50 Years of Community Action exhibition and talks

Tabernacle Powis Square W11 June 24-30

Rachman/Notting Hill Housing Trust/Carnival/Adventure Playgrounds free talks/films
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Monday June 24 6-9pm History of Colville Exhibition 2 launch featuring The Real Rachman Radio 4 documentary by Joshua Levine, Rachmania and Michael X slideshows, and Michael Horovitz. The follow-up to last year’s inaugural Colville history exhibition (highlights in the foyer mentioned in The Times), charting 50 years of local community action on the 50th anniversary of the Profumo affair political sex scandal, with accompanying Rachman slum housing revelations; also featuring Notting Hill Housing Trust, Notting Hill Carnival, London Free School, adventure playgrounds, Corrugated Times, The Point Community Action Centre and Tabernacle history.

Wednesday June 26 6-9pm 50 Years of Notting Hill Housing Trust Talk by Kath King on 50th anniversary of the founding of Notting Hill Housing Trust by Bruce Kenrick on Blenheim Crescent. In the wake of the Rachman scandal, the Presbyterian housing activist set up the trust at number 115; the first NHHT house was 107, and Marc Bolan lived at 57. The offices moved to All Saints Road in the late 60s. Bruce Kenrick also founded the homelessness charity Shelter. The most famous Notting Hill Housing Trust property is 25 Powis Square on the corner of Talbot Road, which appears as the exterior of Mick Jagger’s house in Performance (featured in the Carnival picture with its old portico).

Tuesday June 25 6-9pm Formula for a New City adventure playgrounds history talk/films by Simon Rix/Powis Square Play Power Tabernacle history by Tom Vague Adventure playground expert Simon Rix chronicles the development of playpower from the post-war Clydesdale Road bombsite, the North Kensington adventure playground and the London Free School shanty town between Tavistock Crescent and Tavistock Road, to the Powis and Colville ‘Open the Squares’ campaign of the late 60s. To the radical hippies opening the garden squares was a symbolic mission to convert ‘unturned on people’ and start ‘a tidal wave which is about to wash away the square world.’

Thursday June 27 6-9pm Mas in the Ghetto Carnival History Modern Notting Hill Carnival 40th anniversary screening of Carnival 73 featuring Leslie Palmer and Mas in the Ghetto films by Tony Auguste and Tony Perry, Carnival 66 rendition by Michael Horovitz, and Claudia Jones anti-racism march 50th Tom Vague talk. In 1973 Les Palmer came up with the modern Trinidad-influenced Carnival format and introduced reggae sound-systems. In 1963 Claudia Jones led a march from Ladbroke Grove station to the US embassy, at the time of Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a dream’ speech. Ishmahil Blagrove’s forthcoming Carnival photo book focuses on the original 1966 street procession.
Talbot Tabernacle Notes

‘The old tin Tabernacle’ on Talbot Road in Powis Square was established in 1869, as a ‘non-sectarian Church of Christ’ by the Protestant evangelical preacher Gordon Furlong, in opposition to the high church All Saints down the road. On the 1871 Ordnance Survey map there is a row of houses between Powis Gardens and Aston Road (Powis Terrace). But the map was behind the rapid building times and really represents the early 1860s planned development. The Romanesque red brick and terracotta Talbot Tabernacle was completed in 1888. The foundation stone (now on display inside) was laid in 1883 by Lord Shaftesbury, the social reformer Tory MP who brought about the abolition of child labour. The following year he opened the lecture hall, shortly before his death. Other famous figures who appeared at the Tab in the early years were the children’s homes founder Dr Barnardo and George Williams who founded the YMCA. The Tabernacle founder Gordon Forlong was a Scottish advocate/barrister-turned-Protestant evangelist, who first appeared in London in 1867 at the Victoria Hall on Archer Street (the 20th Century Theatre on Westbourne Grove). In 1876/7 Forlong emigrated to New Zealand and was succeeded at the Tabernacle by Frank White, and then the Reverend R Wright Hay.

‘The old theatre, known as Victoria Hall, in Archer Street, off Westbourne Grove, was rented and preached in every Sunday morning and evening for many months… The divine blessing was so manifestly resting upon this work that Mr and Mrs Forlong, after much prayer and earnest consideration, decided to build. The result was that the Talbot Tabernacle was erected in Talbot Road in the year 1869. To build this Mr and Mrs Forlong used their own money helped out by many smaller contributions from sympathisers and helpers. For eight years he preached in this ‘iron church’. ‘The whole bible, the inspired word of god’ was the foundation of all his preaching to the large congregations that gathered there.

‘His sympathies were always with those who took up strong Protestant ground and his platform was often used by the Protestant Evangelical Alliance for its annual meetings. William Murphy, the martyred saint of those times, was on one occasion speaking in the old Talbot Tabernacle. The writer, then a child, remembers in a crowded meeting during Mr Murphy’s address the cries of, ‘Pistols! Where are the pistols?’ Mr Murphy stood back, but Mr Forlong quickly stepped forward with raised hand and in a loud, calm voice soon stilled the agitation, saying, “There is no danger, but the policemen at the door are to come forward while we sing.” Perfect order and attention were soon restored and maintained until the meeting closed.’ Emilie Snow (the daughter of Gordon Forlong) A King’s Champion 1909

In 1973 the Notting Hill People’s Association staged a ‘community lock-in’ at the old All Saints church hall next to the church, known as ‘The Siege of Notting Hill’; during which councillors were forced to listen to locals’ demands, which included opening the Tabernacle as a community centre. The November/December 1973 issue of the Tabernacle Notes church magazine reported on ’The Colville/Tavistock Survey’: ‘In our previous issue under this heading we wrote ‘meanwhile we continue to occupy amidst increasing difficulties’, but we little knew what was still in store! In October we suffered many frustrations whilst undergoing conversion to natural gas—still not completed—but on November 5 after a firework party in the square opposite the gates of the church, a group of hippy types broke into the Tabernacle, and from 11pm to 3pm a party of over 300 made merry with drinking, dancing and film shows plus amplified music to the annoyance of the neighbours. The leaders of this group told the police they were there with our permission!!!!

‘Next morning the scene in the church, vestries and lecture hall was indescribable, and for the past fortnight a small band of workers has been busy clearing up the mess and making the large vestry and the hall available for use for services, and Sunday school. This was bad enough, but in addition the major part of our equipment was stolen, including the large communion table, two organs, curtains, cutlery and crockery, to say nothing of the clock in the lecture hall which was wrenched off the wall with the brass memorial tablet to the late Mr Gifford! So far the police have not been able to trace any of the items taken. We understand that negotiations with the Borough Council are proceeding, but in the light of the present national financial position and high interest rates there may be delay in completion. Meanwhile we continue to occupy! In the words of Habakkuk 3.17/19, ‘Although… yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will have joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord is my strength...’

As the Tabernacle became the focal point of the Afro-Caribbean community in North Kensington in the late 70s and 80s, the music changed from non-conformist Protestant hymns to Ethiopian Orthodox Rastafarian reggae. There wasn’t actually that much change in the anti-Vatican sentiments of some of the lyrics, which the Tabernacle founder Gordon Forlong and William Murphy would have appreciated.
1955 Peter Rachman acquired part of the Colville estate and a reputation as an accommodating landlord in the black community. Notting Hill became a magnet for West Indian and African immigrants.

1957 Tory Rent Act lifted restrictions on how much landlords could charge; largely blamed for ‘Rachmanism’. Usually white sitting-tenants were persuaded to vacate properties by blues clubs and strong-arm tactics.

1958 In the Notting Hill race riots Colville was besieged by white rioters. West Indians fought back at Totobag’s café on Blenheim Crescent and the Calypso club on Ledbury Road, led by Michael de Freitas. Young Communists held an anti-racism parade. Colin MacInnes featured the riots in his Absolute Beginners novel.

1959 Powis and Colville Residents’ Association was founded. Claudia Jones’ Caribbean Carnival show began at St Pancras Town Hall. Oswald Mosley stood as the fascist Union Movement candidate for North Kensington. Kelso Cochrane was killed in a racist attack during the election campaign.

1960 Rachman offered to convert Powis Square gardens into a playground if rent tribunal applications were withdrawn. Notting Hill Social Council was founded.

1961 Colville was ‘being ripped apart by the jukebox parties, the pimps and the prostitutes’, according to the Kensington News. The residents’ association called for Powis Square gardens to be opened to the public.

1962 Peter Rachman died. Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones was a Powis Square resident.

1963 June/July In the Profumo affair political sex scandal, Rachman became a household name due to the involvement of his girlfriend Christine Keeler and West Indian tenants. Accompanying Colville slum housing revelations brought about the term Rachmanism.

August 31 Claudia Jones led an anti-racism march from Ladbroke Grove to the US embassy, in solidarity with Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream” demo. October Home succeeded Macmillan as Tory prime minister.

December 20 Notting Hill Housing Trust was founded by the Presbyterian missionary Bruce Kenrick on Blenheim Crescent, to provide decent housing in Colville. Michael Winner filmed West Eleven on Powis Square.

1964 Young Communists organised a petition to get Powis Square gardens opened. A Troubled Area: Notes on Notting Hill by Pearl Jephcott was published. Harold Wilson’s Labour were elected. Ringo Starr appeared on All Saints Road in A Hard Day’s Night.
1965 Notting Hill Community Workshop was set up by George Clark. Malcolm X visited Colville and Michael de Freitas became Michael X, the leader of RAAS. The Blenheim Project youth support info service was founded. The Tabernacle appeared in The Knack. Labour Rent Act introduced a fair rent system.

1966 The London Free School community action project featured Pink Floyd in All Saints church hall on Powis Gardens, the first Notting Hill Carnival procession organised by Rhaune Laslett, the Neighbourhood Service and shanty town adventure playground on Tavistock Crescent, and The Gate/Grove newsletter which became International Times.

Muhammad Ali visited 34 Tavistock Crescent. The England team travelled along Ladbroke Grove after winning the World Cup. Cat Stevens’ ‘Portobello Road’ was released. Nancy Sinatra was photographed in Powis Square. Michael Horovitz wrote his ‘Carnival’ beat poem.

1967 Notting Hill People’s Association was founded at the People’s Centre in All Saints church hall; to force ‘the need for non-profit ownership of 1-9 Colville Gardens into the consciousness of the Conservative Council.’

In George Clark’s Notting Hill Summer Project student volunteers carried out a housing survey of slum conditions and opened play streets. NHPA resumed attempts to open Powis Square gardens and produced the long-running People’s News. Michael X was arrested for inciting racial hatred.

1968 Powis Square gardens was opened by Vietnam protesters, after several children were run over in the area. The Council finally agreed to convert the gardens into a playground. Performance featured 25 Powis Square as Mick Jagger’s house and Ry Cooder’s ‘Powis Square’ theme. Frank Crichlow’s Mangrove restaurant opened at 8 All Saints Road.

Notting Hill Interzone IT and Hustler black underground papers were published. Colville walls featured Situationist King Mob graffiti including ‘All You Need is Dynamite’ on Tavistock/Portobello corner. The Notting Hill Press and Notting Hill Squatters campaign were launched. The ’68 Carnival dance on Tavistock Crescent was headlined by the Action.

1969 Quintessence released ‘Getting It Straight In Notting Hill Gate’ and Ram John Holder recorded ‘Notting Hill Eviction Blues’. Hawkwind made their debut as Group X and David Bowie appeared at All Saints hall on Powis Gardens. Island Records moved to Basing Street. The Electric Cinema at 191 Portobello Road became the centre of the underground hippy scene. Notting Hill Housing Trust moved to larger offices on All Saints Road, along from the Mangrove, and acquired Colville Square properties. The Notting Hill Housing Survey and Notting Hill Youth Project were launched.
1970 The Mangrove march protesting against police raids on 8 All Saints Road resulted in a mini-riot. The People's Carnival festival was held in Powis Square. Police raided the Powis Square bonfire night party. Jimi Hendrix was reputedly last seen at the Mangrove or the Globe on Talbot Road. Community groups included the West London Claimants' Union, the Police Group and the Angry Brigade. Led Zeppelin recorded some of 'Stairway to Heaven' at Island's Basing Street studios.

1971 The Mangrove 9 were acquitted. Merle Major led an angry local march to a Powis Square demo. The 25 Powis Square Performance house auction was disrupted. Police arrested NHPA members in connection with the Angry Brigade bombings, and raided the Metro youth club on Tavistock Road. Lemmy made his debut with Hawkwind at the People's Free Carnival in Powis Square, also featuring Pink Fairies and Mighty Baby.

1972 Colville/Tavistock Survey and Housing Group were launched. Bob Marley signed to Island on Basing Street. 1973 Councillors were forced to listen to local demands in the great All Saints Hall community lock-in. 25 Powis Square was squatted and sold to NHHT. The Tabernacle was ransacked by hippies after a bonfire party. Leslie Palmer founded the modern Trinidad-style Notting Hill Carnival. Bob Marley and the Wailers and the Rolling Stones were in Basing Street studios at the same time.

1974 Colville/Tavistock was declared the first housing action area in the country. Richard Branson's Virgin Records moved to Vernon Yard on Portobello. Hawkwind's 'Hall of the Mountain Grill' album was named in honour of 275 Portobello Road. 1975 The Tabernacle closed as a church. The Powis Square play hut was completed. The Community Action Centre was at the Point on Tavistock Road. The 101'ers played the Elgin. Motörhead formed and Horace Ove's Pressure was set in the area. Michael X was executed in Trinidad.

1976 Rioting broke out at Notting Hill Carnival due to excessive policing and the Sus laws. The Mangrove was besieged by police. The first Clash single was inspired by the riot. The first Rough Trade punk and reggae record shop opened at 202 Kensington Park Road. Corrugated Times reported on plans for Tabernacle community centre. 1977 Bob Marley and the Wailers recorded 'Exodus' on Basing Street. Queen recorded 'We are the Champions'. Virgin signed the Sex Pistols. The Raincoats formed in Rough Trade. Carnival ended in another riot. KHT bought up Powis Terrace.

1978 The Clash recorded their second album on Basing Street. Joe Strummer later lived on Lancaster Road. 1979 Tabernacle was granted Grade-II Listed building status, after being threatened with demolition. Strummer appeared there on new year's eve. The Slits recorded on Basing Street. Nick Lowe recorded 'Basing Street'. The Metro youth club was closed down. The Zigzag magazine office was at 118 Talbot Road.
1980 The Tabernacle community centre hall opened and the Mangrove steelband was founded. 1981 Notting Hill Housing Trust's 5,000th home was completed. 1982 All Saints Road Apollo pub was closed. 1983 Rough Trade shop moved to 130 Talbot Road and the Clash Hell W10 film was made. 1984 Band Aid recorded 'Do They Know It's Christmas?' on Basing Street. Class War's first 'Bash the Rich' march started from the Warwick Castle and the Save the Electric cinema campaign was launched.

1987 After more police raids on the Mangrove and another Carnival riot, All Saints Road gentrification began with the Apollo's conversion into workshop studios. 1988 The frontline was commemorated in BAD's 'The Battle of All Saints Road', Transvision Vamp's 'W11 Blues' and the Wise brothers' Once Upon a Time there was a Place called Notting Hill Gate. In the Tabernacle centenary year Joe Strummer reappeared with his post-Clash group Latino Rockabilly War, as the Tab became west London's premier hip-hop venue. 1989 As the last battle of All Saints Road Carnival riot took place, Claire Holder became Carnival chair and Frank Crichlow of the Mangrove was cleared of drugs charges. Martin Amis featured the area in God's Dice and London Fields.

1991 The Mangrove closed after '21 years of resistance'. Hanif Kureishi filmed London Kills Me along Portobello. Lily Allen made her stage debut at an early 90s Notting Hill panto at the Tab. 1992 Frank Crichlow was awarded damages. Kurt Cobain visited the Rough Trade shop. The Colville Project regeneration scheme was launched. 1993 The Tab was taken over by the Council Tabernacle Trust. 1994 All Saints made their debut in Powis Square at the Carnival and appeared at Tab Rwanda benefit gig.

1995 All Saints Road drug crime problems continued despite gentrification. 1996 Notting Hill Carnival attendance rose to over 2 million, and the Tabernacle received a £3 million Lottery grant for refurbishment as an arts centre and permanent Carnival base. 1998 As Notting Hill the movie was made, the Tab reopened featuring a new hall, bar, studios, gallery and restaurant.

2000 The Tab hosted a Santana gig, the Mangrove steelband, Beat Dis jazz collective, Portobello2000 radio station and the Portobello Film Festival. 2002 After the closure of the Mangrove office only People's Sound record shop remained of the All Saints frontline. 2003 After the death of Joe Strummer there was a Tab tribute gig featuring surviving 101'ers. 2004 Tab hosted Mas and Mayhem Carnival history exhibition. 2005 The Tab Trust went into liquidation and the building was closed.

2006 The Good, the Bad and the Queen featuring Damon Albarn and Paul Simonon rehearsed at the Tab. 2009 The Tab was re-launched again incorporating the Carnival Village centre, with gigs by Lily Allen, Florence + the Machine, Take That and the Rotten Hill Gang. 2011 Adele appeared at the Tab as her second album was released by the XL label down Blenheim Crescent.
1966 London Free School

“Ultimately the Free School did nothing but put out a local underground newsletter and organise the two Notting Hill Gate Festivals, which were, admittedly, models of exactly how the arts should operate, festive, friendly, audacious, a little mad and all taking place on demolition sites, in the streets, and in a magnificently institutional church hall.” Jeff Nuttall Bomb Culture

In the 60s, when Notting Hill was known as a slum, the term free school also had a very different meaning to what it has today. The London Free School was an adult education community action project, with a curriculum encompassing housing and immigration, modern history and world power structure, family, children and mental health, current affairs, economics, dance, drama and psychedelia. The Free School group has been described as an ‘anarchic temporary coalition’ of housing activists from the Rachman days and the new hippy generation. The former included George Clark, Richard Hauser, Rhaune and Jim Laslett-O’Brien, Bill Richardson, Adam Ritchie, Andre and Barbara Shervington. The hippy contingent numbered John Hopkins, Michael X, Pete Jenner, Joe Boyd, Michael Horovitz, Julie Felix, Mike McInerney, Graham Keen, Neil Oram, Nigel Waymouth, Kate Heliczer, Harvey Matusow, RD Laing, Emily Young, Anjelica Huston and Pink Floyd.

John Hopkins has called the London Free School “a scam” and “an idea that really shouldn’t be inflated with too much content, because there really wasn’t too much content.” Pete Jenner says it was either the first “public manifestation of the underground in England,” or little more than “a couple of sessions in some terribly seamy boarding house of Michael X’s.” The first issue of the Free School newsletter The Gate reported that ‘the photography group was last seen at a “happening” at the Marquee club, surrounded by people dancing around in cardboard boxes… the teenage group have been playing folk music and listening to Dylan records.’

The London Free School building was 26 Powis Terrace (formerly a jazz record shop and a brothel), but by all accounts not much happened there apart from band practices in Dave Tomlin’s psychedelic basement. The presence of Michael X is said to have scared off any actual local people. However, through him the Free School received its best publicity: when on May 15 1966 Rhaune Laslett’s Free School playgroup at 34 Tavistock Crescent was visited by Muhammad Ali (at the time of his second Henry Cooper fight). The LFS adventure playground on the Westway site demolished strip was inaugurated with a Gustav Metzger auto-destructive art performance—the kids burning a pile of rubbish.

But the London Free School is primarily notable for launching Notting Hill Carnival, with the first street procession organised by Rhaune Laslett on September 18 1966. The Free School Fayre pageant parade, around the area from 34 Tavistock Crescent, had a history theme featuring Henry VIII, Elizabeth I and Charles Dickens characters, the London Irish girl pipers, a New Orleans-style trad jazz marching band, Ginger Johnson’s Afro-Cuban band, Russell Henderson’s Trinidadian steelband and a fire engine.

During the fayre week, All Saints church hall on Powis Gardens (pictured above) hosted social nights including Dickens amateur dramatics, Alexis Korner, Jeff Nuttall performance art and ‘old tyme music hall’. After the fayre, John Hopkins presented ‘Sound/Light workshops’ at All Saints hall by Syd Barrett’s Pink Floyd, during which they developed their psychedelic sound and lightshow. Pink Floyd’s Free School Sound/Light workshops have been described as proper educational events with questions from the audience afterwards. As well as Notting Hill Carnival, Pink Floyd, adventure playgrounds and psychedelic lightshows, the London Free School launched the hippy underground press. International Times or IT was a continuation of the Free School newsletter The Gate/The Grove.