

Derby Lodge Squatbook April to December, 1977

I didn't have to stay long at the Simon Community to discover that it wasn't for me, but while I was there I met Paul. We went to the zoo one day, because I'd tried to arrange to take a party to the zoo, and in the end he was the only person who could stir himself. So we walked down the Malden Road but of course we passed a pub and he had to stop for a pint, then we passed another pub and he had to stop for another pint, so by the time we got to the zoo I was beginning to understand what his problem was.

We stood outside the gate.

"ENTRANCE £1.50."

He was sure he didn't want to pay that, I was sure I didn't want to pay for him, so we turned around and set off back up Regents Park Road. On the way back we passed another pub and he had to stop for another pint.

So we sat in the corner and he explained that the head chef at the hotel kitchen where he worked had given him a black eye and he didn't know if he wanted to go back there. Then he looked rather nervous and started to shake.

"Do you want to pull a job." He said.

"I think its the only way out."

I said no thank you, my nerves wouldn't stand it, but that I wouldn't mention our conversation. Then we went back to the house.

Since I'd lent him some money, I didn't expect to see him again, but the very next day I bumped into him opposite Warren Street Tube Station. I said I was trying to locate the Social Security office, and explained to him the seemingly insuperable difficulty of finding a flat when I had no money, or alternatively, finding a job when I didn't know where I'd be living.

He walked me all the way down the Tottenham Court Road and took me to a sort of accommodation agency. They gave me the address of S.A.C. in Islington. S.A.C. just happened to have an address in Britannia Street or Wicklow Street. I took the address and got on the bus to Kings Cross.

I went round to Wicklow Street first, but there was nobody there. There were two blocks in Britannia Street, and on my way up the first stairwell I met John the Plumber coming down. I told him I'd come from S.A.C. and I wanted somewhere to stay. "Pick a flat" he said, there were quite a few empty ones, and he was keen to put people in them as soon as he could. I looked at 23 and 24. 24 was too big for me and a little rough. John said he'd change the lock of 23 for me and that I should go off and get my things immediately in order to take possession as soon as possible. So I went right back to the Simon Community and told them I'd got a flat and packed up my things and left. They didn't seem very surprised.

Derby Lodge consists of two large blocks of council flats, about one hundred and twenty in all, of which about forty are in Britannia Street, whilst the other eighty face into the next street along, Wicklow Street. The backs of the two blocks face each other across a tarmacadamed courtyard, with a tree in the centre. For the first three months we squatted Britannia Street, then we moved over to Wicklow Street. The flats are arranged around central winding stairwells which lead straight off the street, and onto a balcony on each floor, from which there is access to four flats. Each stairwell continues right on up to the flat roof. My flat was right at the top of the building, on floor five.

All there was in the flat when I moved in was a blue kitchen cupboard with two drawers. The lavatory was smashed and barely usable. The floor was of filthy bare boards and the front window of the little bedroom had two boards nailed over it. I was directed to Tigger's flat for the loan of a crowbar. He told me to put it under my jacket when I walked over the roof because the men in the Post Office garage over the road had been known to call the police if they saw anyone with a crowbar. I prised the boards off the window and laid them on the bedroom floor, so I slept on bare boards for my first night there.

I must have spent the first few days tramping around like a hurricane trying to get the necessities of life with hardly any money. One necessity was a large plastic tub to put under the sink where the wreckers had pulled out the waste pipe. Also a broom and a brush and dustpan. I went out and blew seven pounds on a little electric hotplate, and I bought a cheap army-surplus saucepan, so I could boil water and make coffee. Also I bought a mattress from an office equipment firm in the Grays Inn Road, that was obviously another essential of life.

Over a period of a few days the flat filled with bits and pieces. I found a very serviceable easy chair thrown in the basement front of a derelict house. The bedroom carpets were some old scraps of blue carpet that another squatter had thrown out. I found a rather nice rug just dumped over a hoarding, and I made a midnight raid to recover it. All the carpets and the easy chair got a good clean up with carpet shampoo. A bucket and broom handle served as a washing machine, and a length of electric flex on the balcony was my clothes line.

I suppose at this time my nerves were pretty much on edge, the various raids for carpets and furniture always seemed slightly risky, and there were certain unknowns. The council was one of them, whether they would try to get us out or not. Then there was always the feeling that we might be raided by hostile local people, sometimes there would be rowdy gatherings in the street, but it was generally Tigger and his friends playing with their motorbikes.

Tigger was a very small person who owned a very big Harley Davidson motorbike. Sometimes barmen would refuse to serve Tigger in pubs, although in fact he was about twenty one years old. One day in the pub he told me why. When he was a child he had asthma very badly, and nothing could be done about it. His asthma got so bad that he had two cardiac arrest, and seemed likely to die. So Tigger became a guinea pig, with a few other children, for a new anti-asthma drug. They all got very

fat. One day one of the children found a leaflet in one of the drug boxes, which a member of the staff had forgotten to remove. It listed the side effects of the drug they were taking. One of them was that the drug halted the patients growth permanently. The children held a meeting and elected a delegate to go and confront the doctor, who admitted that this was so.

Tiggers asthma was cured, and he lost his fat, but he has remained the same size that he was when he was twelve.

The whole block, then, was filled only with squatters, with the exception of a tenant Chinese family on the ground floor. It was the summer, and we used to go up onto the flat roof to sunbathe and meet each other. Ron, who was a family man and a great hassler, had got two deckchairs and put them up there. There was a crazy Canadian boy who was usually up there sunbathing in denim shorts. He moved into the flat across the balcony from me for a night. He came round looking very excited and demanded that I come and look at his central heating. He'd put a coin in the gas meter and put a match to the end of the broken gas pipe which had been bent round into the middle of the living room. An enormous flame shot halfway across the room. I wasn't really amused, and I think I was probably rather rude to him once or twice.

After he went, Mary Lynn moved in over the balcony. A single lady who was squatting in order to save money to go to Art College. Ron was galvanised into plumbing in a sink and repairing her broken windows. I promised to take her to the theatre and teach her to play chess, though neither event materialised. She made the flat very neat with rugs and cushions and potted plants and a little electric cooker in the living room. Next door to me was the Frenchman, Claude, who smoked dope every evening and played the guitar. He used to waylay me on my way back from work and invite me round for a smoke. One day his friend Gerald arrived from France, and I had to take care of him for a whole day because Claude was out. He didn't speak a word of English, but we managed, somehow. We went for a meal at the Al cafe, and Rosa said,

"Is he French? I thought so because this morning he came in here at ten o'clock and said 'Beer'.

I was working for Unit Personnel in Kings Cross, and being sent out every day to an appalling plastics factory, but in the evenings there were meetings once a week where about twenty squatters got together and discussed the war with Camden Council. There was at that time a problem with the dustmen, and impromptu work parties used to issue forth from the meetings, to bag rubbish which had been left out in the street. The dustmen's unwillingness to collect our rubbish eventually culminated in Alan going up to the Town Hall with several others and dumping a load of rubbish in the housing department office.

Most of the talking at the meetings was done by Ron and Alan and Geoff who were the main organisers. Also Derek, who arranged meetings and kept the minutes. John the Plumber used to come in late and stand by the door and observe proceedings

with an air of benevolent detachment. He didn't like it when the younger people tried to bring Marxism into squatting. One evening when we were sitting in Jack's flat we were talking about Irish Catholics, and John told us that he was a Christian, which rather surprised me. That was the evening when Jack told us this story.

One of the squatters went down to Burton Street, and he found a couple of chairs on the pavement. There was a man there just disappearing over a wall.

SQUATTER: "Are these your chairs?"

MAN: "Take them."

SQUATTER: "Sure you don't want them?"

MAN: "They're a gift from God, take them."

SQUATTER: "I don't believe in God."

MAN: "Oh well, you'd better not take them then."

I asked Jack what happened, he said the squatter swallowed his pride and took the chairs.

One day I was sitting on the roof and a lady in blue jeans with a very solid stance walked across the roof and sat in one of the deckchairs. I went over and sat in the other one and talked with her. She was young and Irish and very excited with London. While we were talking a man with curly hair gave us rather a distant greeting. This was Neil. Neil and Doreen lived together, Neil was an ex-army unarmed combat instructor, Doreen was studying Aikido. One day I met them on the roof doing callisthenics together. I got a chance to talk to Neil on the roof one time, he was rather disturbed. He'd been all day looking for Doreen, he needed her to sign a cheque for him or something. He told me that when he was in the Army he'd killed people, and that if he didn't talk about it he'd go mad. I told him he had a flighty lady.

There were a few children in the block. Ron and Heather had two. Susie Flanagan downstairs had left her man in Belfast and come to London with two children and a third on the way. When they were in Wicklow Street the two little girls used to stop me as I walked along the street.

"Give us some money," said Tania.

"Why?"

"We want to buy sweets."

Then another single lady with a baby daughter appeared. I found out later that she was Neil's daughter. Neil went and rooted them out of a council flat and brought them to Britannia Street, although afterwards he regretted it, since Vera used to get very emotional.

Then there was the 'Irish' family, so called by everybody including the other Irish people in Derby Lodge. The first day they arrived they swiped all my clothes pegs. The children used to piss in the water tanks on the roof. They were brought into the Lodge by Susie, and they used to walk in and out of her flat at all hours of the day and night, so that Susie got very nervous and started having trouble with her pregnancy. Emergency measures were taken to move them across to Wicklow Street, they were virtually evicted by popular vote, in the end they went off to live in Birmingham, sump of the universe. Rumour had it that they didn't understand squatting and that they thought we were all social workers.

One of the flats where we used to have meetings was occupied by two young men, one of whom was virtually a tramp and who didn't stay long, and a bright individual called Jim. He was only twenty-one, but he'd been a shop steward in Scunthorpe, so he had a certain talent for negotiation. Jim had incurred the wrath of Ron because either he or his friend had brought some winos back to their flat. The winos had a fight and did some damage, and later on they kept coming back, so the flat was boarded up and the lads were put into the grottiest flat which was used as a meeting room also. Soon after I met him, Jim moved across the courtyard into Wicklow Street, where he lived with a couple called Les and Stephanie. Also Cameron used to live there. Cameron was an extraordinary middle-aged drunk. He'd been in the army and lived all over the world. People said he worked as a press interpreter in Fleet Street, and perhaps he did, he certainly had enough money to get drunk all the time, and he seemed to have a certain amount of culture when he was sober. I went round to Jim's flat one night and they were all sitting around taking the mickey out of Cameron (who wasn't there at the time). Jim said he'd had a dream about Cameron staggering up the hill at Calvary with a bottle of whiskey on his back. Then he's nailed on the cross and one of the thieves turns to him and says,

"Do you accept dialectical materialism and the five-year plan."

Cameron says, "YES."

"My son, you will go to hell."

I used to sit on the roof a lot, on summer evenings it was paradise up there. Various figures used to drift across from time to time. I often used to meet John the Plumber up there, and he used to ramble on in his comforting way. Then there was an American girl with very short hair. Her name was Wendy. She spent half of her time living with Ingrid, who was a whore, and had a pimp who used to come to the flat and make scenes. One day at the general meeting it was decided that a whole gang of us should assemble on Ingrid's balcony at seven o'clock the next evening because the pimp was expected and we were going to see him off. I was quite nervous, and I spent the whole of the next day thinking about it. I went for a walk down in the town, and as I was coming back at about six o'clock I heard something of a commotion going on in Ingrid's flat. I went up there, and sure enough the pimp was in the flat making a scene and weeping about how it was his flat and he'd been turned out unfairly, and so on. The only people there were me and Ron and a big vegetarian peace freak. Ron

went off looking for help and the peace freak stood around looking like a cabbage. Fortunately the pimp came out without being violent to Ingrid, and when he saw us he just said,

"All right lads, I don't want any trouble," and then he cleared off. I went down to the street just in time to meet the kung-fu brigade coming back from the pub.

While we were in Britannia Street it happened that the Queen's Silver Jubilee procession took place. Various events were planned. The squatters intended to take over a building which was empty, but where several thousand pounds had been spent on doing up the lavatories so that foreign dignitaries could get a good view of the procession from the balcony. The squatters did get in, but the police stormed over the rooftops and evicted them. Also, a one-time hostel for single police constables, Camden House in Camden, was squatted, and it became a sort of emergency hostel for a while.

A late arrival to Derby Lodge was Hungry Bob. I met him on Britannia Street and he said that he'd been sent there by S.A.C. So I had the privilege of 'initiating' him into Derby Lodge. We went up and down the two stairwells, we visited John the Plumber, then Ron. Finally we discovered that Colin had the keys to Claude's flat, right next door to me. Claude and Gerald had gone to Morocco, so Bob moved in there, Colin lent him some furniture and a little oilstove to make tea.

It was interesting to see Bob experiencing some of the same things that I felt when I arrived. He was worried about being evicted. He told me that he had left home when he was fourteen, and had never seen his parents since. He didn't get on with them. He had a court case pending then, for breaking into a gas meter belonging to his brother-in-law.

The council had plans to evict us, we discussed various plans of action at the meetings. Some people considered building barricades, locked doors at the bottom of each stairwell. A gloomy picture developed. Scouts went around looking for alternative sites. Also a lady from Student Community Housing came along and said that there was some chance that they might take over our flats and give us a licence, In the end we determined that if the Council genuinely intended to renovate the flats we would co-operate and go quietly. Summonses were received and a court case was held.

So people started the operation of surreptitiously opening up the bricked up flats round on Wicklow Street. Hungry Bob, who was the last to arrive, was one of the first to be rehoused. He had no job and various court cases pending, so he was a little insecure. Also a group effort was mounted to rehouse Susie Flanagan, as she was getting more and more pregnant. One day I went on to a flat opening expedition. I volunteered to be 'cockatoo'. I was to stand on the corner of Wicklow Street and if a police car came along I would put on my black beret, and walk casually away down the street. Tony Ash was going to watch me and relay my signal to the hammer and crowbar gang. I took up my station outside the Northumberland Arms. In two minutes a police car came down the road opposite. I put on my cap and walked off. The police car went down the Kings Cross Road, not interested in us. I walked back, we had a

confab, then we started again. This time all went well. I had one main road and two side roads which I was watching alternately for a vehicle. It was a tense feeling, quite exciting. An old man came out of the pub, saw me looking anxiously up and down the road, and said,

"Don't worry, it won't happen yet awhile." But he didn't know what was going on. I stood there for maybe an hour. I was concentrating so hard on looking for a vehicle that a policeman and a policewoman walked along the road and almost right up to me before I noticed them. I was confused. It was such an obvious gesture, but they didn't notice. Tony Ash thought it was funny, he thought I was being supercool. John the Plumber said he didn't think they were interested in us.

"Birds and the bees stuff, nothing to do with police work."

Eventually we all got our notice to quit. John was trying to calm me down and saying that the bailiffs wouldn't be in till after the weekend. We were supposed to be out by Friday. I got my notice on Monday and I was working fulltime at Kelvin Hughes, so it was a little awkward. On Thursday lunchtime I went looking for a clubhammer. I walked all round Brick Lane and halfway down Commercial Road before I could buy one. I got back to work at four in the afternoon.

That evening I went round to Wicklow Street, I accosted John and told him that I needed a flat right then. He showed me 123 and gave me some advice, so I went to work like a maniac, pounding away at the breeze blocks. When most of the blocks were out we started to bash at the door. Eventually it gave way, though it was knocked out of shape in the process. There was no light, John fiddled around and mended the fuse, I made a shift at the barrel of the lock, and eventually I succeeded. I was rather nervous expecting to be hauled off by the police at any moment.

The flat was totally dark, all the windows having been bricked up. It had been flooded by the last tenant, so it was damp, and also full of rubbish. Bits of rotten clothing, old books and magazines, rusty motor car lamps, rotten carpeting, and mouldy couch grass. I had to carry all my gear around from 23, down five flights of stairs. I put the chairs on my head, I put the little plastic bowls inside the big plastic tub. I was amazed at all the possessions I'd acquired since I'd been there. A tin bath, a gerry immersion heater consisting of a plastic bucket with an electric kettle element fitted into it, all my rugs and carpets, the mattress, and my clothes. In just three months, having arrived in London with only a few clothes wrapped up in a sleeping bag and a guitar, I had accumulated enough bits and pieces to have to make about six trips. I kept meeting other squatters, Mary Lynn was zooming to and fro with her belongings, Geoff was busy moving house too. Despite exhaustion, there was something of a party atmosphere.

I cleared a space in all the muck and put down a folded carpet. Then I put my mattress down on that, and slept there. Leaving 23 was like leaving home again, I left it as utterly bare as I had found it, the door swinging free without even a lock on it.

I suppose it was the next evening that I picked up Cameron. Although he was originally in Wicklow Street, his drunken habits had led to his being unceremonially

moved back to an empty flat in Britannia Street. He lived there in a completely bare flat, sleeping in a sleeping bag with only two light bulbs for furniture. I used to talk to him sometimes, so when I saw him standing outside the Golden Lion with nowhere to go, I suggested that he could stay with me for a while. That evening Hungry Bob invited Mary Lynn and Cameron and I back to his flat for coffee. Cameron was dead drunk, and while we were there a man called George came round looking for him,

"Where's that flat you've got, Cameron."

I told him Cameron didn't have a flat.

"I gave you five pounds in the pub so I could move into your flat. You told me you had a flat."

"Five pounds (hic) never." said Cameron, denying all knowledge of the deal. There was a terrific argument, George told Cameron not to lie and threatened to shotgun him, Cameron denied all knowledge of the money, I tried to arbitrate and find out the truth. I told George that I couldn't possibly put him up. Eventually we all got to bed, Cameron moved in his possessions, three plastic bags full of clothes. He slept on the settee in the living room, which remained much as we had found it with a gigantic Kelvinator fridge stuck against the wall near the door. I cleaned up the little room and put my mattress in there. All the rubbish was carted across the courtyard and dumped through the window of an empty flat in Britannia Street. Later on I painted the room and bought sheets and blankets in Brick Lane to make a proper bed. George moved some of his furniture in the next day, which was a little alarming, but fortunately he then found a flat of his own.

It was August when we moved over to Wicklow Street, so the weather was still hot. The street became a meeting place rather than the roof, We had a bit of drama about a week after we'd all moved because somebody started two fires in empty flats in Britannia Street. We turned out in the middle of the night to watch the fire engines. I thought of the blitz and what London must have been like at that time.

I used to walk a lot during the evenings, often down to Leicester Square to watch the buskers. We were living in a block with tenants, and the roof wasn't so private any more. I used to sit outside the Northumberland Arms where people went to drink and watch to see who went by. Susie was often over there, surrounded by friends. She was very pregnant, everyone was encouraging her, and eventually she gave birth to a boy whom she called Martin.

There were some thefts. Mary Lynn's flat was entered, her record player was stolen and the flat vandalised. Mary Lynn was convinced that it was Neil's doing. One day I went up to Neil's flat to visit him. Mary Lynn was there. She was trying to persuade Neil to give her the record player back or to give her some money. She was positive that he had it, he was equally positive that he didn't have it, stalemate. Later on Mary Lynn called an emergency lynch meeting and tried to persuade us to give her four or five big men to confront Neil and extract a confession from him. Other people mentioned the fact that Neil had recently been interrogated by the police, and it was suggested that he might have been temporarily insane. The general consensus seemed

to be that there was not any proof which would justify taking any action as dangerous as Mary Lynn suggested and no action was therefore taken. Shortly after that Mary Lynn left Derby Lodge.

When baby Martin was six weeks old, Derek and Bron, who lived with Jim, held a farewell party. Susie came along and had a glass of beer, then she went home and took baby Martin to bed with her. In the morning Neil found him in a bucket at the side of the bed, suffocated. The police took Susie away, in a state of hysteria, and locked her up. Alan and Geoff spent the whole weekend trying to arrange bail, and eventually they succeeded and she went to stay with her sister at Notting Hill. She had to send her two little girls back to Belfast, meanwhile she is being pushed through a whole series of dreary Court hearings to determine whether she was negligent or not.

About two weeks after that I was lying in bed on Friday night and I heard Neil outside saying, "Ben, Ben." I got up and let him in. His neck was all bandaged up. He told me that he'd been over to Stockwell to buy dope, and that he'd been mugged and hit on the neck with iron bars. He had lost seventy pounds. He was desperate to get his hands on a bit of dope, as he didn't want to go home emptyhanded. I didn't have any, we tried Hungry Bob, but he wasn't very helpful. Neil was disturbed about baby Martin. He said that he was utterly pissed off with life, which he often said, then he went off upstairs to his flat. That weekend I went to Worcester, and when I got back he had committed suicide.

At that time Jim had just moved into 123. He arranged a deal with Cameron whereby Cameron got his flat, with three rooms and a mattress and a bath and various items of furniture, in return for Cameron's place on the settee. The only advantage to Jim was that this flat had an S.C.H. licence and his own flat didn't but the main consideration may have been that Jim didn't like being in that flat, as he now was, alone. Having negotiated this deal, Jim then informed me of it, much to my amazement. I was quite ready to agree since I found Cameron a somewhat depressing flatmate. We decided to move one Friday evening. We came in and found Cameron vomiting into the sink. We carried his worldly belongings around to the other flat, along with some furniture. The last thing we found was a pair of ladies knickers. We took them along and asked Cameron if they were his.

"No," he said, "but I'll look into them."

The flat was somewhat altered, then. We now had a television and a cooker, and various other mod cons, and the atmosphere was noticeably improved by Jim's presence. One night he woke me up at about one in the morning. I went out, the street was full of smoke. Somebody had driven up to the Northumberland Arms and thrown one or two petrol bombs through the window into the bar. This was at about twelve thirty, and people were still drinking in there. An ambulance pulled away from the kerb. Smoke and flames were billowing out of the windows. I saw two firemen wearing respirators break down a back door and go into the smoke. They came out seconds later with an Alsatian dog. They laid it on the pavement and tried to resuscitate it with heart massage and oxygen from a respirator, but they didn't succeed. Someone was carrying a very wet and frightened black cat with singed whiskers. Half of Wicklow Street had turned out to watch, some in nightgowns and curlers. One or

two people were hysterical, the police wandered around asking people if they'd seen anything.

In the end nobody was killed, a few were quite badly burned and detained in hospital, but the pub was completely gutted, so Derby Lodge lost its friendly local. Best information suggests that the bombers were a right wing group taking revenge because an I.R.A. organisation had held meetings there.

So that was the end of our pub. The spirit of fun which had dominated the summer was somewhat dampened by this series of events. People were drifting away from Derby Lodge. Jack went back to Ireland to attend university, Steve the anarchist went back too. Steve's flatmates, Kevin and Wendy, went off to Barcelona to be writers. New people filtered into Derby Lodge, and since we'd almost given up having meetings and we had no pub, the new people didn't get to know us nor we them.

The block which we were occupying was now divided into two halves. This half had been taken over by S.C.H. and the flats were now licensed by Camden Council. We paid a peppercorn rent, in return for which S.C.H. did some work on the flats and promised to try and rehouse us. The other two stairwells were still squatted, and had a life of only two or three months before the council intended to renovate them. As the flats on this side fell empty, long-standing squatters from the other side moved in and grabbed them, and the other side, being unappealing to regular squatters and home-hunters, began to fill up with wandering people, and a group of street porn merchants. My favourite story about them was that one day they came down to Alan to ask him to put their gas meter back in, and when he asked them why they took it out, they said they'd lent it to someone to cook a meal.

We used to have social evenings down in 123 when Geoff and Tina and Alan and Les and Steph used to come down and watch television with Jim and I. One evening Hungry Bob came round. He said he was feeling bad and he wanted to see a doctor. He'd taken a trip about a week before, not in Derby Lodge, but with some friends over in Penge. He seemed alright at the time, just a bit super-thoughtful about himself and his own ways of relating to others. Somehow there was a delayed shock reaction, though. We couldn't get a doctor, but we calmed him down, and I put a mattress on the floor of my room so that he could sleep there. He stayed for about four days, during which time he was very withdrawn, and had a lot of trouble communicating with people. Then one night we stayed out late having coffee in Les's flat, and when we came in he'd taken my sleeping bag and gone back next door to his own flat. We didn't see him for a few days, and so thought no more about it, but about a week later he appeared again at nine in the evening, when we were all watching T.V. and said he needed a doctor. I visited the hospital on the corner, they told me to ring University College Hospital, who told me that they didn't deal with psychiatric emergencies, but that if he could break an arm or a leg they would be pleased to see him. I took Bob back to his own flat and persuaded him there was no point in going out in the middle of the night. He was very depressed about his life, he had still got a court case pending, for petty theft, and he couldn't find a job that he liked. Also at that time he didn't have many friends, male or female. I left him there for the night,

the next morning he came round at nine o'clock and said he wanted to see a doctor again.

I took him up to the Maudsley Hospital, and we had to wait for about three hours before they could see him. I had to talk nonsense to him and read stories out of the magazines to keep his head together. In the end he banged the table and cried out, "For fuck's sake do something!"

Then they managed to see him. They couldn't take him in, so he went to his sister's house, and a few days afterwards he went into Greenwich Hospital.

Then a week or so later Neil's inquest came around. Vera had to go to the inquest, and she was very disturbed. Later on that day her friends visited her and found an empty bottle of sleepers. She was whisked off to hospital, and Carla was taken into care. Within a few hours, Vera was back. It was all a misunderstanding, she hadn't taken the sleepers at all. She was livid, she threw bricks through the windows at the people who had called the social workers. She threatened to petrol-bomb Doreen. Then she locked herself in her flat and sobbed and screamed and refused to open the door. I tried to get her to open up, but she wouldn't. We were afraid that she might hurt herself. In the end I put a note through her letterbox telling her to come down for coffee when she felt like it. She opened the door then, and came downstairs.

There were problems for a few days because the social services seemed to be unwilling to give Carla back. It was touch and go whether Vera would freak again and spoil her chances altogether. Then she vanished from Derby Lodge. She went to live in a mother-and-baby-unit which she doesn't like very much, but at least she has Carla back.

So by this time, nine months after I arrived, most of the people who I came with have left. Susie and Vera were forced to leave by family problems, they still visit us. Jack and Steve got fed up with the city and went back to Ireland. Kevin and Wendy went off travelling and adventuring. Les and Stephanie went back to Middlesbrough to try and find a cottage and an alternative life-style. Alan moved to another squat, Hungry Bob is still in hospital. Ingrid was last know to have been jailed for petty theft in Birmingham, sump of the universe.

To say nothing of

John and Mary
Donal
Storm
John the Hat
Kenrick and Penny
Zeems
Bonny
Tina
Mick
Maurice

Carminc
The Manchester Lads

and a whole lot of others that I met but whose names escaped me, and a whole lot that I never met at all.