"WELCOME to 1976 Carnival at Alcatraz' said a banner on a block of flats. Actually the place was Netherley, though people there often feel like prisoners.

During one week in August the whole estate suddenly came to life. It was the first time there had been a carnival in Netherley and the organisers were staggered by its success.

The carnival was entirely a home-grown affair. It wasn't run by paid community workers or anyone from outside the area. And although the total cost was around £3,000, all but £145 was raised on the estate.

The idea for a carnival originally came from a group of mothers who were active in tenants' campaigns. One of them, MARIA REILLY, talked to the Free Press about why they did it and what it achieved ...

WE THOUGHT about doing a carnival after about a year of doing our militant work. You would get people saying things like "I'm not coming because it's always left to a few to do it". And I always thought to myself: There's something missing. Wh won't they fight to defend where they

And I realised they didn't feel as though Netherley belonged to them. Until you had something to fight for that belonged to you, you would never fight.

So I thought if I can give them Netherley, then afterwards try and get them to defend it, then I thought we'd have a better job than just leaving t to a few diehards.

Another reason which started us off into the carnival was when the old lady on the landing got kicked and she died, and it was an act of vandalism as she was asking the children to move.

We went round the schools - me, Maureen Curran, Shirley Parkinson, and Maureen Smith - we talked to the children about vandalism and things that they did... like throwing things off landings.

And we explained why they did it, and that there was nowhere to play, and they were bored. And we said: If you will do this one thing for us, we promise we will do something for you. ... The vandalism rate just dropped. We found if we approached them as adults we were getting an adult attitude back. We weren't roaring and shouting, we were trying to get something through to them - and it worked.

STARTING

WE THOUGHT first thing to do is find out how many more are interested. So we put out about a thousand leaflets. We got the Comp (Netherley Comprehensive) to run them off for us on tick. It only cost £2.30 but we didn't have it.

The first meeting we had wasn't so bad. We got about fifteen. The second meeting there was six - then three of them didn't turn up till nine. And that was after a thousand leaflets had gone out.

We made a mistake of not putting it over in the first leaflet exactly what we wanted. So we made certain then that every leaflet which went out, people knew what was expected.

They did another 4,000 leaflets at Easter. Six of them spent three weeks delivering them and about thirty people turned up the estate was Shirley and the two for the next meeting. Then their luck changed unexpectedly...

Somebody on the estate accused us raising for general funds. of stealing £400. So we went and put up a big notice in the Post Office (I put it up because it was me that it neighbours... was about saying about the £400 - I it, it was all fictitions.

People would say: "Oh they're



blah, blah, blah, and I would take them to court.

I said, any jangling to be done on street corners by misinformed people because they don't come to meetings is no use to anybody. Everyone's welcome and they are open meetings.

That seemed to arouse people's interest more than all the leaflets. There were . 160 at the next meeting. They watched films of the Granby and Old Swan

We discussed their mistakes. Granby Festival – that was done by the paid workers. And as soon as the workers stopped being paid, well, then it all finished, which was wrong

This was all done by the mothers. Anyone paid to do the job first of all comes in and doesn't know the people. We had the advantage that we lived here, we knew exactly what breed of people we had to deal with.

RAISING CASH

One feature of the carnival was the

We said: Call your own coffee mornings. Get your neighbours interested and form your own committee from there. We also made it that they couldn't go outside their own area

The only people who could travel

It was when people started organising the we're not going to get 300. street parties that some of them realised how little contact they had with their

street parties. People were asked to organise these themselves and to raise

with their raffles.

girls she had helping her. They could said "How many are you expecting?" use the whole estate 'cause they were

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for money.

we were at sixes and sevens. We had e fancy dress, there was the inflatable, there was horse rides, ther was general games going on. We ought toys for every child on the state and we had to give these out. The fancy dress the mothers made

awful funny in our square. You don't

And we'd say: "For God's sake

they can't be that funny. Go and knock

and tell them you're leaving their kid

It worked, and in the end some squares

out - you know, literally put it like

raised as much as £140.

THE CARNIVAL

WE HAD A PLAQUE for the best

presented area during the carnival.

knew as this was the first time we

So we thought: Let's make it a

trying to outdo the other. The only

were Langshaw Lea, Paveley Bank,

Fulshaw Close. We tried absolutely

everything. I think they were sitting

Crepe paper and everything... the

Netherley until we started coming in

Now we had the judge out on Mon-

day. Any bits of the squares that

hadn't decorated, they were queuing

in Woolworth's on Tuesday morning

Then there was the parade:

and they were decorating during the

The police came in the morning and

and being ambitious I said 300, think-

When we got to the Comp there were

ing deep down in my heart and soul

thousands, literally thousands, see,

and you didn't realise how many there

was until you were down by Naylors-

field and looked back and they were

were about twenty deep and that's

when you really realised you'd won.

Everyone was dressed up, mothers,

fathers, aunties, uncles, grandmothers,

Costumes... we got fifty from the

Everyman Theatre, and this was an

two mothers in each square and we

said on the leaflets: "Two mothers

have got them. But we want everyone

else to make their own. Most people

nobody was doing it. It was a bluff.

One lady had a frock with a big

are doing it." As far a we knew

And they did it.

encouragement. We gave them out to

still coming out of the Comp and they

wholesale said he'd never heard of

for crepe paper.

week.

waiting for somebody to do it for

places we couldn't get interested

competition. And so one square was

wouldn't get people to decorate.

know them. You can't go asking them

the children were ingenious. They were marvellous. A robot won, it was cardboard boxes covered with bacofoil, God help him he must have been

cushion up and a note on her back

saying 'Was it Bill or was it Ben?'

utely comical.

All sorts of things which were absol-

The first site after the parade was

Brittarge Brow and when we got there

it was very disorganised. That was

ur fault, the reason being that we

There was one tramp that was that nentic you would have walked pa in the street. And they called the police out for a laugh and said they had a tramp in the square. And the bobby was saying "Come on there, you are upsetting the children, you are spoiling the carnival."

RESULTS

We've not made people happy who didn't have any money, were hungry, or have got real problems. You just couldn't do that. We gave them a happy week and something to smooth over their wounds.

We felt if we gave a week where people said "Oh bugger the problems The reason we thought of was that we even if they said "bugger the rent" and they spent it on their children and on a good time... Anyone anywhere in this depression deserves a bit of happiness sometimes. I don't think one week of not paying your rent or your bills would make much difference as long as it makes you

> Every sort of group on the estate got more or less involved ... the major ettes, the judo, the morris dancing. You had people saying "Oh does

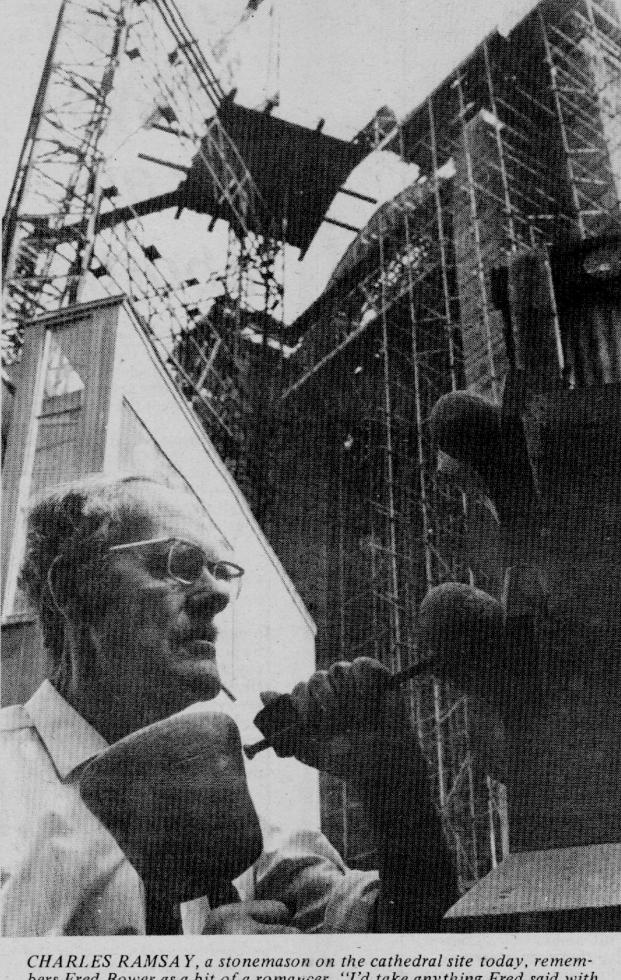
that go on all the year?" or "I wouldn't mind joining that" or "I didn't know there was one". And people are still carrying on certain things... boys' football - he wants t expand that really big - ladies' football that they can keep on all the year round... forming an entertainments committee for the estate, making sure you know that certain things go off - dances.

The way people got involved was just fantastic, and it must have been something they were waiting for and waiting to do, otherwise it couldn't

have gone off. We must have given them some. thing they always wanted and we only just gave them the idea and from

then they built it up themselves. I have a feeling that next year the different area committees may organise their own site for their own particular day and fit it into a programme. Which will be even better. They don't need a co-ordinator, that was only for the first year.

We found organisers and people who could do jobs that they never realised they could do before, and maybe they didn't get the training at school and yet could get out and organise groups. People get paid thousands of pounds to organise big companies. Well, these girls did it on small scales and did it equally as



bers Fred Bower as a bit of a romancer. "I'd take anything Fred said with

Mr Ramsay until recently had some of Fred Bower's tools, easily recognisable by the mark 'Rewob' ('Bower' spelt backwards) stamped on them. He remembers Fred's brother, Billy, as well. "He was a letter cutter. They were both well known characters in the trade. Their father ran a yard in North Hill Street, but I think it was in Thornton's yard about 1928 that I worked with Fred Bower, but we moved around a lot in those



Bloody Sunday - crowds gather on St George's Plateau.

HEROLLING STUNEMASON

Workman who left a message to posterity...

IMBEDDED deep within the foundations of Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral is a tin box placed there by one of the masons who laid the foundation stone. Inside is a scrap of paper bearing these words:

"Hail! We, the wage slaves employed on the erection of this cathedral to be dedicated to the worship of the unemployed Jewish carpenter, hail ye! Within a stone's throw from here human beings are housed in slums not fit for swine. This message... is to tell ye how we of today are at the mercy of Trusts. Building, fabrics, clothing, food, fuel, transport; all are in the hands of money-mad, soul-destroying Trusts... The Money-Trusts today own us. In your day, you will, thanks to past and present agitators for economic freedom, own the Trusts. Yours will... be a happier existence indeed. See to it therefore that ye too work for the betterment of all and justify your existence by leaving the world the better for your having lived in it... Hail, Comrades and farewell. Yours sincerely, A WAGE-SLAVE'

The "wage-slave" was Fred Bower, author of a classic working-class autobiography entitled "Rolling Stonemason". But who was Fred Bower?

JOHN FREDERICK BOWER was born on December 6,1871 in Boston, Massachusetts. His parents came to Liverpool when Fred was three, settling in the Toxteth district: a rabbit warren of "slums not fit for swine" where the seamen and dockers who maintained one of the world's greatest ports lived and died in conditions of almost unbelievable poverty.

Fred Bower was to spend most of his life trying to tear down the system that built those slums.

After learning the family trade of stonemasonry, Fred set out on a series of travels, working his way all over Britain and, later, America and Canada. The things he saw and experienced on those travels convinced him of the need for a complete change in the social system. Upon his return to Liverpool in 1903 he, like many other rebels of those days, joined the Independent Labour Party.

Fred's greatest ally in the ILP was that now almost legendary dockers' leader, Jim Larkin, who had known Fred since childhood, having been born just around the corner from him in High Park Street,

FOUNDATION STONE

For a large part of 1904 Fred worked for Thorntons, the first building firm to work on the construction of the Anglican Cathedral. When the cathedral foundations were laid in June that year Fred, assisted by Jim Larkin, dreamed up the idea of placing therein the message to posterity quoted above. The message was duly placed in the brick surround of the oundation stone. And there, presumably, it has lain ever since.

In the same year as the cathedral incident Fred and Jim campaigned together on behalf of John Wolf Tone Morrisey, socialist candidate for the position of City Auditor. Previously the two auditors' posts were divided between Liberals and Tories and many were outraged that the socialists should put the city to the expense of an election! Fred and Jim put election posters

everywhere – including the wall of Burts Builders in Grafton Street, where Fred was then working. After this the approach of a policeman forced them to ide on top of a wall.

But no doubt they considered their efforts justified when, later that week, Morrisey was elected as auditor and went

by ALAN

on to become - in November 1905 Liverpool's first Labour councillor. Over the next few years Fred Bower became one of Liverpool's best known socialists by holding open-air meetings all over the city in which he argued the case for socialism in a rich, down-to-earth style that was all his own. Like the time he called out to one such meeting: "Any working man who is not a socialist is a hog." "Well I'm no socialist and I'm not a hog" came one man's aggrieved reply. "Then why are you content to live like

one?" Fred shot back. In the years immediately before the First World War British workers went through their greatest ever phase of industrial militancy. During this period Bower became converted to Syndicalism; the belief that the only power working people have is their ability to organise industrially. As a result he became associated with Tom Mann, Britain's best-known and greatest Syndicalist leader. Throughout the summer of 1911 Fred was to work with Mann during Liverpool's greatest strike

In mid-June 1911 Liverpool seamen rebelled against the degrading medical examinations to which they were subjected, thereby sparking off a longthreatened strike for better pay and union recognition.

Within weeks the entire Liverpool transport system ground to a halt with dockers, carters, tramwaymen and railwaymen joining in. For a time the city was practically

controlled by Tom Mann and his strike committee and Home Secretary Winston Churchill correctly described the situation as "more like a civil war than a strike." A gunboat lay in the Mersey, the Territorials were ordered to hand in the bolts of their rifles and 5000 troops were called in to "maintain the peace". They "maintained the peace" with

such enthusiasm that they shot two men dead and wounded many others, including two desperate revolutionaries aged six and eight years. When the strike was more or less successfully concluded at the end of

August credit went to Tom Mann and his



Fred Bower [Picture courtesy of Jonathan Cape, publishers of his book]

strike committee, but without the untiring and largely unsung efforts of the Fred Bowers of this world neither this nor any similar dispute could hope to succeed.

At the height of the strike Bower was one of the 40,000-strong crowd who, on the afternoon of August 13, marched to St George's Plateau to hear a speech from Tom Mann – only to be attacked by hundreds of policemen, many of them mounted. The police action provoked a battle which went on for hours, left hundreds injured and put the day down in Liverpool history under the name "Bloody Sunday". Bower's description of that day in his autobiography is one of the few eyewitness accounts - and certainly the best - on record.

The following year Fred was involved in the famous affair of the "Don't Shoot" leaflet. Troops had increasingly been brought into use against strikers, so Fred wrote a leaflet calling on soldiers to refuse to serve in such circumstances. The leaflet was nationally distributed, causing the Home Office to have one of its periodic fits. Everyone involved in producing the leaflet was jailed - except Fred, thereby depriving him of even the dubious distinction of martyrdom!

A PITCHED BATTLE

In 1913 Lim Larkin was leading the Irish workers in a pitched battle with the Dublin Employers Federation. At his old friend's instigation Fred packed a number of guns into a box marked "Tombstones" and shipped them to Larkin who needed them to equip his newly-formed 'Citizens Army' who, presumably, used the weapons in the illconceived, quixotic rebellion of Easter

The great Industrial Rebellion of 1910 -1914 ended with the outbreak of the First World War and many socialists, like Fred's old friend Victor Grayson, called for a truce in the Class War until Germany was beaten.

Not Fred. He wasn't going to help murder his German fellow-workers. He spent the war helping to smuggle Consci-

entious Objectors out of the country. Near the end of the war Fred was elated by the news of the Russian revolution and adopted the Hammer and Sickle as his stone mason's "signature" Visitors to a certain church in the Liverpool area must wonder what such a sign is doing engraved on the church

MORE SETTLED LIFE

After the war I red spent some time working in Australia. Upon his return he began to lead a more settled life in his Wirral home. His friends constantly urged him to write his autobiography. The result was "Rolling Stonemason" published in 1936, in which he describes his adventures (only a few of which are described here) in a style the present writer cannot hope to imitate. Yet, for some inexplicable reason, the book was a flop in terms of sales. The small printin took three years to sell and then the book went out of print. Today it is almost unobtainable, though Liverpool City Library have a reference copy. At the time "Rolling Stonemason"

was written Bower had lived for some years in a black maria which he had converted into a hut! But by the time it was published he had gone to live in Banks Road, Heswall. There he stayed until May 31, 1942, when he died in his

Fred Bower lived and died in comparative obscurity. Today he is almost forgotten; his book known to few but historians.

But perhaps he provided his own epitaph when he said of Robert Tressell (author of "The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists"): "To have written such a book as his shows him to have lived a successful life however and wherever he may have lived and died."