



Flashback to October: Pickets at the off-licence after Mrs Weaver was sacked.

Drinks firm set 'honesty traps'

WINE MERCHANTS Ashe and Nephew admitted at an industrial tribunal in Liverpool that they set 'honesty traps' to catch their staff.

The tribunal was held in January to investigate the case of Mrs Gladys Weaver who was sacked from the firm's off-licence in Scargreen Avenue, Fazakerley.

Mrs Weaver said she was dismissed for refusing to plant money around the shop and to put extra money in the till to test the honesty of her assistants. (See Free Press 21).

The company agreed they asked their manageresses to play these dirty tricks.

But they said Mrs Weaver was actually sacked because stock losses at the shop were five times more than was 'tolerable'. (They made it clear they did not doubt Mrs Weaver's own honesty.)

No verdict has yet been announced. Even the tribunal chairman said he found it 'distasteful' that the manageresses were sometimes asked to act as 'agents provocateurs' by tempting the staff to steal.

Naturally the company's barrister did his best to persuade the tribunal that these 'honesty traps' were only used when stock losses became serious ('serious' was over 0.5%).

The Scargreen Avenue shop is extremely busy. During Mrs Weaver's year as manageress takings were about £72,000. And yet she received only £25 a week before tax, for at least 50 hours' work.

From the start Mrs Weaver was told not to trust her three assistants. And when one assistant started using a car, Mrs Weaver was told to watch her particularly closely.

Mrs Weaver, like all the manageresses, was also told to return unexpectedly to the shop during her 'off duty' hours to check the till and the spirit sales.

Not content with this, the area manager, Mr Michael O'Brien went around the shops pretending to be a customer. One assistant was sacked from Scargreen Avenue when he found she had not recorded the correct amount on the till.

● Ashe and Nephew is part of the giant - and very dubiously run - Lonrho Company, which specialises in exploiting Third World countries and in giving massive bonuses to its directors. On the Lonrho board are 'respectable' figures such as former Tory minister Duncan Sandys, Edward Du Cann, the former Tory minister and financial manipulator, and Sheikh Nasser Sebah Al Almed of Kuwait.

Council architect tells his story

THE STORY SO FAR... Knowsley Council Architect Eric Spencer Stevenson has resigned seven months after being named as a central figure in our "Corruption in Kirkby" article.

Last May, we revealed that Stevenson, while architect for Kirkby Council, had received various favours from builder George Leatherbarrow.

A £2,000 sports car and an extension on his house in Heswall were enough to get Stevenson suspended and the police investigating.

We also detailed Leatherbarrow's remarkable generosity to others connected with Kirkby Council - although with £10 million-worth of council contracts he could afford to be.

Council leader Dave Tempest, JP, OBE, and his side-kick, councillor Bill Marshall, were both lucky

enough to have extensions built on their homes. And both told incredible stories about how they paid.

Another council architect, Alan Wright, also received building materials from the council's Tower Hill estate, where George Leatherbarrow was the general contractor.

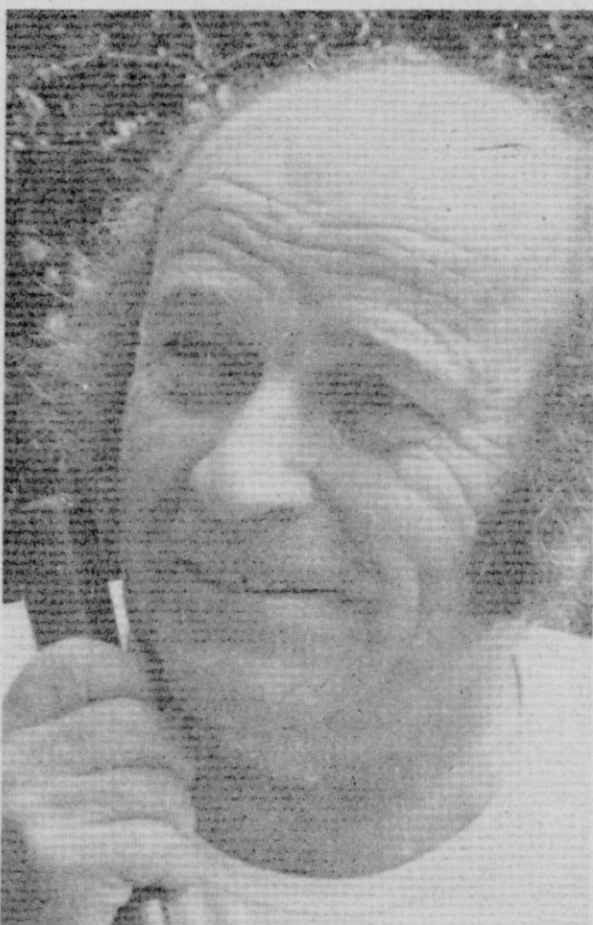
Police investigations into these - and other - things are expected to go on all this year.

But more interesting facts have been revealed by Eric Spencer Stevenson himself. Before he resigned, Stevenson was interviewed by councillors about two contracts given to George Leatherbarrow: Kirkby ski-slope and the Dragons Lane housing scheme at Whiston.

"Strictly Confidential" reports of these interviews went to Knowsley Council's Policy Committee last month. Below, we examine what they contained...



TEMPEST - opened the quotations in Stevenson's office.



LEATHERBARROW - no contract until work was almost finished.

Ski-slope saga . . .

KIRKBY SKI SLOPE was dreamed up by Eric Spencer Stevenson early in 1973.

"Mr Stevenson accepted that throughout 1973 he was pushing the ski slope with the then chairman of Kirkby's General Purposes Committee (Dave Tempest)..."

It wasn't until November 1973 that this committee gave permission for the go-ahead. But Stevenson admitted that long before that - in July - he had placed a provisional order for the ski equipment with Ski Mat Ltd.

Stevenson explained in the interview that "he thought that he had had prior discussions" with Dave Tempest.

It was Tempest, of course, who personally accepted tenders from Ski Mat Ltd worth over £28,000 early in 1974. (But if provisional orders had been placed with Ski Mat months before, what chance did any other firm have?)

Stevenson also admitted that - most unusually - he had obtained prices for mounding the slope by

personally ringing four contractors. He did not specify any particular material and there were no formal tender documents.

Four quotations were sent to his office where they were opened in his presence by... Dave Tempest. It was George Leatherbarrow's firm which got the work worth more than £64,000.

No formal contract was signed with Leatherbarrow until the slope was almost finished.

Stevenson insisted that he had not controlled the actual building of the slope, and so he knew nothing of the rubbish Leatherbarrows were tipping there. The supervision had been left to "a senior member of his staff" - Alan Wright.

He said Wright had drawn his attention to Leatherbarrow's "Free Tipping" advert but he assumed his man had put a stop to it.

However, Stevenson now "accepted that enquiries should be made among members of his staff concerned as to why the non-approved material had been allowed to be tipped."

Last tender chapter

THE £1,149,000 contract to build 124 houses at Dragons Lane, Whiston, was awarded to George Leatherbarrow (Builders) Ltd in December 1974.

The decision came as a shock to builders Holland Hannen and Cubitts. They had done the first phase of the scheme and would normally carry on to finish the development.

But architect Eric Spencer Stevenson had other ideas. He ended negotiations with Cubitts and stifled their complaints by not passing them on to the Housing Committee as Cubitts had asked.

Stevenson tried to explain ditching Cubitts by telling councillors in the interview that "he did not like neg-

otiated tenders but preferred to obtain competitive prices."

However, as the report on the interview notes, this did not stop him asking permission, later, to negotiate two more contracts with Leatherbarrows.

Stevenson apparently opened the tenders for the contract himself. Leatherbarrow's was the lowest and he advised the Housing Committee to accept it.

But what he did not tell the committee was that no completion date was specified by Leatherbarrows. And so, depending on the contract period, theirs might not have been the lowest after all.

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Policemen's ball change

AN INTERESTING alteration to the arrangements for the annual Kirkby police ball on February 6.

In the past, senior officers and local dignitaries have kept well clear of common scuffers by having their own VIP bar and buffet. But there will be no VIP treatment this year.

It seems the Boys on the Beat have realised there are no 'worthies' in Kirkby worth looking up to. Viva la Revolution!

1200 in strike 'outrage'

THE THREE-WEEK unofficial strike by contracting electricians on Merseyside, last month, was the first widespread challenge to the industry's governing body.

Twelve hundred men came out when the national Joint Industry Board - made up of employers' and union representatives - altered a 40-year-old agreement on pay for "travelling time".

Merseyside electricians, unlike those elsewhere, were paid for travelling time by an addition to their basic rate. Over the years this came to be regarded as part of the basic - paid to everybody, whether they worked away from the employer's premises or not.

But, as part of the 1976 pay deal, the JIB brought Merseyside into line with the rest of the country. The additional hourly rate disappeared. And "travelling time" would be strictly related to distance. This meant some would gain, but others would lose money.

The result was a swift revolt which hit over 50 firms and 80 building sites, including Liverpool's teaching hospital site where 750 men were laid off.

Tom Breakell, the EEPTU's executive member for the North West, said this about the strike: "It's a bloody outrage. The same organisation that kept the IRO (Britain's longest dispute) going are now organising and

manipulating this. The Morning Star doesn't print something every day unless they've got their dirty finger in it."

Eddie Sabino, the chairman of the strike committee, had a slightly different story. He said he was recovering from the union elections (in which he was defeated by Breakell) and was genuinely surprised by the reactions of the men.

"It didn't take me long to see we were on to a proper grass roots movement," he said.

Within three days the number of strikers jumped from 500 to 900. And eventually, well over 90% of Merseyside contracting electricians were involved.

The decision to alter the "travelling time" agreement was certainly not taken at the grass roots. In fact, even local employers and local union officials had foreseen that the JIB's proposals would cause trouble, and

had opposed them.

But at the national JIB meeting on December 11 - attended by Breakell - there was not one single vote against the decision.

After almost two weeks of the strike, the JIB took a full-page advert in the Liverpool Echo to try and get the men back to work. The advert promised "a special arrangement" to see that no one lost money.

But it was still not a cast-iron guarantee. And the very next day a mass meeting voted to stay out.

It was only after the JIB issued an instruction to all Merseyside employers, guaranteeing wage levels for everybody, that the electricians voted to end their strike on January 23.

And, in an interesting development, the men also agreed that the unofficial strike committee should stay in existence to check that the 1976 pay deal was properly implemented.



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