

# The fine edge between survival and Shaw Street

POVERTY is an industry. Frequently there are reports compiled by highly trained, highly paid 'experts' on human misery.

The definition of a "poor person" according to the Public Health Act 1936, is "someone in receipt of public assistance". That could include the Queen and Cabinet Ministers.

What is not absurd is the plight of the single homeless. Those who 'live' in public or privately owned common lodging houses, overnight shelters, holes in walls (unfurnished) and the Cathedral Gardens.

Last September the Highways and Environment Committee considered a request, passed on by the Social Services Committee, from information taken by the Inner Area Study on the single homeless and the conditions of the places they inhabited.

January. The Deputy Chief Public Health Inspector submits the report he has been asked to compile on conditions in certain lodging houses.

February. The Housing Committee, who've had the suggestions passed on by the Highways and Environment, and Social Services jointly suggest two things. First, that the Director of Housing compiles a further report on the state of the single homeless, and second, that he looks into the possibilities of buying certain lodging houses, and re-housing the inhabitants.

The Director is now compiling and looking into.

## A CLEAN BED - IF YOU CAN FIND IT...

MERSEYSIDE has 19 common lodging houses. They vary from night shelters to large three-storey buildings that often accommodate hundreds. Many are well known, and close to the city centre.

There is one exception. The DHSS "reception centre" in Field Lane, Fazakerley. Located in a forlorn corner, surrounded by private houses and lanes, it is extremely difficult to find.

One wonders if it is situated so that it can only be found now and again. We were told: "Those on the circuit know it." Few make it if they do. The average nightly intake is five.

The 'residents' work in the kitchen, the gardens, their dorms and so forth. After deductions they receive £2.80 pocket money weekly. A bus fare from there is over 20p into the city.

We were unable to move inside it without permission. We were told to stay in our car, or in the office.

The manager, neat, clean and talkative, recited many "one can"s, and was proud of the institution.

Why is it so far out? -It's not really, it is close to the East Lincs Road, give or take a field. Is it to 'police' vagrants before they can enter Liverpool? And as Liverpool, unlike many large cities has no lodging houses under council control, is it to lessen ratepayers' burdens?

Fazakerley seems rigid, and intimidating. A place to avoid, unless... Seemingly it is avoided. At least it is clean, and clean imprisonment is acceptable to soap peddlars.

## THE DOCTORS WHO DON'T WANT TO KNOW

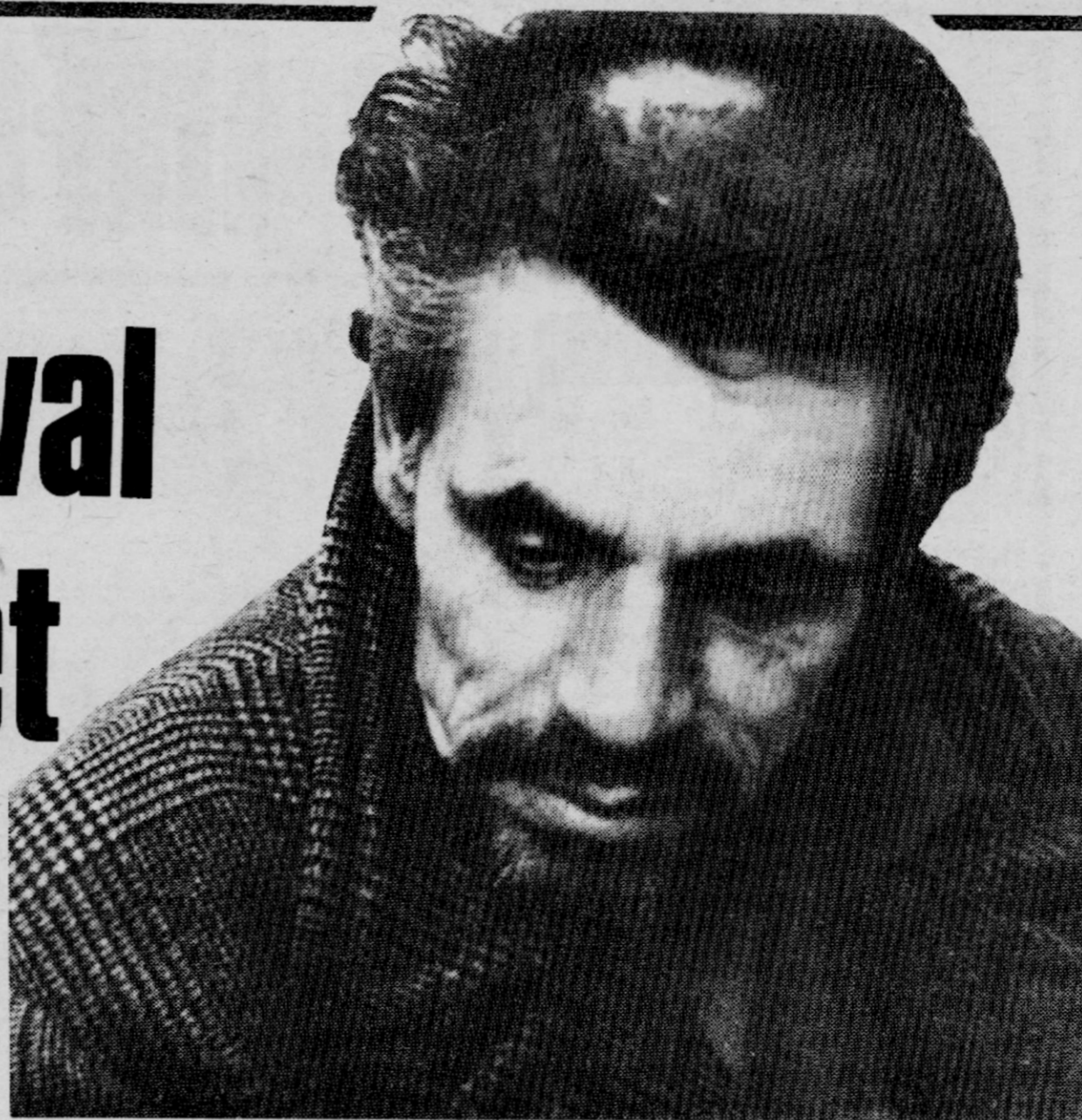
IN FEBRUARY yet another report on the single homeless was produced - this time by Liverpool's Central/Southern Community Health Council. It contained enough statistics to set up a department of "primary medical care" at the university. It informed us that the single homeless receive almost no medical care.

This weird report wanders from moral sermons offered by GPs who think the single homeless only get sick to get a clean bed, to aspirins handed out by sorely harassed staff in hospital casualty wards.

The figures in this report are only abstracts for a reality. A compilation of what the single homeless already know. Who are such reports for? For those who were not hired to do the last one?

In Shaw Street, in Arden House, at the Crypt behind the Catholic Cathedral, in cafes, and in Renshaw Hall, we talked to many men and women who were defined as single homeless. Not only is primary medical care denied them, but primary social dignity. They have not dropped out. They have been booted out.

They are held as warnings for the work ethic. If you don't work, don't pay your rent, drink too much, worry too often, there is the midden you'll fall in, and it is never, ever, emptied.



## TRAPPED BY THE SOCIAL SECURITY

SOCIAL SECURITY officials have their own rituals to deal with the single homeless.

They give daily vouchers. Or weekly. They post Giro's to those who run the privately owned lodging houses.

They refuse any rent in advance for those who find homes. As landlords will not give rent books unless deposits are paid, and the SS will not pay unless rent books are produced, insanity rules.

Those who get over that hurdle find they are refused furniture grants and told to go back where they came from. "It's not our job," say the SS, "to change a person's social status."

## NO ESCAPE FROM SHAW STREET

THE WORST lodging house in this city is 41/43 Shaw Street, owned by Mr Leonard Davies. There, men pay £4.55 a week for a bed and some breakfast. That's literal.

The dorms, unheated, hold six or seven beds. Often those beds hold sick, or dying men all day. The beds are infested. There are fireplaces in some dorms, and tunnels to the sky. Coal is bought from the pittancees. Men are often burnt.

Incontinent men often defecate in corners of those dorms, for in a building of 51 rooms, there are two baths, nine washbasins, two inside toilets, and a row in the back yard the binmen get the heebies in.

Facilities for up to 200 human beings. The council has just secured facilities in the form of a multi-million pound cop shop, and this...

The practices inside this disgusting hole are horrendous. Passivity is the religion. The place is run by 'trusties'

like any jail worth the name.

Imagine that your money for rent and food were given straight to your landlord and that the rest was doled out to you when the landlord felt you could cope with it.

Mr Davies and his two assistants open the weekly Giro's sent to the inhabitants. They deduct the monies due and hand out the remnant.

If you wish to 'escape' you are not handed your Giro. It is posted back to the SS office that sent it, and if you arrive at that office that afternoon, the SS officers find it hard to believe that you have not received it. When it arrives at the office next day you have already been handed a daily voucher sending you back to Shaw Street... Escape? Who's kidding?

## FINGERING THE SPECIMENS...

A COLD NIGHT, and the first few people arrive in the Crypt shelter. Those faces, seen often in terminal wards. Expecting only an end. Hope is beyond reach.

The day has been abuse, ridicule and violence. Clustering around bare tables, wary and often rightly frightened by our questions, it takes time to break down the distances between us. Time for us, too, to blow out the false sympathy we feel. We can get out. They must escape. There is a great difference between a journey home and a break out.

The men talk of their lives, their fantasies, food, keys, cigarettes, good beds, bad beds, and the meek are terrorised by the truculent, the cruel and the furtive survive.

There is a tradition of reporting on "the poor" in this nation. Almost a delight in being able to. Sure, there is humour, for without it there is nothing at all. There is the obsession with basics. Food, a bed, heat. There are the 'saints' working for nothing but quiet canonisation in their own hearts.

And far from here are the "experts", fingering the specimens, and decreeing. It is told as a tale of money. But it goes much deeper. Men and women without permanent addresses are seen as unfit for rehabilitation. Mobility is only authorised by the state.

A whole poverty industry invents, replaces, reproduces new poor. What is unnerving is that on the dole, not paying rent, gas, leccy, or rates exits you rapidly from the so-called norm.

Any single rebellion, any genuine protest - and there is Shaw Street. It looms for many thousands of us, and the fine edge between social survival and helplessness is that same money those many committees spend on highly paid reports that effect more reports that produce a report of reports.

THE YOUNG MAN, whose Cork accent was changing to a universal whisper, had a yellow-grey face. He patted his thin suit as if unsure of his exact physical size and thought some minutes more before replying to one of our questions. We had asked him in the Crypt:

"When did you leave Shaw Street?"

He shuddered, but he smiled. "I never left it. I fled." And then he smiled again.

# George gets the boot

KIRKBY builder George Leatherbarrow has been sacked from his own firm.

His son, Brian, has gained control of George Leatherbarrow (Builders) Limited and got rid of both George and another director, Eric Hufton.

It's understood George received £7,000 redundancy pay, even though he owes the ailing company around £25,000.

But George still has a few problems. The bank is pressing him over a considerable debt from the stock-car racing he used to run in New Brighton. And it's probably to beat the bailiffs that Leatherbarrow is insisting that his charming wife, Nareena, paid for all their furniture and both of their cars.

No doubt that is why she has recently gone to work behind the beauty counter in the Binns store in Church Street.

Meanwhile, the Director of Public Prosecutions should soon decide whether Leatherbarrow and his many friends on the old Kirkby Council should be prosecuted for corruption.

If so, George will be loudly represented by his new solicitor, the tiresome E. Rex Makin.

# Police assault victim dies

JOHN LANNON, the Kirkby man who was severely assaulted by police when arrested at the Woodpecker pub in Northwood in August 1975, has died of a heart attack. He was 36.

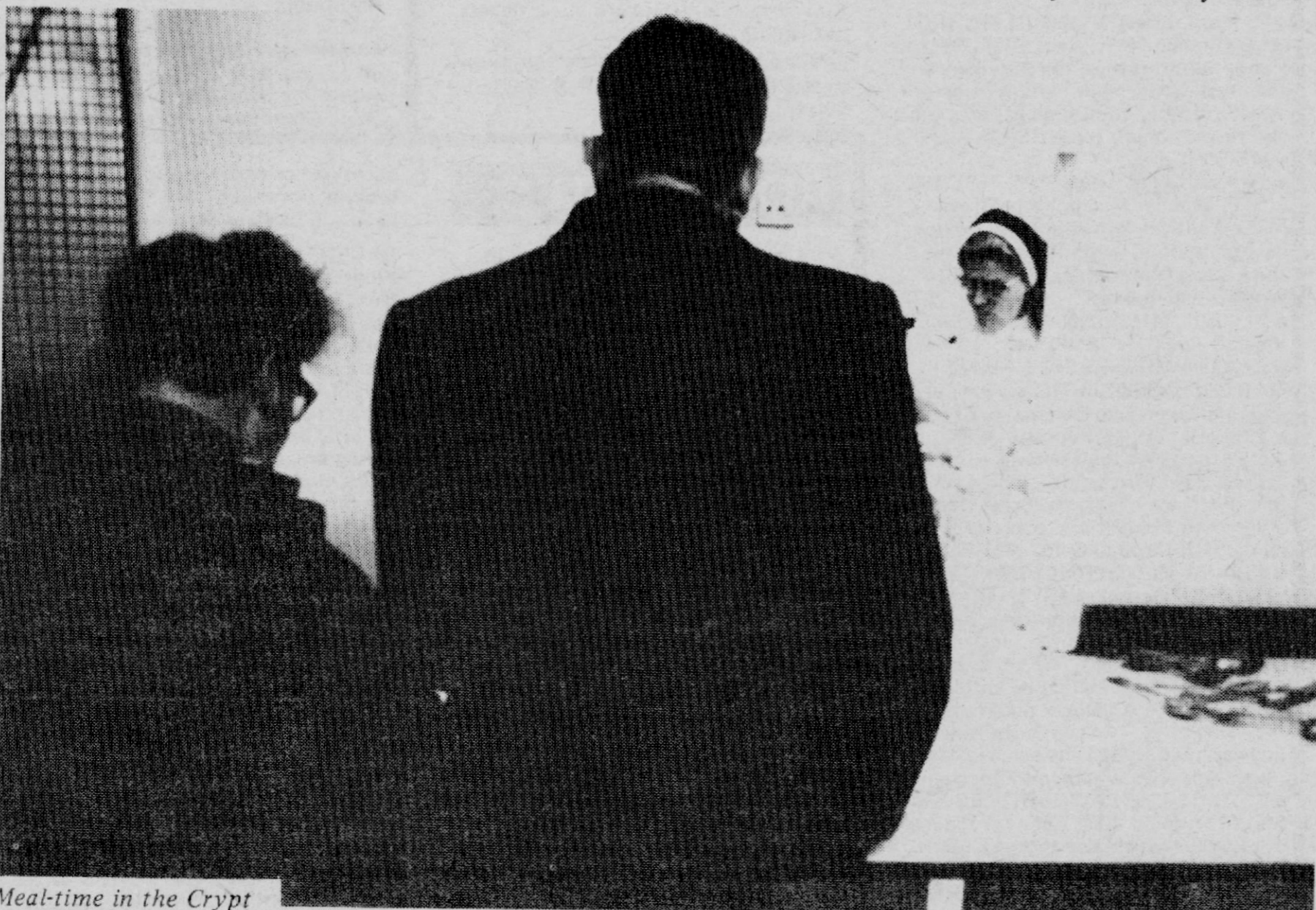
After Lannon's arrest, the Free Press found over a dozen witnesses who saw him kicked and punched by three police officers.

Lannon ended up having an emergency operation for a punctured lung, and hospital treatment for a broken rib, facial injuries and severe bruising.

Then, to avoid the allegations being made against the police in open court, the prosecution made a remarkable deal with defence lawyers. As a result John Lannon - a man with a long criminal record - was sentenced to 200 hours unpaid community work for pleading guilty to five charges.

Now solicitors acting for Lannon's wife are checking whether there can be any connection between his death and the assault by police. Court action against the police is still a possibility.

But with the main witness dead, Constables Alistair Thomas Frew, Norman Wilcock and David Roberts can probably rest easily in their beds.



Meal-time in the Crypt

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