided by the re-cycling of sewage, which would also be much more economic - despite high initial costs for factories - and would create many new jobs.

A factory on Merseyside serving the north-west could save £30 million a year (the present costs of transportation, storage and dumping), create over 1,000 jobs and generate its own profits from the sale of fertiliser and re-cycled animal foodstuffs.

Burnt sewage would generate power, and pure water could eventually be produced. It remains to be seen whether companies like ICI, which produces a lot of fertiliser, will go along with such a scheme.

Significantly, there was no representative of any conservation or amenity group on the working party which produced the report. Nor was there any trade union representation - which is absurd considering how much industry is involved.

NO MORE FARES PLEASE!

SHOULD fares go up? That was the question Merseyside's Passenger Transport Authority were going to decide when they met on November 7. In the event, Heath's pay and price freeze decided for them: Fares cannot be increased - for the time being.

But should they be increased later? When fares go up, as everyone knows, the number of passengers on buses, trains and ferries goes down. And more people use cars. More cars mean more pollution, more congestion, more homes flattened under concrete and tarmac. If we want to avoid this, public transport should be used more - not less.

How can more people be persuaded to turn to public transport? Some believe the answer is to abolish fares. A number of Labour councillors support the idea. Councillor Harold Lee has predicted free transport on Merseyside in the next five years. Alderman Bill Sefton has called for a report, which will be published on December 14. Here we look at some of the arguments.....

'TO GIVE freedom to the car, the city must be torn down and rebuilt in its image.' Nottingham's transportation chairman said recently. And looking at America's examples he said: 'The Long Island Freeway has been described as the largest parking lot in the world, and the freeways of Los Angeles are impossibly overloaded. Indeed it is now accepted that the construction of these roads has of itself accelerated the urban sprawl, which in turn has led to vast increases in traffic and assisted in the destruction of city centres.

'If America, with all its resources can not cope with the pollution and deterioration which has resulted from giving the motorist his freedom, how can we in this small, densely populated island hope to do this?'

Until recently the most popular way to deal with traffic jams was to build more roads. But it doesn't solve the problem for long. Traffic soon builds up again - and you're back to square one. Nottingham is the latest city to realise its mistake - and has just cancelled its urban road building programme.

ABOLISHING FARES

Other ways are now being discussed. One is to entice the motorist onto public transport by providing a better service and lowering or abolishing fares.

If there were no fares, how many people would give up their cars and park near a station or bus stop and travel into town by bus or train?

Attempts were made to calculate this in 1970. The results suggested that if Liverpool's buses were free the proportion of car users would drop from 53% to 35.2%. A 2 1/2% decrease would produce a 3% reduction in car users, and a 5% decrease a 7.3% reduction.

However these calculations are only mainly theoretical, and experts say

The case for fare-free transport

they are based on 'rather shaky data'. They give nothing more than an indication.

Another rough guide is a London University study of the travelling habits of London Transport employees. They travel free on buses and tubes and pay only a quarter of normal British Rail fares.

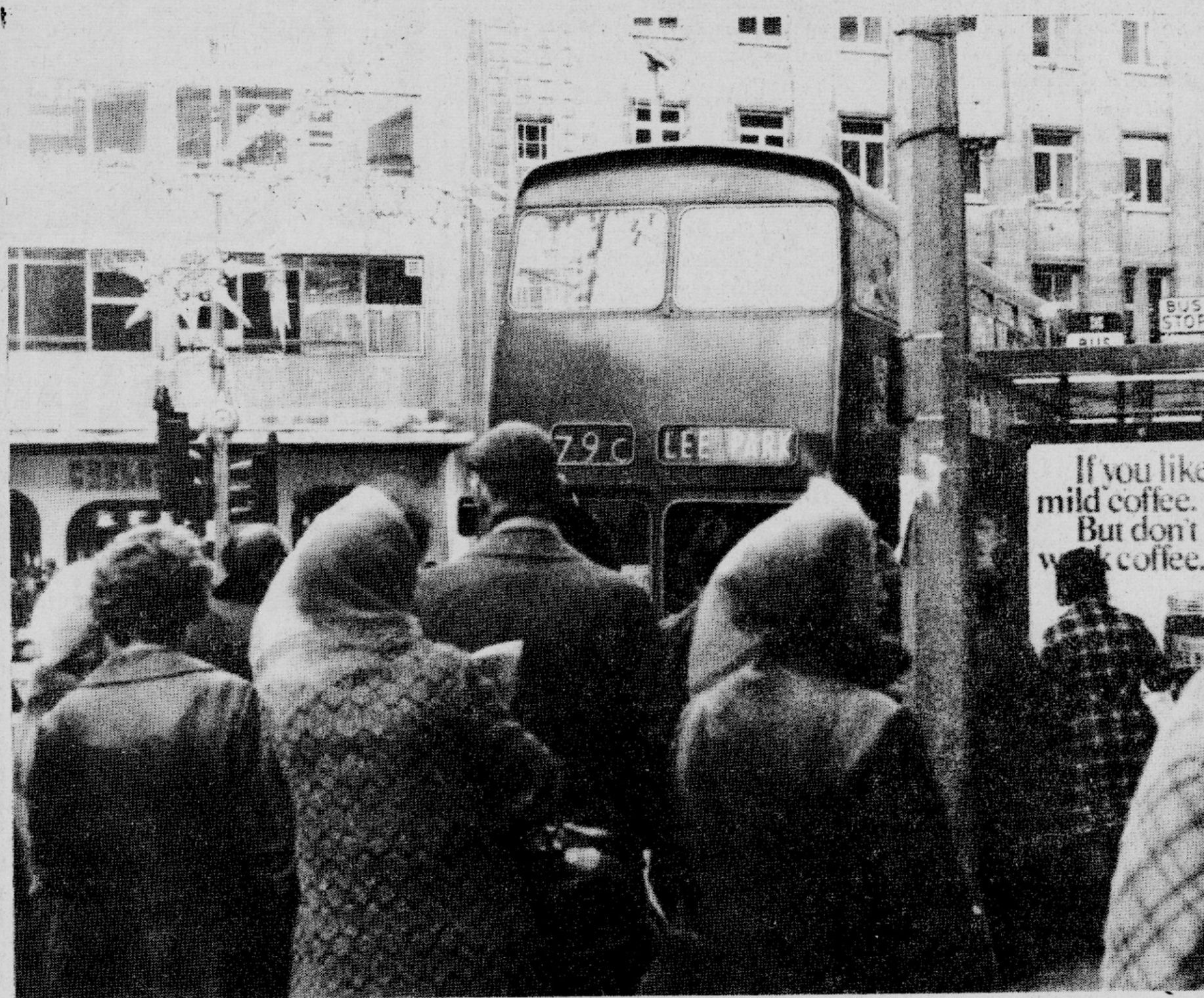
The survey concluded that if everyone had similar facilities, the proportion of car journeys to work in central London would be 30 to 40% of what it is now.

Because there are no really accurate predictions of the effects of fare-free transport, a sudden abolition of fares would probably lead to chaos.

But it could be done in stages over several years, by reducing fares and increasing the number of buses and trains at each step - and carefully watching how travelling habits altered.

ONE IN TEN

The 1966 census showed that in Liverpool less than 27% of households have cars. And in some areas - like the Dingle - less than one house in ten has a car. The vast majority of people in Liverpool must



use public transport, or walk.

Transport is the key to many activities and everyone should be able to visit the city centre without being deterred by high fares.

If travel was free, no-one would be cut off from the life of the city because they couldn't afford to get there. Public buildings like the library, museum and art gallery would be better used.

More people with problems would be able to visit corporation offices - and keep on visiting them - until they got satisfaction.

FREE PASSES

Not all the benefits of free travel can be counted in pounds and pence. Pensioners' free passes do much to ease the problem of loneliness: They can visit friends and relations or have a day in New Brighton. Without the passes many would be confined to a few streets near their homes. But pensioners are not the only ones.

Thousands of others - people with low incomes, mothers with large families - would also welcome free transport.

Fare-free travel would of course

have to be paid for. The cost would depend on the service provided, but in 1970 officials suggested that if all the money had to come out of the rates, a levy of 25p in the pound might be realistic.

Politicians might be afraid this would be unpopular with voters. But it would only be unpopular if the public decided they weren't getting their money's worth.

For a family whose house has a rateable value of £100 the cost would be £25 a year - so any family now spending more than ten bob a week on fares would benefit. If they no longer needed a car they would save even more.

Payment through the rates would be a fairer system. The people in the best houses would pay the most - and in general they are the people who cause most expenditure on roads by using their cars a lot.

£3 MILLION SAVING

But there might be other sources of income. The Merseyside Land Use and Transportation Study report said: 'Savings of at least £3 million in capital investment on highway and parking facilities would be possible if 1,500 peak hour vehicle trips can be diverted to public transport.'

The Government pays 75% of the cost of building major roads, and if the MPTA could show that free transport was saving money that would have been spent on roads, they would have a strong case for a grant towards transport costs.

A transport system with no fares would be easier and slightly cheaper to run. Buses would not be held up while passengers paid the driver and the clerical work necessitated by fares would go. Collecting everyone's fares in a lump sum through the rates is a more sensible and efficient way of doing it.

Free bus campaign

IN PARTS of the North-West attempts have been made to start a fare-free bus service, mainly in Manchester and Liverpool.

In Manchester, the Free Public Transport Campaign is into its second year, and in 1971 they ran an election candidate for the city council.

In January this year, 'Free Public Transport Month', a free bus was run on one route for a day, while 2,500 signatures for a petition were collected.

To publicise the campaign, a brightly-painted model bus was made out of wood and polystyrene and pushed through the streets, proudly bearing the destination 'Towards a new society'.

In Liverpool, the Friends of the Earth transport group attempted to run a free bus, but met with a blunt refusal from the Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority, from whom they planned to hire the bus.

Friends of the Earth had hoped to run the bus at the teatime rush hour along a busy route in the city, but the Authority said they could not spare any buses for that route and at that time.

They also claimed that they would lose revenue, which is surprising because Friends of the Earth wanted to pay for hiring it.

on social services, etc.

Almost all the money needed to run a free transport system would have been spent on transport anyway, whether on bus and train fares or on building roads. Abolishing fares simply means paying for the service in a better and fairer way.

It would be better to improve services rather than make travel free.

It would be possible to do both. Free travel could itself lead to improved service - with no fares to collect and less traffic on the roads journeys would be faster.

Tourists and visitors from outside the area wouldn't pay anything towards the cost of free transport. Shops and businesses in the area would be helping to pay the cost, and would benefit from tourists spending money when they came.

In other towns

NOTTINGHAM - Series of traffic collars will limit the number of cars entering the city. All plans for new urban roads and major improvements to existing roads - which would have cost well over £100 million - have been scrapped. Instead, the money will be put into improving the buses.

STEVENAGE - 'Superbus' is cheap, fast and frequent (every five minutes). It was started instead of a road programme.

READING - Greatly improved efficiency of bus service by use of priority lanes.

ABINGDON - has 'Dial-a-bus' system. Passengers phone a radio control room which directs a minibus to pick them up. Maidstone, Chelmsford and Harlow making similar plans.

LEEDS - Cross-city commuter service for people with season tickets. Passengers picked up near their homes.

RUNCORN NEW TOWN - Buses operate on a separate road system.

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