

# NUMBER 18, CARLISLE STREET, SOHO LONDON, W.1.

## Home For Rock And Roll Heroes

by Roy Hollingworth

If you've ever scurried around the sidestreets and back alleys of old Central London, you come across these very strange crumbling buildings leaning on each others' shoulders like so many old soldiers.

In Soho, these old, old buildings are occupied by floosies, tarts, dandies and fops. Helga gave Swedish lessons for five English pounds; The Dolls House offers "Little Rude Riding Hood", a sweetly debauched version of the classic kiddies' tale; and in the paper shop window on Dean Street one can read small cards pasted to the window, which say: "Riding lessons - Special Course on the Use of the Whip - Lulu, 734-ZZZZ"; "Avante - Garde home movies for sale"; "Learn French the French Way - Za - Za, 767-0000". Know what I mean?

These old buildings, now sinking with the weight of decadence and disease told different tales during earlier centuries. On many of them can be seen plaques delicately inlaid into the wall - "Admiral Sir Cloudsley Shovell lived here 1731 - 1745"; "Karl Marx dined here"; "Birthplace of William Pitt The Younger" etc.

On the corner of Dean Street and Carlisle Street, stood 18, Carlisle Street.

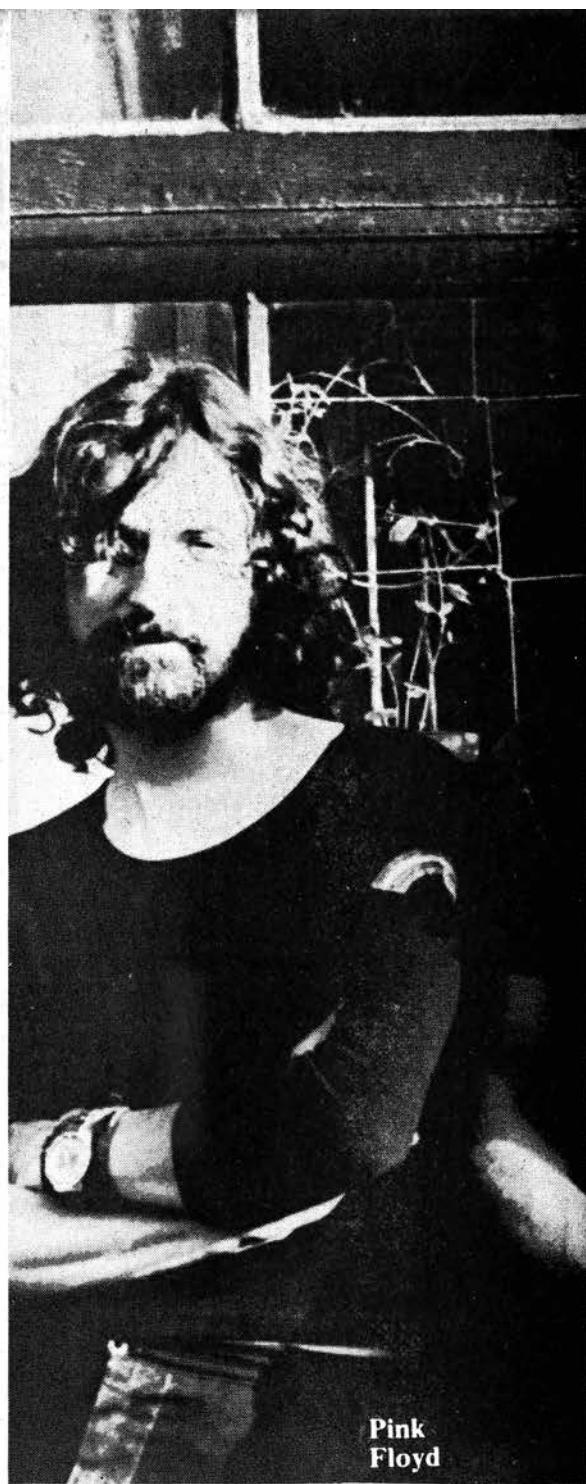
Number 18, Carlisle Street, Soho, London, was a funny old place.

Yes, one day, many years from now - or maybe not too many considering the pace of long distance runners and progression - demolition workers will stumble across 18 Carlisle Street, and as they are about to laser beam it to ashes, they will pause for one frail moment to study the dusty, pock-marked plaque on the wall. It will read "Barrie Wentzell and Roy Hollingworth lived here; approx 1960 - 1975. Also lodging house for Vivian Stanshall, Tony Kay, Peter Banks and Uncle Tom Cobley. Home for Rock and Roll Heroes".

"My grandfather used to talk of these people", one of the demolition workers will say. "He sd they were completely mad. By all accounts they used to enjoy themselves." He will shake his head, adjust the bolt in his neck, and blow the place into oblivion. And a piece of history will find itself scattered into the wind in one trillion pieces. And that will be that.

But once it was. And it did stand on the corner of Dean and Carlisle, and rose into the London skyline like a medieval castle turret. That's what it was actually, a turret, designed by some gin-crazed 18th Century architect, who was actually a frustrated King Arthur. There was actually a round table up there - but I'll come to that later.

If, to the passer-by, things looked



decidedly odd from the outside, then he could rest assured that things on the inside were decidedly odder.

I first moved into 18 Carlisle Street in 1971 - to stay primarily for one week while I looked for more permanent lodgings. As it turned out I was to stay for more than three years. Things happen like that.

The turret and building were divided into four storeys; the first being an absolutely fabulous Pizzeria (the only place I knew in the World where one could get a tuna-fish pizza with a fried egg on top). The second floor was the roost of Marquee Ent., a booking agency for rock and traditional jazz bands. The fourth floor was occupied by a film maker extraordinaire called Peter, and also his lady, who wore black crepe, and kept birds of prey in cages scattered around the living room. Twixt the second and fourth floors lived rock photographer Barrie Wentzell,



alias "The Marmalade Cat", and myself. We both worked for the World's largest selling music weekly. We both felt very large, but were modest about the fact, and only ordered Sedan Chairs on Good Fridays and Shrove Tuesday.

We had a colour television; a stereo-system; a gas fire; one round wooden table; two beds; a developing and printing laboratory; a lavatory; two guitars; an orange oven glove; one stove and a bath tub in the kitchen. We also had mice, and a comfortable supply of bacon, light ale, and Irish whiskey.

It was therefore rudely finished and furnished, and was for the most part painted white, except for mysterious stains here and there. "Holmes, I think it might be a splash from a 1968 Burgundy."

Yet despite its rudeness, the interior design (due to the turret) gave it the appearance of some 16th Century artist's home and studio in downtown Venice.

This resemblance was further enhanced by frequent flooding, due to the fact that Peter the strange film maker had a habit of leaving taps running into his bath tub when he embarked on his frequent vacations. Oh, I forgot to mention that the ventilation system from the Pizzeria wormed its way up the inside of the building, and vomited rancid tomato - and - mozerella - and - tuna - fish cheese - and grease flavored air into our kitchen.

The odour of the Pizzeria ventilation system was such, that The Marmalade Cat and myself were forced to dab beer and Irish whiskey behind our ears, so as strangers would not mistake us for being Italian. Not that we had anything against Italians, except that they were smarmy gigalos who were three-feet high, and smelt funny. But that's another story.

Now it was so planned that 18 Carlisle Street was in the immediate vicinity of two of London's finest recording studios;

a half-dozen record companies, and a brace of pubs where musicians hung out. Also, next door there lived two prostitutes, Sylvia and Mimi, and across the street was The Doll's House Burlesque Club. It was, so to speak, a funky little area.

You could breakfast at the local cafe, and while you were sliding around with a pool of chips, sausage and beans, one would be joined by a couple of record producers, a film director, one group, two pimps, a paper-seller and a heroin addict. They ask me why I write poems. They ask!

With The Marmalade Cat and myself working with, and knowing so many people in the rock business, an abundance of strange and romantic characters were forever stumbling in and out of 18 Carlisle Street on their way to recording studios; or to be photographed; or to drink with us between sessions, or to ....



Bonzo  
Dog  
Band





We were never without company. Now that can be good, and bad, and at times it can be darned diabolical. Looking back on it though, it was beautifully bizarre.

Our most frequent visitor was one Vivian Stanshall, formerly the leader of The Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band, a collection of beautiful fools and genius who were ten years ahead of their time, and were therefore forced to struggle and suffer severe pain at the hands of record companies - who can indeed make artists suffer.

Well, Vivian was continually at work on his solo album, and also making cameo appearances on several television and radio shows, where his wit and brilliance continued to be astonishing - despite a treacherous drinking habit which combined heart relaxing pills and brandy. He was fearless.

Vivian had an enormously long ginger beard, and took it upon himself to wear exceedingly colourful Kaftans, a little woolen hat, and bells on his ankles.

It was the bells I heard first, tinkling up our stairs at about 4.30 a.m. one morning. I was in a half-coma, due to cider and brandy, but could definitely define Vivian's jingling, burping and rattling up the stairs. He was also whistling something loud and incoherent.

Then came this enormous thumping on the door, and cry of "Open up you bloody rascals" I bolted out of bed, fast as a cat, and opening the door witnessed this bedraggled figure of Vivian, complete with a case of beer and a policeman. "Want to throw a party old boy? Where's Wentzell?"

The policeman, who was young, and not yet dark blue, stammered. "Er, does he belong to you. I found him on the street outside".

"Yes, he's one of ours", I replied, "he must have been on one of his secret trips to Dunkirk. Old salt and all that."

"Oh, I see," said the policeman. "Well, look after him. Evening all."

"Bloody fascist piglet" spat Viv, "ought to have his balls peppered and eaten. Now where's Wentzell?"

"Well he's asleep Viv. It's 4.30 in the morning."

"Asleep! What the Hell! And what's all this rubbish about it being four bloody thirty. Last time I looked at my watch it said 11.15, and I thought you chaps might be up for a few pre-midnight beers. Now let me in."

By this time The Marmalade Cat had begun to stir from his pit, and was somewhat shocked and dazed by the sight of Vivian entering his bedroom, throwing bottles onto the bed and demanding an opener, and music. Needless to say, we couldn't refuse, and boozed until breakfast. And dear Vivian fell into a coma on the carpet.

Then there was the night I arrived home to find Noel Murphy, an Irish folk singer fast asleep in my bed with some floosie. Noel was in a Guinness coma, and I knew it would take a bloody fork-lift truck to move him. I heaved off his boots, patted his floosie on her soft white bum, and curled up to sleep on my carpet.

The weekly screening of "Monty Python's Flying Circus" would draw up to three or four musicians - Tony Kay (who was with Yes during that period), Peter Banks, of Flash, Tony Ashton, and a gaggle of Liverpudlian poets (McCartney's brother, Roger McGough to name one) and a gaggle of various Bonzo Dogs. There we were, sat on the straw carpet around the tele scoffing bacon sandwiches with marmalade dressing; laughing like fools and sucking strong Devon cider from large brown bottles.

Evenings came and went in the strange turret. Madmen were forever appearing with half-written lyrics; drugs aplenty and tales of the road that were enough to make your short and curly stand on end. I began to lose my sanity.

In an effort to restore it I took up the hobby of building little model aeroplanes from kiddie's model kits. Quite soon I had a handsome collection of Sopwith Camels, Fokke-Wolf fighters and the odd S.E.5. I had a whole squadron of British Sopwiths and a whole squadron of German Fokkes. I lined them up in formation on top of the fireplace, and gloated with pride.

After finishing my splendid battle formation, Wentzell informed me that I was "Nuts". I informed him that it had been extremely therapeutic, and that I was now going out to interview Leonard Cohen.

Leonard was very nice, and we talked about everything very lovely being spoiled by everything very nasty. Whistling an old hymn, I strutted through the Soho Streets, heading for home (in need of tea, bacon and television).

Arriving outside out door, I could hear a mess of noise from the inside. The sounds of mouth-made machine guns and explosions, moans and blood-curdling yells, and the splintering sound of shattered plastic.

I stormed through the door, ran into the living room, and there playing "Snoopy versus The Red Baron" was Vivian, Barrie, assorted members of the Welsh group, Man, and others. My little planes lay shot into pieces on the floor; there wings ripped off; props twisted and deformed; pilots trod into the carpet. A tear fell from my cheek.

"Don't worry old boy, the British won. Now let's celebrate down at yon public house."

Moral: Don't build plastic aeroplanes in a brick turret.

There were the languid times of course. When on sunny Saturday afternoons, I would sit in the open window of the turret with "Dark Side of the Moon" filling my ears, watching the massive 747s glide into Heathrow Airport, and below would be the strippers dashing from club to club; and the fruit sellers with their barrows, and Soho moving along like some Dickensian street scene.

And then there would be a yell from the street below. I would look down. A musician with his guitar case. "Any beer in the place Roy? Can I come up?". Of course, but leave my plastic battleships alone. They are my joy. My life. □

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