

DREAM FLATS NIGHTMARE

FOURTEEN and fifteen Princes Avenue, Liverpool, are two large houses, attractively modernised and converted into flats. For the homeless, they're a dream come true.

And that, as far as the owners are concerned, is the problem.

Liverpool Housing Trust let the flats as temporary accommodation. But the flats are so good, the owners seem afraid no-one would want to leave.

So they have some unusual tactics to prevent people out-staying their welcome.

All new arrivals must sign a "licence to occupy". This deprives them of the normal rights of tenants and makes on-the-spot eviction possible.

And there's another catch — on the front door. The benevolent Trust call it a safety catch. It goes on at 11 p.m., so anyone who doesn't sprint back from the pictures or pub is locked out.

A student who stayed there recently described his experience. He arrived back late one Saturday night and got the warden up to let him in.

His girl-friend came in as well. Now that was very naughty. Rule Four states that no friends must stay overnight "except with prior written approval from the Trust."

A few minutes later the police arrived to remove the girl. They also took away the key to the student's flat. That meant he couldn't leave any belongings in the flat.

A few days later he left for good.

Courtaulds' hard bargain

WORKERS at Courtauld's Furzebrook plant at Aintree, which was "saved" from closure last December, are paying a high price for the privilege of keeping their jobs.

The Courtaulds management have achieved all they set out to achieve — and more.

This includes £20 a week Temporary Employment Subsidy from the government for each of about 500 workers; smashing union and job organisation in the plant; reducing manning levels; some redundancies; and — on top of all that — vastly increased production.

Things went wrong for the Courtaulds workers in December, after they had voted by a large majority to reject the company's demands.

The management responded by summoning each worker individually and giving him a choice. Either agree to "co-operate", apply for one of the few jobs elsewhere on the Aintree site, or volunteer for redundancy. Anyone who rejected all three options would be made redundant.

Incredibly, the Transport and General Workers Union went along with the ultimatum. And, as a result, 150 workers lost their jobs, including nine out of eleven shop stewards.

The union's branch chairman, John Nettleton, was given another job at Aintree.

Since then, agreed manning levels have been scrapped. On knitting, for instance, there used to be six men to 22 machines, including a chargehand. Now there are only four workers, none of them on the higher chargehand rate.

In addition, the management have insisted on complete "flexibility". This means there are no negotiations over new procedures and unskilled workers, like cleaners, are expected to take over when skilled men are missing.

The latest suggestion from management is that workers in the dye-house should spend their early and late shifts on their usual jobs, but on the night shift, when absenteeism is high, they will "float" from one job to another.

Workers are no longer allowed to take their winter week's holiday during the unpopular night shift.

Production has soared. Management set new targets in December, but when these are met, they simply introduce higher ones. One of their targets, to be reached in December this year, was achieved last month.

And, to make a final mockery of Courtauld's argument for closing Furzebrook — the poor state of the textiles market — it's rumoured they will shortly be recruiting more labour.



CYNICISM+BIGOTRY+LIBEL+SLANDER+POETIC LICENCE+

BACKSTABBERS

FIBS+LIES+CORRUPTION+

BORED with the usual high standards of Free Press journalism? Then read on! Backstabbers offers a whole new column of biased and vindictive trivia in genuine bad taste!

N.B. N.B. N.B. If anyone desires a mention in the column we are easily swayed by offers of finance, flesh and anything else you think we may covet. Likewise, if you don't desire a mention we will consider similar offers.

And a final N.B. to finish the introductions: Any resemblance of characters in this column to any person, living or dead, is quite deliberate, but we'd deny it in court. Enough of this, on with the fun...

HELLO-GOODBYE

WILL LIVERPOOL ever purge itself of wallowing in barren Beatle nostalgia? Perhaps a third of the populace ekes out a sense of history and identity with some fatuous reminiscence of how they nearly became a cog in the fabled Beatle bandwagon, or how one of the Fab Four laid their sister.

Recent offerings in the tradition have come from "The Man the Beatles Gave Away", several defunct showbiz hustlers and the Liverpool School of Language Music Dream and Pun whose outside wall plaque bears the fiction: "John Lennon pissed here 27 times, thanks John."

Incidentally, "The Man the Beatles Gave Away" once threatened to blacklist the young Beatles amongst Liverpool night-clubs after they made a mess of decorating his flat on the cheap.

But the very latest sensation to stifle our yawns is 18-year-old Ruth McCartney! Ruth, who graced the pages of the Daily Express (March 2) in leotard and fishnet, is the daughter of the woman who married the man who married the woman who married Paul McCartney's father after his mother died.

Speaking of her "high kicking dance team with a difference" called Talent, she said: "We have 26 O-levels between us. We want to bring a new concept, some cerebral depth, you might say, to a dancing show."

According to the Liverpool Daily Post (evening edition, March 4), Talent's debut included "a fashion display of suede and leather clothing designed by Toni Spencer of Whitechapel." Bitter disappointment was expressed by several clients of the Deerstalker Club, Birkenhead (where the event took place) who had spent the entire day before feverishly thumbing through Bertrand Russell's History of Western Philosophy in an attempt to prepare themselves for Ruth's act.

Enough of this nonsense. May we just ask a final question? Can any Merseyside-based organisation boast investment, financial or otherwise, from the Fab Four?

BINGO AT THE BALTIMORE

TWO instant culture sessions at Kirklands this week. The mod bar, where anybody who is nobody must be seen drinking expensive cheap wine, seems to be pursuing a dual target of optimum profit from the wine guzzling masses and simultaneously carving out a name for itself as THE focus of all that is nouveau and digestible for the trendy middle-brow-about-town.

Until now these ambitions have been tenuously balanced, however the performances of Unity Theatre and Alex Waters were patently amateur and a slip in standards.

DEAF SCHOOL

OUR CORRESPONDENT was momentarily embarrassed on the night of THE big concert (Deaf School, Empire, March 11) when his ticket supplier, the adorable but stupid Jayne Cassey failed miserably to procure the desired passport to bliss. Our dilemma was magically relieved by the arrival of the dashing Nordic figure of Merlin Cluso (Arts Correspondent, Liverpool Daily Post) and renowned authority on the Amazon). He smoothly guided your cub reporter through the intricacies of getting in for nowt masquerading as an influential critic. Our correspondent gratefully bought a round of ice creams for Merlin and his steady, Helene.

The concert was a sell-out and the audience was mainly comprised of punks and schoolkids fashionably posing as punks and schoolkids.

Backstage after the show, still masquerading as an influential critic, our man joined the throng of yes-men and hangers-on in the usual postures of adulation and congratulation. Derek ("I'm not signing anything") Taylor laughingly grimaced as members of the band tiredly autographed the natty Deaf School souvenir carrier bags for their mothers and reps of obscure radio stations. Notable for its absence was Radio Shitty Ltd., who still refuse to play Deaf School's single, "Taxi", considering it "too

sophisticated for Shitty's audience." Pity Liverpool allows itself to be milked by a group of businessmen who consider the population moronic.

REVELLING in this glamorous life-style our man joined the band at a reception in the Adelphi Hotel thrown by Warner Bros. Finding this dull, the more energetic stars repaired to Eric's. At long last our man responded to the pleadings of the band and consented to interview them, if only briefly. We asked them a series of questions that we cunningly realised would highlight and contrast the exciting lifestyle of individual group members:

Enrico Cadillac Jr... Can I begin by asking you the name of your favourite perfume? — "Lily of the Valley."

He went on to say that he cannot grow a proper moustache and has to pencil it in. What is your favourite dessert? — "Treacle sponge."

And your favourite sport? At this point he winked and lustily grabbed Betty Bright.

Next we spoke to Deaf School producer Rob Dickins. Rob's fav. perfume is "rhubarb and custard". Like Ruth McCartney, he was touchy about qualifications and loudly boasted 10 O-levels, an honours degree in politics and a bronze life-saving medal. When asked his fav. sport he turned, like Enrico, to Betty Bright. Not wishing to miss anything, our man approached the lovely starlet and began our now boringly repetitive line in questions.

Fav. perfume? — "Arpege Lanvin". Fav. desert? — "Ice Cream". Fav. shoe-maker? — "Woolworths".

Betty, who sports black rubber stage wear and likes to tease the audience, found it "highly amusing" to see young men risking life and limb in an effort to peck her on the cheek whilst on stage.

Backstabbers: If you had a free day tomorrow, what would you like to do? Betty: "I'd like to dig my garden and plant gladioli bulbs."

Without prior warning Betty went on to trip over drummer Tim who quipped that Chanel No. 5 was his favourite perfume, and that "Sahara" was his fav. dessert. Tim's girlfriend, Ziggy confided that her fav. perfume was "Dior" and her fav. dessert is "Anything". When we enquired who did her hair, she replied, "Don't be stupid." Ziggy is of Lithuanian origin/extract and enjoys hot food. Tim got up after 27 hellos (approx.). We offered to sleep with him for £60. He agreed.

TO THE LYCEUM cafe for a late petit déjeuner (March 25). Times Literary Supplement more boring than ever, so joined tables with Brian Passion and his guests (including the irrepressible Celia von Mutton).

An impromptu literary session was soon under way. Our party was much amused by the engaging Mr Reynolds, who rounded off a pleasant afternoon by making a premature departure on a tea-trolley.

SCOOP...SCOOP...SCOOP!

Readers of the Daily Post recently thrilled to the paper's exclusive stories of Liverpool's connection with the Third Reich.

The first sensation revealed that Hitler lived in Liverpool 8. Currently (March 10) an article describes The Scouser who guards ace war criminal Rudolf Hess in Spandau.

Not wishing to remain out of it, Backstabbers' special agent has researched archives of the Nazi newspaper Volkischer Beobachter (1934-1939) and has information firmly connecting Martin Bormann with Liverpool and details of the period when he was employed as an usherette at the Rialto!

NEXT WEEK, at great expense, begins our Cut-Out-and-Throw-Away story of the amazing Martin Bormann, starting with his arrival in a crate of bananas with brother Bing during the long, hot summer of 1927!



CORRUPT DEAL

(FROM PAGE ONE)

and met Scarisbrick and Roberts. He received a further letter the following week saying, "I enclose confirmation of your appointment as contracts manager as discussed at your meeting on Saturday last, with myself and partner J.H. Roberts, J.P."

POTENTIALLY LETHAL

THE SLENDERAD heaters were, predictably, a failure. One of the tenants, Mrs Norma Caldwell pointed out the obvious which had escaped the Birkenhead housing committee: "The ceilings in the houses used to get hot, while people's ankles were freezing."

But Slenderad heaters were also potentially lethal. And the worst fears of the council officers were realised in 1974, at No. 6 Power Road, on the estate.

A fire, caused by the Slenderad heater, broke out early in the morning. Mrs Jacqueline Holmes

and her three children, aged 5, 4 and 2, were trapped at the top of the stairs.

"We were lucky. I swung the kids by their arms on to the outside extension. In five minutes the house had gone up. The smoke drove me back from the stairs."

Mrs Holmes had predicted the fire. Months before she had visited the council housing department and complained about the smell of burning rubber coming from the Slenderad heaters.

"I told them the heating system was faulty. From the day they fitted the stuff on the ceilings like that we knew it was wrong. You don't put heating on the ceilings."

Jack Roberts didn't agree with that, but then he had other considerations uppermost in his mind.

In July 1975 Wirral Council — Birkenhead's successor — ordered the disconnection of all Slenderad heating panels. The new housing committee were told that Merseyside Electronic Products had ceased trading and it was impossible to contact anyone with the firm.

Jack Roberts was a member of that committee. He said nothing. He could have told his fellow councillors that he had been a partner in MEP... that one of his sons worked as a foreman electrician for MEP, directly engaged on the Woodward Road site... that MEP shared the same offices as his other company, Meadway...

FINANCIAL RUIN

IT WAS not only MEP that had collapsed in financial ruin. Roberts' other company, Meadway, also fell by the wayside, leaving a trail of bad debts across Birkenhead.

When they failed to find Jack Scarisbrick, Meadway's many creditors began pursuing the company's other director, Jack Roberts.

Roberts attempted to deny he

was a director. On many occasions he denied his liability, although paying off some of the debts in small amounts.

Then when the pressure built up Roberts lodged a statement with Birkenhead county court stating "I have not at any time traded as Meadway Developments."

That was a lie. Justice of the Peace Roberts was a backer of Meadway (he had mortgaged his house in its favour), he had acted as a director (by signing cheques) and he had benefited considerably from company perks.

The Labour ex-Mayor of Birkenhead had used a Meadway company car, and regularly filled it up with petrol in the company account.

FRIENDS IN NEED

WHEN the creditors finally closed in on Roberts, two more names came to light.

One debt settlement in 1974 was signed by Beryl Bagnall on behalf of Meadway. The signature is that of former councillor Beryl Bagnall, one-time member of Birkenhead Housing Committee.

The other name was that of Peter Gordon Catchpoole, a former New Brighton Wall of Death rider. Catchpoole is the man behind PGC Management Consultants. PGC had the same address as Roberts' companies. And interestingly this was the firm which first began negotiations for the Slenderad franchise on Merseyside.

Some time in 1972, while Birkenhead Housing Committee were still debating Slenderad, four gentlemen went to the Bowler Hat club for a particularly lavish dinner.

The four were Peter Gordon Catchpoole, Councillor Jack Roberts, his business partner Jack Scarisbrick, and W.K. Humphries, general manager of Dryden Electronics, the firm which made Slenderad.

LIBERTY HALL

At the Odd Spot (top end of Bold Street) every Sunday, 8 p.m.

Late bar. Members 25p, non-members 40p. All welcome

April 10: Easter Sunday — Odd Spot closed.

April 17: An evening of feminist music with Frankie Armstrong and Susan Straightarrow.

April 24: "OCCUPY!" — film of Fisher-Bendix occupation in Kirkby.

May 1: Mayday social with 'Contraband', Manchester group who play "political surf music", and poet Steve Cohen

May 8: China — talk by Sue Cartledge, who visited China during the "Gang of Four" troubles.

Membership details: Phone 521 5763 (evening) or 227 2514 (day)

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