

THE PROTESTERS

BY HARRY MARTIN



The voice of legitimate protest in a city which is almost notorious for its contentiousness, belongs not to the long-haired, left-wing intellectuals fired with the burning zeal of youth to put the world to rights, but a genteel

group of little old ladies. And it is their frail shoulders which bear the burden of the battle to preserve Nottingham's historic heritage . . .

Helen Crowder, Eva Carmichael, E M Palmer, A M Mills, B Jacacz

(from left to right)

This group of five women were active in protesting about the knocking down of the Broad Marsh, Narrow Marsh and Drury Hill area of the city back in the late 1960's

and early 1970's. They were determined to make the officials think twice. The Civic Society and various history associations had all raised objections but it was these women who over several years kept up efforts to get the Council to change its mind regarding the development of a new shopping centre

These five, together with a Mrs H Johnson and Dr H M Browning both from Mapperley they lobbied City Councillors about plans for Broad Marsh, writing letters to Council planning officials and bombarding the Ministry of the Environment with letters. They called for and got a public enquiry and several weeks before the inquiry they circulated copies of a letter together with a map showing the proposed developments and exhorted others to join the protests and stop the 'official vandals.'

The 'stopping up' of the Broad Marsh the letter said 'will lead to the construction of a sprawling development which will not only be of great inconvenience to would-be travellers but will seriously impede access to and from the Midland Station and the city centre.'

They attended the Public Inquiry at the Guildhall and took their seats in the 'trial of the Broad Marsh'. The leader of the group was Miss E.M. Palmer – shown holding a copy of the plans and not a weapon to bash the officials with! She was a retired schoolteacher from Lenton and an experienced protester. She had attended three earlier Public Inquiries: about Drury Hill, the proposed eastern bypass, Fletcher Gate and then that for the Broad Marsh; intent on stopping the 'whittling away' of historic remains. Although she failed each time she remained resolute in her efforts to stop the destruction of an historic medieval part of Nottingham City. She cross examined the City Planning Officer a Mr Evans forcing the admission that the meeting to discuss the future of the Severn's building had taken place in London. They put up a spirited fight with Eva Carmichael, an ex-servicewoman questioning officials about the loss of an old right of way and said that the damage done by the war was insignificant compared to that being done by planners.

She summed up by saying:

'The people we are opposing today are our own Corporation and the men we have elected to guard our interests, instead of which they are the official vandals who are destroying this ancient city.'

Each of the women spoke and then Miss Palmer took the stand firstly apologizing for causing the expense of the inquiry but nevertheless stressing the objections in a 9 foolscap page indictment of the scheme.

However, it was to no avail as those of us living in Nottingham know to our cost. Broadmarsh shopping centre went ahead with the loss of Nottingham's narrowest street, Drury Hill, an ancient thoroughfare dating back to Saxon times. The protesters won the preservation of some caves – now City of Caves and the moving of the Severn's Building but they did not stop the Broadmarsh centre which has been unpopular since its inception.

And that brings us to today, some fifty years later, where the Broad Marsh area is attracting attention once again with the failure of the shopping centre, the failure of proposed redevelopment. The city has been left with an eye sore and a problem but perhaps an opportunity to breathe life into that part of the city with green spaces and

With thanks to a Harry Martin for his article The Protesters held at Nottingham Archives.