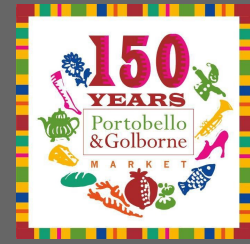


Colville



community history project issue 10 February 2015 under the flyover



In the shadow of the Westway

Following the 'Orphans' 1970 street photo blow-ups installation by Steve Mepsted in the Acklam farmers market bays 56-8, see back page, this issue focuses on life in the shadow of the Westway and before the flyover on Acklam Road and Tavistock Crescent; featuring Leslie Palmer's Carnival office story on pages 3-5. Photos courtesy of Local Studies, North Kensington Community Archive, Charlie Phillips, and Old Notting Hill & North Kensington Facebook group. The 2015 Tabernacle exhibition/oral history project will be on Acklam/Tavistock under the flyover.

The Westway Trust are proposing to rebuild and develop its properties under the Westway as the Portobello Village, starting with the Acklam Village site and the Portobello Green open tented area. The plans will be discussed at the next Colville Community Forum meeting at the Lighthouse to be announced. The architects and development manager are consulting at an early stage so all residents and Forum members will be able to offer ideas and input. The forthcoming 150 years of Portobello market celebrations include Book & Kitchen shop's local literary timeline tour.

Colville Community History Project

colvillecom.com tomvague@gmail.com getting it straight in notting hill gate

CITY LIVING
LOCAL LIFE

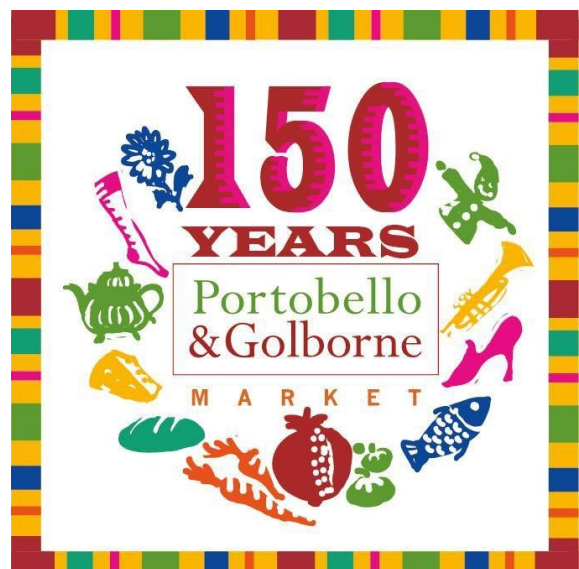


Before and After the Westway/150 Years of Portobello Market

In 'Notting Hill in Bygone Days', 'there seems to be a natural break where the railway embankment crosses Portobello Road. At this point the old lane was interrupted by low marshy ground, overgrown with rushes and watercress.' 150 years ago Portobello farmhouse was across the field to the north, but within a few years it was the streets of Golborne. Over the Colville ward northern boundary, the Westway and train line, Acklam Road was built in the late 1860s and largely demolished a hundred years later to make way for the Westway. The old street featured the Duke of Sussex pub on the corner of Portobello Road, pictured above in the 1900s; the site of which is currently partly occupied by the entrance to the Acklam Village farmers market and earmarked to become the Westway Portobello Village.

Acklam Road took its name from the Acklam village, now part of Middlesbrough, which like Rillington and Ruston is close to the country seat in Yorkshire of the North Kensington developer Colonel St Quintin. Post-Westway, Acklam Road has hosted adventure playgrounds, Hawkwind, the Pink Fairies, Aswad, Carnivals and the HQ, riots and graffiti innovations, Portobello Film Festival at the Pop-up Cinema, Acklam Hall/Bay 63/Subterania/Neighbourhood/Supperclub/Mode, the skatepark, Westbourne Studios and the Muslim cultural heritage centre. Most famously the Acklam/Portobello junction appears on 'The Clash' album sleeve, during the 1976 Carnival, and the following year Bob Marley was at Lloyd Coxson's sound-system on the corner.

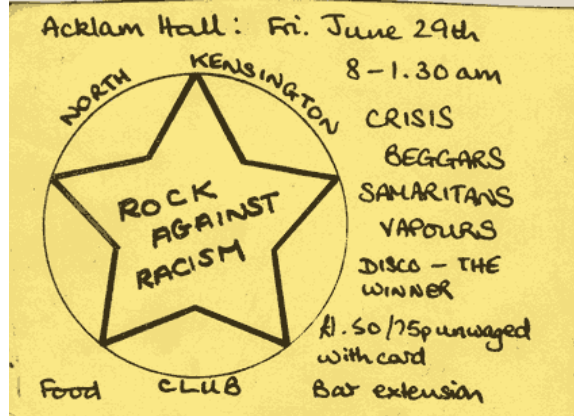
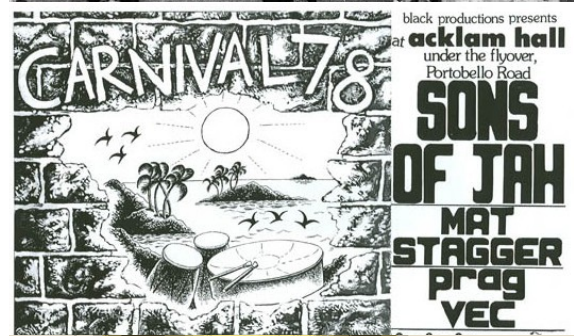
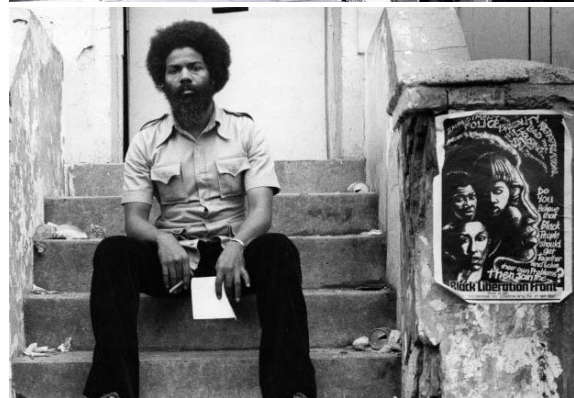
By the 1870s, as the local MP William Bull recalled the market was already established: 'Carnival time was on Saturday nights in the winter, when it was thronged like a fair from Cornwall Road (Westbourne Park Road) to Bolton Road (Westbourne Grove). The people overflowed from the pavement so that the roadway was quite impassable for horse traffic which, to do it justice, never appeared. On the left-hand side (the east side) were costers' barrows, lighted by flaming naphtha lamps, in the side-streets were side-shows, vendors of patent medicine, conjurors and itinerant musicians.'



Acklam Road/Village

Leslie Palmer, the founder of Notting Hill Carnival as we know it today, recalls Acklam Road in 1973 from his forthcoming memoirs. Anthony Perry, director of the North Kensington Amenity Trust responsible for the land under the newly built Westway motorway, which now ran above our collective heads, had decided to pay for a Time Out ad inviting Carnival-interested persons to a public meeting in the makeshift open-air theatre space at Portobello Green under the flyover one Sunday afternoon 7 weeks before the 1973 August bank holiday. Merle Major, the previous organiser had retired due to pregnancy. Perry had a vested interest in the affair as he had wisely allowed the 1972 steelband to begin and end the jump-up at the Portobello Green. 5 people turned up, which didn't say a lot for the interest and enthusiasm for the Carnival. Me, Granville Price, Selwyn Baptiste (pictured), Anthony Perry and possibly Silma Faustine acknowledged each other and, when it was my turn to speak, I said that the event would be improved if it were broadened to include the local soul and reggae sound-systems and bands. I had no idea who Anthony really was or indeed exactly what North Kensington Amenity Trust (now the Westway Development Trust) did, but it would appear that Anthony was interested in what I was saying and suggested that I should come and chat to him at his office across the road the next day.

Going to the Amenity Trust at 3 Acklam Road offered me the opportunity to see the derelict state of the terrace, which had been evacuated as they were extremely close to the Westway. The Amenity Trust occupied the end house of the terrace that had been made functional and just about fit for purpose. Beside Cora, his secretary, there was the light skinned Jamaican worker Dave whom Anthony designated to help settle us in. The trust's work was challenging as they were the most accessible body that seemingly represented the Council and as such they were the target for occasional grouches from disgruntled residents. Their main brief was to ascertain what amenities could be housed on the undeveloped land under the flyover and in an attempt to create a good impression on everyone Anthony had landscaped the largest available space and created the Portobello Green. By this time he had also scrounged a load of wooden railroad sleepers, with which he created a performance space with a stage, and got the then prime minister Harold Wilson to come and open the Westway Theatre. The rest of the bays were rubbish strewn but on the eastern side a small play group existed across Acklam from the derelict terrace. Ronnie Briggs had stayed put at the other end of the terrace where he ran a mechanic's shop, which was a popular hangout spot for his cronies and was eventually a buzzing corner in the Carnivals that followed. Papa Weazel also known as Messiah Sounds played at the blues dances at Briggs's garage, and Boy George became a regular, later teaming up with Weazel on the b-side of 'Do You Really Want To Hurt Me?'





Leslie Palmer Carnival 1973

Anthony Perry was as shrewd as I figured that he might be; and having slept on it and not knowing me from Adam, he asked me to get Frank Crichlow and Merle Major to vouch for my suitability to organise the event. I might have taken along my blueprints for music points and the route map, and explained to Anthony and Dave what I intended to do. Frank and Merle said it was great that I was interested in carrying on the tradition and when they left Anthony introduced me to Tony Soares, whom I knew as the guy who ran Grass Roots bookshop on Golborne Road. He helped me draft fundraising letters and find possible sponsors. Everything needs money and that was at the top of the agenda when we had the first roundtable at which Anthony allocated us a small room and a phone, and explained to us that as the Carnival didn't have charitable status we would have to use theirs, in order for us to solicit funding. I had never promoted an event before nor had I ever had the need to apply for funds from any sources, but I was full of enthusiasm and willing to have a go to get the show together.



Robert 'Bigga' Hamilton was a resident of Ladbrooke Grove and Carnival lover; I remember him helping Merle Major in 1972, distributing sailor suits to the kids in the playgrounds, to encourage them to be involved in the Carnival. Bigga walked into the Carnival office at 3 Acklam Road about the second morning after I took over the responsibility of organising the local jump-up. He became my main assistant and together with my partner Geraldine, 15 year old Donald Francis, with his mate Leon Waithe, we organised the Carnival events, certainly in 1973 it was us 4 that carried the brunt of all the work. Bigga loved cars; he was a spray-painter and a taxi driver, and made himself available to help to organise the event and the associated exhibitions. He stayed with me for the next 3 years and stayed with the Carnival for many years after I had departed. Bigga knew London and he would drive us all over distributing flyers, leaving them in places that I didn't even know existed. We would have gone off to Finsbury Park, Stoke Newington, found a little Trini club, left some flyers there with telephone numbers, and sure enough Laurence Noel picked up on that and that was the first would-be costume band that contacted us at the office. Bigga Hamilton was my main assistant, in every sense of the word.



The very first day of the 1973 Carnival, our first event as it were, we'd had a good time with the kids' parade and were delighted with the council trucks turning up, with the drivers ready to give the kids from the neighbourhood playgrounds a ride through the streets in all their assorted make-believe costumes, and cans of pop drinks and biscuits that they piled on the lorries with them. Derek Donaldson and a few other young men had volunteered as stewards in the event that some crowd control may be required. A few ice-cream vans turned up and Lucita sold her rotis on her stall on the biggest road-

Acklam Under the Flyover

side bay. Lord Sam provided a hot calypso beat, being the only soca Trinidad sound that was available at that time. This Sunday, the Carnival Sunday was the trial day, it was kind of laid back and cool, as we knew that by 3pm the folks from the Sunday lunchtime session at the Coleherne pub in Earl's Court would soon be arriving to add to the crowd that was beginning to build. I reckon I would have made a few bob with which to add to the kitty if I sold stall space at £5 a time on Portobello Green and the land beneath the flyover. The streets and pavements were council owned so we were within our rights to sell on the Portobello Green but not on the streets. The Pryce family had kindly loaned us some of their market stalls from up the Golborne.

The Westway Theatre, which occupied the largest space nearest to Portobello had a decent sized stage where we later on used to have promotional gigs on the odd weekend to draw attention to the upcoming Carnival. Trojan Records had sent along the Cimarons, who played there while the salesmen set up a record stall on the street side. We had cleared the other disused bays as far as we were able to make them fit for purpose and the smaller sounds occupied those which were soon full of onlookers and dancers. Phil Fearon's 6 by 6 and Erroll Shorter's Daveracks put on a great show accompanied by Paddington Terror and Bertram de Wasp who turned up the hi-fi on the tarmac space of the Acklam Road playground. Sir Collins and Delton Pink with a contingent of young local soul, Afro-funk and reggae bands played on the pavements in the surrounding streets. It was all very local as we eagerly anticipated the real costume parade the following day.

I had made a deal with Lucita to provide lunchtime rotis for the council drivers and I gave their boss a case of Long Life beer to share among the 6 drivers. Everything was mellow until we decided to collect the £5 stall fees. The ice-cream vans paid their £10 each and everyone seemed happy to oblige, except for one hotdog seller who'd come up from the West End to sell on the Green. We all knew him as he was a Bajan black guy and we didn't really expect him to refuse to pay, but he did. By this time we'd all had a bit of rum to drink, which the embassies had provided for the occasion and perhaps in hindsight we might have gone into a long explanation of the right to rent the space on the private land, but the upshot of it was us telling him to move and go on to the street as he'd make his money there anyway. But he wouldn't have that either, so a steward pulled his cart towards the street and when it came off the pavement the flimsy aluminium pole broke off completely. My back was turned and as I walked ahead of the cart, he gave me a terrific whack on my head with the aluminium pole; luckily the Afro hairstyle was in fashion so I had a thick covering of woolly hair to protect my skull, and before I could react the other stewards intervened.





Tavistock Crescent/Road

Tavistock Crescent and Road were developed in the late 1860s alongside the railway line from Westbourne Park station, originally as Great Western Crescent and Tavistock Terrace. As Florence Gladstone put it: 'In the remaining portion of the Kensington parish, lying north of Talbot Road, the houses were built on a smaller scale, those nearest the line of the Hammersmith and City Railway being the poorest.' On the 1900s Charles Booth map, the Tavistock streets are poverty and comfort mixed/fairly comfortable, but Silvester Mews, between Basing Street and All Saints Road, is very poor dark blue. By the 1960s Tavistock Crescent had gone from being respectable working class to the worst slum of the area, compared unfavourably with nearby Rachman properties, and was duly demolished in the late 70s.

At the Junction Arms, Tavistock Road, Crescent and Basing Road now Street junction political meeting in the 20s the banners include the National League of the Blind, the North Kensington Branch of the Street Traders Union, and the Union of General Workers Kensal Green. Portobello market became official with licensed stalls and market inspectors in 1927. In 'Going Down the Lane' John Recordon recalls: "a lot of political activity around Portobello market in the 20s and 30s, I was a Young Communist. Most of the meetings were on bread and butter issues, unemployment and the atrocious housing conditions. They were good humoured, though there was a lot of heckling. The costermongers tended to object. Our meetings didn't interfere with their trade, it was more their politics, they were strongly patriotic Tory." In the 70s the Junction pub at 92 Tavistock Road became the Point Community Action Centre, thus described in Tony Allen's *Corrugated Times*: 'First it was a pub, the Junction Arms, then a Labour Exchange, then a clinic, then it was tinned up for a few years, squatted, occupied, hassled for, now it's ours.' Today the site is occupied by the west end of Tavistock Gardens.

At the north-east extremity of the Colville ward and Hollywood W11 was the Tavistock Hotel/Arms pub, next to the footbridge over the railway/under the Westway, leading to the Acklam Road barrier block under Trelick Tower, great British industrial/urban location. The pub appeared in various films, most notably 'Withnail and I' as the Mother Black Cap, from which Richard E Grant and Paul McGann were chased—and which it became in reality after spells as the Frog & Firkin and Babushka before the site's post-modern luxury flat conversion in 2011. The old pub is in 'The L-Shaped Room' in 1962 and Tavistock Crescent/Road features in 'The Squeeze' car chase in 76. The Clash film 'Hell W10' contains a scene on the footbridge involving Tony James of Sigue Sigue Sputnik. Laura Fraser appears in the pub in the 1999 film 'Virtual Sexuality', and Chiwetel Ejiofor visits Emilia Fox on St Luke's Road at the Tavistock Crescent junction in 'Three Blind Mice' from 2003.

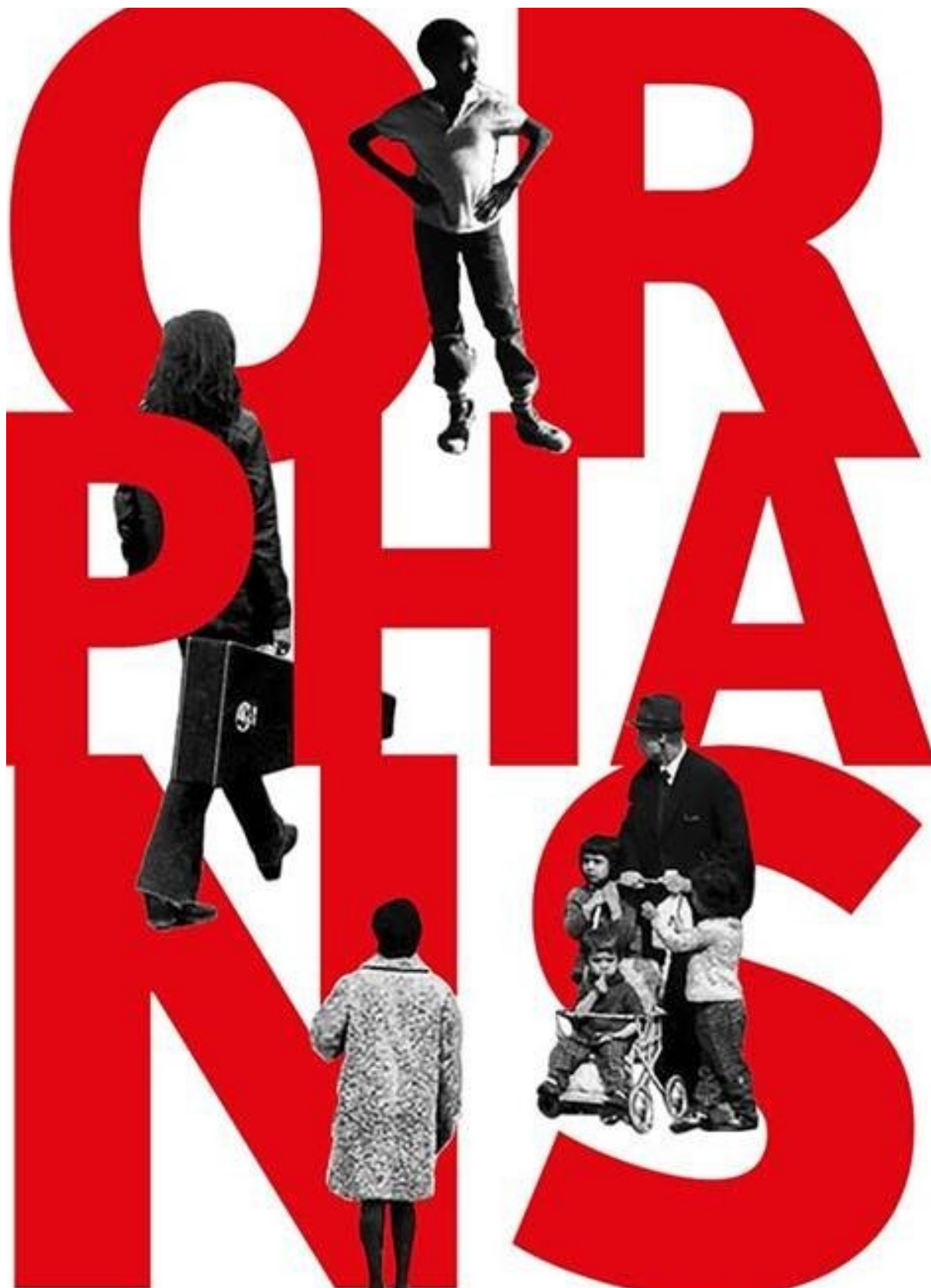
Carnival 1966 and All That

On May 15 1966 Rhaune Laslett's London Free School playgroup at 34 Tavistock Crescent (since demolished) was visited by the world heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali, in the run up to his second Henry Cooper fight. This was also where the first modern Notting Hill Carnival procession began on September 18 1966, when Rhaune Laslett organised the Free School Fayre pageant parade around the area; featuring the London Irish girl pipers, a New Orleans-style trad jazz marching band, Ginger Johnson's Afro-Cuban band, and Russ Henderson's Trinidadian steelband from the Coleherne pub in Earl's Court. Russ Henderson recalls: "Some kids dressed up a bit and bunting in the road, they had a clown, donkey cart and juggler, just things to entertain the kids... Instead of staying outside of Mrs Laslett's building we walked to one end and we walked back down and we thought that was going good and we said we'll move the barriers and make a little run." Although the parade was planned in advance.

Rhaune Laslett's Neighbourhood Service at 34 Tavistock Crescent offered 'free advice for county and magistrates court proceedings, depressives and young addicts in need of help and advice as well as causes of acute distress, especially housing.' The 1968 Notting Hill Fair/ Carnival concluded at the London Free School 'shanty town' adventure playground between Tavistock Crescent and Tavistock Road, east of St Luke's Road, with an 'open air dance' featuring the mod band the Action, Ginger Johnson, Pure Medicine and a steel band. Pete Jenner's Blackhill Enterprises put on benefit gigs for the Neighbourhood Service at the Roundhouse by the Small Faces, Sly and the Family Stone, and David Bowie. The St Luke's Road corner of Tavistock Road hosted the Metro Youth Club, the scene of Alton Ellis and Aswad gigs and various police incidents in the 70s. Rhaune Laslett's house and the Metro are actually over the Colville and Kensington boundary in Westminster.

During the 1976 Carnival Tavistock Road became the riot frontline between the police and youths. The junction with Portobello also appears in the car chase in 'The Squeeze' film, starring Stacy Keach and Freddie Starr. The Clash singer Joe Strummer said in an interview with Chris Salewicz in 1978: "The other day I was walking along and I saw that all of Tavistock Crescent is gone. And they used to seem to really know how to build houses fit for human beings to live in those days. I mean, round by Westbourne Park Road these real egg-boxes suddenly sprung up from behind the corrugated iron, which is just brutal." Strummer later lived at 37 Lancaster Road, he was on Tavistock Crescent in his 'Hell W10' film and when he formed the new Clash group in the mid 80s. Crescent residents of note include the speed-rapper JC001. Since the Tavistock/Portobello junction was pedestrianised in 1982 it's been known as Portobello or Tavistock square, piazza or plaza.





Acklam/Portobello Village farmers market Acklam Road bays 56-8 under the Westway
1970 Westway opening street photograph blow-ups installation by Steve Mepsted

Colville Community History Project

colvillecom.com tomvague@gmail.com getting it straight in notting hill gate

CITY LIVING
LOCAL LIFE