

Westbourne Park
tube station, 1967The Piss House
Pub, 1969

Notting Hill Carnival, 1968

SWINGING 60s

Photographer Charlie Phillips has been documenting the social evolution of Notting Hill since his teenage years

When Charlie Phillips heard the sound of steel pan and the collective march of a few hundred feet echo through Portobello Road in 1968, his first thought was to grab his camera.

A self-taught photographer, Charlie had become known for capturing the protests of a politically charged era, but that day, when he pointed his Kodak at the crowd, he had no idea that he was in fact documenting a piece of Notting Hill history – the early years of Carnival. ‘It was a very diverse community at that time. It was a day when everything was expressed – everybody came out that day,’ he explains.

Charlie arrived in Notting Hill from Jamaica in the 1950s – a turbulent time for the area when Rachmanism was rife, and racial tensions in the community ran high. ‘Those were the days where you’d see things like ‘no



Charlie Phillips

Irish, no blacks, no dogs,’ on signs,’ he explains.

When an American G.I. left a camera with his father, Charlie began photographing his surroundings, capturing the complexity of 1960s Notting Hill. ‘I never meant to be a photographer, I wanted to be an opera singer,’ he says.

His style, inspired by the illustrations of Norman Rockwell,

conveys the unpredictability of everyday life in the area.

Many of Charlie’s images were taken at the locally known ‘Piss House’ pub, a working class bar on the corner of Blenheim Crescent and Portobello Road, ‘It was a meeting place for the working class, you’d have a lot of Irish navvies and West Indian train drivers. It was the first place I ever had a drink of shandy. It was one of the first multicultural places,’ he explains.

When Carnival arrived in west London, it brought with it an essential outlet that allowed the area’s melting pot of cultures to breathe, ‘Notting Hill has always been a very tense area, from the housing conditions to police brutality and stop and search. The relationship between different members of the community was not all that. So they decided to bring it all together, to share different cultures – and I was part of that.’