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*So if, can I just, can you just start by, can you just count to ten for me to check the levels*

One, two, free [three], four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten

*Perfect. Yeah that looks good. Alright then. So, um first of all can you tell me your full name? Please. [Laughs]*

[Laughs] Ok, yeah, my name’s David Cox

*And can you just spell that. I know it’s obvious but we need to spell it anyway*

Uh D A V I D C O X

*Excellent. And can you tell me the year that you were born?*

Uh nineteen sixty seven

*Brilliant. And um today we are in your house. Can you just tell me the address of your house?*

It’s eighty nine A Surdstone Road E 2 9 HN

*And do you know the date today?*

It’s the twenty fifth of July?

*2015*

2015

*Brilliant. Ok, excellent. Thanks David. So to start with can you, um, can you just start by telling me where you were born?*

Um, well I was born in Wanstead, um, but actually lived in Leytonstone for the first two years of my life and then my parents, um moved to Wan’ I was born in Wanstead hospital and then we decided that, my parents decided to move to Wanstead, um, so I lived there for the first twenty years of my life. And then I moved to, uh, East London when I was twenty two twenty three and I’ve lived there ever since, I’ve been here, in East London f’, uh, Tower Hamlets for twenty five years

*Ok brilliant. And, um, you were telling me earlier that your, um, that you said that the M eleven had kind of followed you around…*

That’s right yeah

*…throughout your life. So can we go back, right back to Wanstead and your early childhood…*

Yeah

*…and can you tell me a little bit about how…how the M eleven featured in your life when you were very young*

Well, um, I remember when we first moved to Wanstead, uh, there was lots of posters, uh, about the M eleven, um, saying no to the M eleven and, um, because there was free [three] public enquiries about the, uh, the proposed M eleven link road so I remember seeing as a child the posters in people’s windows and I was curious about it but I wasn’t obviously…politically active when I was a child then, um, but the George green, I remember playing on there as a child and there was, there was a number of horse chestnut there’s a horse chestnut and sweet chestnut trees all on the green and we used to play on the green as children, um…so basically when, uh, we found out about the link road and that they’d cordoned off the chestnut tree, um, on the seventh of November nineteen…ninety free [three]…um we actually, there was a number of us, uh, there were a number of people in encircled the tr’ chestnut tree which had been fenced off and we all started pushing the fence down. And there was a tree dressing ceremony so people could come and put ribbons on the tree and they sung songs around the tree and there was a small road digger that was in inside the compound which they’s, uh, encircled with, uh, fencing and, uh, a number of people climbed on that and were singing songs. Uh, the security guards, there was too many people for the security guards to to stop so, um, they just pretty much stood back, uh, they tried to stop people, uh, reaching the but there was just too many people for, uh, for them to stop. Um, and then the chestnut tree then became occupied by protesters, um, there was five people living in the chestnut tree…and they built a tree house and they fantastic fing [thing] they did was put a post box on the chestnut tree which meant it became a legal dwelling because people sent them letters of support to the people living in the chestnut tree and when this went to court the, the barrister that was, uh…supporting the the protest’ or representing the protesters actually said that, um, it meant that they had to go for the eviction process so it would be a longer process, it couldn’t just, um, fell the tree they had to go through the legal process of taking out an eviction notice, so it gave them extra time. Um…so basically in Dec’ in December of ninety, uh, free [three] there was the eviction of the chestnut tree and there was basically hundreds and hundreds of police, um, I think eight hundred police actually were at the eviction…and there was, could’ve been twenty eight police vans, down Cambridge Park Road. Um, the eviction happened in the early hours of the morning so it was about six uh, six o’clock in the morning and I remember a claxton horn, the type of horn you use at a football match, and it was really ear piercing, it was just very…atmospheric that, that there was just this kinda misty and then you heard this horn…and I was actually staying with my parents, I didn’t stay by the tree I was staying at my parents ‘cause they live right, very close to the site, um, so I got up very early and run to the site and then…we all encircled the tree, there was four people locked onto the tree. They had drainpipes and they had, um, basically put their ar’ arms in lock in, so they had like handcuffs inside the drainpipes and they were locked onto each other. And the rest of us were encircled around them so that there was just a mass of people surrounding the tree. Um, and I was actually one of the last people that they took away before they broke into the locks, so they actually thought I was locked on at one point and then they realised that I wasn’t and they kind of frew [threw] me on top of the tents that were around the tree. I remember one of the men in th’ uh the tree said he’s an environmentalist leave him alone [laughs] he’s protecting the environment and, uh, I remember the police were very heavy handed, um, they were quite aggressive towards the protesters and there was lots of complaints put in about their behaviour. Um, they pushed, uh, a retired, uh, man Laurie Lockland to the ground, um, he was in his seventies a communist and he was trod on his glasses and they sort of slapped , uh, a young woman across the fa’ the face. Um, they, there is documentation and that’s actually of a police officer drawing a truncheon and I think the truncheon is actually in the, uh, Hornbeam environmental centre, I think it’s one of the exhibits there. Um…police officers were S P G, special police group, and they had overalls on, uh, and they covered up the numbers on their apelettes[epaulettes] so they wouldn’t be recognised. Um…a lot of people got injured, a woman had her arm broken, she was, um, pulled out of the tree and her arm was broken, um, quite a few people…uh, including myself, we were laying in the road to stop the cherry pickers getting to the tree and the police officers leant on us with basically, uh, they put their elbow on your rib cage until, so it was difficult for you to breath, and I had internal bruising for about free [three] weeks. Um…some people had their pressure points pressed on their temples on their head which is very dangerous

*Mm*

Uh, one friend of mine actually had his testicles twisted by an officer. Uh, they there’s all sorts of tactics that they used to get people out of the roads so they could carry out the eviction. Um, we, we made lots of complaints to Bindham and Co who were a group of solicitors representing the, uh, protest. I think they documented over, you know, over a hundred incidents of, uh, violence towards the protesters

*And was dir’, I guess, was direct action, was it a fairly young movement in the UK at that time? So were these kind of tactics that you were coming up against, probably for the first time, or, I mean was there, was there the knowledge within the activist community of these tactics and how to sort of meaningfully respond to them, or were you quite surprised by the tactics or. Do you see what I mean? Do you understand the question?*

Yeah. Th’ some of the protesters had been involved with Twiford Down in Whiltshire so they, they were, they knew what to expect from the police and the security. Um, I’ve been involved with CND in the eighties in the anti-apartheid movement, so what was kind of , I dunno, sat down the road from various peace demonstrations so I was used to the police dragging, being dragged along by the, uh, by the police, but uh, but not using pressure points. Um, a lot of the local residents have never ever been involved with protest and, before the M eleven campaign, and they felt compelled to do so because they saw public land being, uh, fenced off and destroyed so they felt compelled to be involved. So I think they found it shocking because they didn’t realise…the state, the police the security would use that level of violence against ordinary people that were protesting peacefully

*Mm*

But I think a number of us weren’t that surprised

*Um, I’m just gonna go back a little bit and ask, you mentioned when, um, when you were surrounding the tree the first time and there were, there was a digger and people climbing onto the digger and you said that people were singing songs?*

Yes

*Do you by any chance remember any of the songs?*

Um…they were, they were songs they made up. The wo’ the…I can’t remember the exact words but…they were trying to make it a celebratory, the whole thing I found about the protest was that they tried to make it fun and they tried to make it humorous. Cause it kind of diffused the violence and this is what I really like about the peaceful direct action movement is that they used, um, creativity, they dress up sing, um, almost sometimes pantomime, or you could call it theatre, um, very visual. And it was a way of getting public attention but also a way of diffusing any kind of violence and saying, you know, we’re using creative methods to put our point across. So I don’t know the exact words but I remember the people singing [laughs]

*Do you remember any of the words?*

Um…oh there was the one about the, uh, she’s a mountain she gets stronger and stronger, um she goes on and on, it’s uh I think it’s a pagan song about…that you know, um, you can’t really destroy the spirit, it’ll go out on and on and get stronger and stronger

*Mmm*

Yeah

*Excellent, um…and I also, I’m sorry I will come back to this, but I’m also, I want to go back a bit again to your childhood and your sort of early memories of the area that you grew up in. Can you sort of describe any really early memories that you have of that area and playing on the green maybe*

Well it was very gr’ a very green area cause the end of the road, we lived in Warren Road, there was a farm at the end of the road and we lived right next to Wanstead Park which was a forest, it was part of Epping Forest but it was, bequeathed to the people of Wanstead as a public park…um, there wasn’t that much traffic in the seventies when I grew up and it was safe to play out on your bike and…uh, the green, there was always people, children playing on the Wanstead green and then also there’s another park, um, in Wanstead High Street, uh, Christchurch park so it’s, I just remember it being a green area, it was safe to walk to school it was safe to cycle, uh, people were friendly, there was lots of local shops…um, and it was a nice area to grow up as a child. It was almost like a village, people actually describe Wanstead as a village on the outskirts of London.

*Mmm*

So, so it was a kinda unique, um, place…uh, it was also the crossroads between East London cause you’ve got Leytonstone, obviously Stratford and then in the other direction you’ve got, uh, Essex so you’ve got Woodford, um, Chingford Loughton, so it’s a very unique place Wanstead really

*Mmm. Um, and you and you talked earlier about remembering seeing posters in people’s windows about the M11, can you remember what the posters looked like?*

I think they’re orange with black writing on, I think it just said no to the M eleven

*And can you remember when you first became aware of what, what was going on there, what, what was proposed and what impact that might have on you?*

Um, well I think there was, there was a, a kind of open meeting where people could go and look at the map, proposed map of the M eleven and, there was a number of people attended that and I think I remember seeing…that it would be going through Wanstead, uh, Leytonstone Leyton and up to Hackney Wick. But I noticed most of the, the, the pro’ well there was, I noticed a lot of properties in Cambridge Park Road would be destroyed and were destroyed, but also in Layton as well…but um

*And how old were you when you…started to kind of understand a little bit what, what the proposal was?*

Um, well probably only really got involved in my twenties, um, that actually became interested because…I think it was only, it had been an issue in the sixties as far as planning and, but it wasn’t very, um…it wasn’t a at a stage then when it was actually going to be put into practice implemented

*Um, yeah cause you said that there were three public enquiries, do you know any more about that?*

Um, no it’s just what, it just what I’ve read about, the, I just sort of did my own research and I read about it and apparently, um, even Winston Churchill who was the MP in Wanstead was opposed to the M eleven and so he was probably an MP up, cause he died in the seventies, so I think he was an MP up to the sixties so, even he opposed the M eleven so it would have been going on that long…the idea of the M eleven…um…

*And were your parents, involved at all in…objecting or were they involved in*

Not until, no, not until the, um, the actual protest, I think a lot of people…when they actually physically saw what was going to happen that…galvanised them into action, I think before that it was probably…it was such a long process that had gone on for such a long time…um, that people probably think well it wasn’t actually going to happen until it did actually happen

*Mmm. And do you know when it was very first proposed, do you know, um, what the reasoning behind it was, was it, I mean because in the nineties obviously it was to do with reducing the commuter time out of central London but was that what*

That was the main reason because I think they said it would be, so yeah it, it is ridiculous when you think about it, but actually it was to save time and actually…if you build motorways you’re creating more of a demand for traffic and then it’s not going to save any time at all so its, it’s a self defeating thing really

*Mmm*

Um…the more, you know, the more motorways you have the more traffic you’re going to have and it’s not going to save anyone any journey time, you need to put investment in public transport and pedestrianised areas and, you know, look at local economies where people don’t have to travel so much to work, um, obviously makes cycling a lot safer, encourage that…um…but…the ironic thing is, even, the transport minister at the time Steven Norris was a Conservative transport, uh, minister admitted on a Panorama programme about the whole, uh, road debate, that there was a change in our attitude and that it wasn’t sustainable road building…and he was actually, because, um…actually his reasons I’ve already expressed you’re creating more of a demand for traffic if you build more roads, I mean you have to look at ways of reducing traffic not ways of increasing traffic

*So when was that? Do you know when that was?*

This was in the early nineties, it would be ninety four ninety five

*Mmm. And do you think that partly was a, um…a an effect of the resistance, the protests? Do you think that had a, played a real role in changing public opinion?*

Yes, I mean it made, the protest made it very expensive for them to carry out the work, I mean, it’s running to millions the M eleven, um, link road and obviously Twyford Down Newbury Bypass the Batheastern Bypass, there was a whole number of, um…there was at least sixty percent of the proposed roads were cancelled, and this was towards the end of the Conservative government, just before, um, the Tony Blair government got in, so, but actually some people believe that, that direct action helped to bring down the Conservatives as far as there was so much…protest against, um, the road building programme as well as the, the Criminal Justice Act which was designed to stop protest actually…um, coupled with the fact that at the time the Conservative government was every other, uh, week there was a scandal of corruption and sleaze within the Party, so…I think the road protest had a big effect and…we, and after that actually the Labour Party didn’t, um, when Tony Blair came into power there wasn’t as much road building going on and that’s probably because of the protest cause it was very expensive, the public were generally, the general public were in favour of the protest, um…and if you look at the people involved there are a real mixture of people. There were seasoned protesters…, um, school children retired people, um, very, quite influential wealthy people, um, very poor people whose, uh, livelihoods would be affected by closing down, um, people concerned about pollution levels, uh, there was a very wide and it actually united people from all different backgrounds…which was one thing that probably hadn’t happened before, um…within the political sphere because most people…you know, if you’re wealthy you support the Tories if you’re poor you support a more, a more left wing Party, so I think this actually united all people from all different political backgrounds because they didn’t want their local environment destroyed

*Mmm. So would you say that the overwhelming feeling from the local community was in opposition to the building of the road?*

I think so yes, yes I mean there may have been a few people who were in favour of, or who supported it but I think the vast majority of people were against it…yeah

*So can you remember the first getting really properly involved in the…in the, uh, protests in your twenties?*

Um

*What was it that kind of galvanised you?*

I think it was the, seeing the chestnut tree surrounded with fencing and then we pulled down the fence and then people occupied the tree and we, and then obviously the day of the eviction we sur’, uh, surrounded the tree and it went on for ten hours the eviction…um, so it was a very very long eviction. And then after the tree was felled people thought oh it’s, cause it was one of the symbols of the protest, was the chestnut tree and they said well that’s the end of the protest, but actually this was the media, obviously and the establishment but actually then the houses in Cambridge Park Road were under fret [threat] and they were beautiful Edwardian houses that were, had large gardens they were very beautiful houses and um, they were occupied and we built barricades inside them and, actually as we were, that’s when my father got involved, my father was a builder and…he helped to build the barricades, um, there was one room which free [three] women locked onto a washing machine which was full of concrete and they had, um, drainpipes inside the washing machine…and they had a bar in the middle of the drainpipe and they had handcuffs which they locked onto, or carabineer hooks which they locked onto the bar and we had to make the room difficult for the, for the uh, bailiffs to get into, so there was concrete put into…the cavities in the wall, so you have a, like a wooden structure inside the room and you pour concrete into these wooden frames…and there was galvanised steel sheeting, the type of thing you’d put onto a shed roof that was screwed onto the outside of the walls in the other rooms

*Wow*

And there was

*So how, sorry, so how, did that all happen before the pro’ after the protesters had got in and locked on?*

Yeah

*And then other people*

Well basically the occupied, people squatted the houses that were going to be demolished and they, uh, basically built barricades outside, they they built ditches around the houses, so that the diggers would be able to get to the houses…uh, then they put iron over the windows, um…and they made some rooms very difficult to get into, so they’d reinforce them with wood, uh, concrete shuttering iron sheets. And there was only one door in and out of the, uh, room which had, um, was lie a, a big heavy sliding wooden door of a post, a big strong post behind it, so the protesters could get out if they wanted to but it meant that the bailiffs would have to drill through it…so, um, we, we, the housing xxxx was involved, we gave them, uh, the women safety goggles and they had hard hats, uh, dust masks because when the security guards came through the wall there was a lot of debris flying around, bits of wood and cement and it was very dusty…um, but it took them a good free [three] hours four hours to get into the room, they had to drill through concrete wood take the steel shuttering off, but when they got into the room, there was two women locked onto the washing machine and there was one woman who was filming it as part of an independent film maker, and actually the security guards said right we, we’ve, we’ve come, um, across these lock on devices before we know you can release your locks, so they said you can either do it yourself now or we can use, uh, we can forcefully pull your arm out and the, actually the protester was asking about what level of force they’d use and they said well it’ll be painful for you so you’d better do it now…so there was lots, you know, people were very very brave they actually, uh…put their health and safety at risk in a way because they believed in their cause and

*So they, did they do it, did they…unlock themselves or did they stay*

I think they stayed as long as they could…but obviously the security guards were trying to twist their arms and things like this, but they asked the film maker to leave, I noticed this, they asked the film maker to go before they started to try and get them out of the locks

*And do you know if that’s legal?*

Well this is what they were asking at the time, can you legally, do that and they said oh we can use minimal force to, to uh, carry out our eviction but… it is actually, I probably myself I’d classify that as assault, if you’re, if you’re trying to twist someone’s arm and you break their arm

*And do you know if, was any action taken afterwards or*

There was a number of, incidents were recorded and submitted, um, to…by the barristers representing, the solicitors representing the protesters, um…but I think that they, the idea is people held out as long as they could to, to delay the work as much as possible…and miraculously nobody was seriously hurt there was, there were some, people were injured but nobody was actually killed which was miraculous when you think of, uh, people were being pulled off the rooves of the houses and these were like firty [thirty] foot, huge houses and there’s pictures of a man hanging onto a spire, he’s been pulled by the cherry picker and he’s hanging on to a spire on the house and, you know, if he’d fell he would have, certainly be dead and they were smashing up the rooves with sledge hammers whilst people were still on the roof…so they, they the security guards were on a cherry picker which was a large crane which can get up to the roof of the building and it’s got a platform, and they had sledge hammers and other, you know, bits of wood and they were smashing up tiles where people, people were still sitting up on the roof, so the roof could have collapsed with people on, on the roof

*Where are we talking, where*

This is Cambridge Park Road

*Still Cambridge Park Road, yeah*

So, I was involved with that and

*Is Cambridge Park Road in Wanstead?*

It’s in Wanstead, it, it goes from uh, Wanstead green up to, uh…the green man roundabout in Leytonstone so it’s quite a long road, um…and I think there was about six houses were destroyed, um…but it took them two, it took them a long time to, to you know, that was a whole day to evict two houses, um, after that there was a fing [thing] called operation road block, they had, they had a bit, they had a building site which when they knocked down the houses and it was surrounded by fencing…so March nineteen ninety four, there was um, people occupying the building sites for a month so there would be lots of protest people climbing up cranes, so we, basically we’d get over the fence, run past the security guards and climb up the cranes and some of those were forty foot high, I meant they were forty foot cranes and we didn’t have ropes we just climbed up them like a ladder they were just like a, um, a lattice work and you just climbed up to the top of them…and you’d sometimes spend the whole day up there, so you’d have to take, um, water a sandwich and maybe even a water bottle to wee in or something [laughs] it depends how long you, you stayed up there for, but the idea was just to disrupt the work, um, and it was very effective, people came from all over London not just the local area…um…I mean after that, obviously Claremont Road, um, was occupied

*So how, um, can you talk, do you know, or can you talk me through sort of the process* Claremont *Road went through to be occupied, cause it was, first of all it was just an ordinary residential estate and then it was the Acme housing just kind of moved in at some point and, have you got kind of a clear image of the sort of, the change that it went through between it being a residential street to being a street occupied largely by squatters and activists? Have you got quite a clear image of, you know, our residents moving out and our squatters moving in, that kind of, thing?*

Um…well I think, obviously a lot of properties were compulsory purchased. There was a couple of residents that refused to go, um, Dolly being one of the residents and she’d lived there all her life, she was ninety two years old and she refused to go, um…there was Richard Leyton I think as well who lived in the road and…there was a number of people who , um…occupied the place, the properties and they turned it into art house and there was a café…uh, and then there was, there were street parties in the road and jazz music, uh, just all sorts of different music actually, different bands playing and then the, the properties started, um, being reinforced so they would…build bunkers and barricades and there was even tunnels going underneath on of the houses, um

*To where?*

Uh, it was, I think run along…past, um…along the Central Line, but it was actually so they could get supplies in and out of Claremont Road if they need, if it was occupied, if it was under siege. Um, it was quite a long time actually, it was very, they used oil drums to, and they used wood, they had wooden…struts and supports but obviously the had oil drums there as well to make the, so there was quite a small space and people were…um, squeezed through these spaces and, uh…to get supplies in, to and from Claremont Road when it was being cut off by the security and the police. But, um, not a lot of people actually knew about it, it was in the film made about the M eleven campaign ‘Life in the Fast Lane’ but, I think they had to keep it quite secretive cause, obviously, if the security guards heard about it they could block the tunnel off or it could be dangerous or, so it’s only a few of the people knew about it, um, there was a huge tower on top of one of the houses named after Dolly, the resident, the oldest resident on Claremont Road…and people locked onto that, um, on the final eviction day. Um, but the, the street, there was a good atmosphere, there was like a street party atmosphere in Claremont Road where the furniture was taken out onto the street, so it’s almost like bringing the community onto the street with the sofas and chairs and tables and people had games, they were playing games on the street and…music, um, plants and lampshades on the street [laughs] so it was actually, it was the reverse of, it was putting people first rather than cars and the idea was, reclaim the streets, actually, it’s about people not cars and…um, it was a very very good, uh, idea cause then it, the ‘Reclaim the Streets’ movement sprung out of that, they started having spontaneous street parties, um, I think there was about five, uh, street parties in London protesting about, uh, road pollution and that came out of Claremont Road, so that, that was a really good idea that came from that, um

*So were there any cars on the street? Were there, was it blocked off to cars?*

Um, well no, I think, it, some of the protesters may have had vehicles, I mean, ironically some of the protesters did have their own vehicles, but they, they used them, uh, wisely I s’pose or sensibly…um, but actually their, their cars were vandalised by the security guards cause there’s footage of all their windows being smashed and…um, there was a lot of, uh…of that kind of aggression towards the protesters, um, as you, going back to the tree, um, there was an incident where people had tents around the chestnut tree in Wanstead and free [three] men petrol bombed the tents because, basically, they, they were caught and there was a court case and they were imprisoned but they were hired, we think, by one of the companies involved with…the construction of the M eleven. So it, it was a building company involved with the construction of, because it was costing them money, delays were costing them money they wanted to get the protesters away, so they hired free [three] men who were, I think, came from Southend, they weren’t local, and one of my friends actually spotted the, um, tents on fire and he warned, he was, he actually lived in Wanstead and he’s come out of the George pub, which is opposite the George green and he saw these people running away and the, and that they’d thrown petrol bombs and he shouted and the people, six people managed to get out of the tents, so the people didn’t get, they could’ve got burnt, they could’ve got badly injured…so it got very, um…they’re using very very dangerous tactics, the building companies the security and the police…so it was, a bit like a war in a way cause…there was lots of misinformation as well, we had, there was people who were sympathetic to the campaign, who were security guards and they tried to give us tip offs to when they were going to carry out the evictions, so it was, um…there was lots of information, you know misinformation and, you know, we had a telephone tree used everybody who supported the campaign signed up to the tree and gave their details and you would be contacted if there was an eviction so you could, be there to support them, you know, cause not everybody lived on the site, um, not everybody squatted the buildings cause obviously some people…uh, went to work or they had, you know, lived in other houses, but they…came down on the days of the eviction and on the weekends and helped with the protest

*And you were one of those people?*

Yes, yeah, cause I was living in a housing co-op in Bow, um…so I’d go on the weekends and in the evenings and ty to get there for the evictions

*Mmm. So, um, so tell me more about the sympathies, the relationships between the kind of sympathetic, um, security guards and the protesters. And, and do you think they were genuine, were they genuine sympathisers?*

Well some of the security guards realised that they wouldn’t be there if there wasn’t a protest, so they, and actually some of them were taken from the job centres, so they… realised that, if there wasn’t a protest there wouldn’t be any need for security, so there was a kind of symbiotic relationship, in a way…um, but then some of the security guards were thrown out of the army the police or they were hired particularly because they were aggressive and…they almost hated the protesters and they relished in throwing you off of cranes and twisting your arms and, you know, metering out violence against you. Um, and I expect that there were people, maybe, within the planning department that may have been sympathetic to our cause as well. The people that worked for the council who were…may have been sympathetic, so I think there, there probably was…people who on the face of it…may, we thought may have opposed us, but were sort of giving us information and supporting us in some ways

*Was it a Conservative council?*

Um…yes, but I think there was, there were a number of Labour councillors…oh no, we had a Labour MP Harry Cohen and there was a number of, um, Labour councillorsbecause some of them supported the campaign…yeah…we had support from the Green Party, uh, Redbridge and Waltham Forest Green Party supported us, cause Gene Lambert came down to support on the protests, um…and Harry Cohen, um, said that the M eleven was a waste of money and he said that the people were against it so we had support from polit’ some political support as well…um, but it was mainly the Conservatives that were in favour of the m eleven link road

*Mmm. Ok…so back to Claremont Road, you were describing, sort of describing the feeling of the road and the art and the sculpture and furniture outside, can you, can you just kind of tell me more about the, just the kind of…ambience I guess, the environment the, what it felt like as a place, a community*

Well it, it generally, it was just very creative people…seemed to b very relaxed, um, not relaxed obviously when waiting to be evicted but actually when there was street parties they seemed to be, really enjoying themselves, everyone seemed to be getting along really well…um…there was an art house which, um…had a, a motorway, like a snake on one of the walls with lots of money coming out of the snake which I think was supposed to represent the, the greed of, of the road builders…um…they had a café there that served foo’, you know…um, food for the protest, um…they had various bands playing…they had a car saying rust in peace, so, they had the bonnet taken off and there was plants put in where the bonnet was, where the engine was there was all these plants growing out the top of the car and it said rust in peace

*Nice*

So there was lots of creative, um…plays on words and street performance

*What was the café like?*

I didn’t actually go in the cafebut…I mean they had music and it was just really laid back and veggie food

*Mmm. Um, and can you remember anything else about the art house?*

Oh there was a room that had apparently, the first, uh, colour that human beings used was red ochre and there was a room that was painted red ochre and they had gold leave on the chimney breast, on, and there was various pictures of the protest that people had cut out of papers and things I think…but um, there was vines, the outside of the house there was lots of green vines on the front of the house and, sort of, people entwined into the green vines

*And, um…just in terms of those like different communities that were living in Claremont Road, I mean you’ve spoken a bit about Dolly and Richard Leyton, but was there a sense, do you think of communality between the protesters and other residents or did most of the other residents leave fairly willingly? Was there kind of…comradery between those different communities?*

I think that, a lot of people, original residents, probably had left, but I think the people in the surrounding roads were very supportive of the campaign. Cause I remember some of the local shops were giving food to the protesters and…um, when the evictions happened people came out of their houses and they were cheering for the protesters and they were…um, very supportive, I think the local community was very supportive of the protest…but I think cause people probably offered money for their houses, that some people took that, um, and some people just refused to go even though they were offered money

*Like Dolly and Richard?*

Yeah, I mean Dolly…said that, um, she worked, I think in her twenties she worked in the city , but she’d lived in Claremont Road all of her life and she didn’t want to leave…and actually it was quite moving cause I saw an article and it said that, um, the protesters had became her friends and she said she didn’t see them as, um…dirty hippies, she saw them as the grandchildren she never had…and apparently her fia ncée was killed in the first world war and she never remarried anybody. She, um, never met anybody after, or she didn’t, um, want to. So she was on her own but then she had all these people that became her friends later in life…and she said they were the grandchildren she never had, so I think that was quite moving

*Did you know her?*

I spoke to her a couple of times, I didn’t know her personally but I spoke to her, on a couple of the protests, yeah

*So would she come out actually to…to the protests?*

Well she still lived in that house which was in the middle of Claremont Road and she would talk to people on the street, and there was, all the protest was going on around her because she, eventually she was taken, I think…during one of the evictions she became over, overcome with the stress of the whole situation and I think she was, um…basically she was forced out of her home, she was, she was taken out of the home by…the, I suppose the ambulance crew and the police took her away from her home and she was put into a care home and she only lived for about a year after she was put into the care home, so it was obviously really traumatic for her and she obviously didn’t want to go…but, um…actually I went to her funeral and it was quite incredible because it was, full, of people, it was…all, many young people from the protest movement and they were so, uh, so much affection towards Dolly…and um, they put copies of the road breaker in her coffin and they put some flowers in the coffin, so it was really moving actually…and they sung lots of songs for her…and…they had a photograph of her in her twenties and she was quite a striking woman and they actually said, um, Dolly wasn’t, she didn’t believe in religion because her fiancée was killed in the first world war and she said no god would allow millions of people to be killed…but, um…and it, it was amazing because…she had so, so many friends and she’d made so many friends in later life and she will always be remembered I think and, yeah, it was just incredible really, that sort of solidarity

*And did the solidarity continue after she’d been taken, I mean, did the protesters maintain a relationship with her after she’d been taken away from Claremont Road?*

Yeah, people visited her regularly, actually, yeah, a lot of the people went to see, to visit her when she moved to the home and she, saw her quite a lot, yeah…no it carried on when she left Claremont Road, um

*And can you describe the funeral, a bit more?*

I think it was in Manor Park cemetery and it was…probably five hundred people, a lot of people, especially for an older person because, sadly, when people get older they lose a lot of their friends and…sadly, the funerals I’ve been to where younger people have died they’ve had lots of people cause they’ve had lots of friends, but they had lots of people there…the coffin was open so you actually saw Dolly and a number of people kissed her on the cheek and they put things in her coffin…um…and…there was a man called Keith who played, he played a keyboard and he sung songs about her and then…everyone got up and sung a song, um…and it was just a very nice atmosphere, I mean it, it was sad, in one sense, very sad that she’d, it was very sad that she’d had to leave her home after living there all her life but, it was happy that she was well loved and wouldn’t be forgotten and that all those people cared about her…so it was a, kind of strange…day in that sense, there was a sad part of it and a celebratory part as well

*Yeah…amazing*

But, when she was in the care home there was, one or two of the staff came as well, um, to represent the home and they said they couldn’t believe it, that they, that you know, she had so much, people cared about her and, you know I think they were very moved by it…as well

*Do you know how it was for her, it, her being in the care home, did she…build relationships there, did she have*

I mean she was there for not very long at all and maybe even less than a year actually and um…I think that she had a lot of, you know, as I said before, lots of the protesters went to visit her and she had, she had you know, quite a lot of them saw her and she probably saw, um, maybe free [three] or four times a week someone would go and see her

*Wow*

Um…but I expect that, you know, cause she was a real character, I expect the people in the home really liked her as well cause she was a real character and she was feisty and she had a lot of history and, she had strong beliefs and she was a really interesting person, you know

*What was she like? Tell me more about her fiestyness or her beliefs or her character*

Well I knew that she’d worked in the City briefly as a secretary I think and then she’d, obviously lost her fiancée and…and she’d, um…you know, obviously live in Claremont Road and she just, she was just, uh, determined to stay in her home and she was just, and she said that, you know, she, when she was interviewed by the media they tried to say oh didn’t you, what do you think about all these protesters and squatters coming to your and she said well you know their wonderful, they’re my friends and you know…they’re, they’re supporting me to try and stop, you know, so I can stay in my home and that why should our communities be destroyed

*Excellent…Um, anything else, anything else to say about, uh, Claremont Road? Leyton, was it called, Leyton, was that Leytonstonia?*

Well Leytonstonia was about, uh, near, there was a little camp near the green man and there was some houses, um, in Fillibrooke Road…but I suppose, yeah, it was all a part of Leytonstonia, yeah, um…yeah I mean Claremont Road is the biggest, uh, most expensive and the longest eviction in British history I think and it, you know

*How long did it go on for?*

I think it took…two days, the final eviction almost took two days because, um…they got the people out of the buildings and off, that were in the street first and then the people on the tower named Dolly they, they were the last people to, to get off the, uh, out of Claremont Road because they were obviously locked on to scaffolding and I think Greenpeace had donated some steel nets, um, which they had suspended from the rooves of the buildings to the trees so there was like a, a spider’s web of metal of, going from the trees to the roof, space, um, so people were suspended in nets at roof level so quite high up

*So that was another, just, direct action tactic, that was like the equivalent of tripods or whatever*

Yeah, yeah I mean they had like tripods, there were people in treehouses, there were trees in the road that people were in tree houses, people were in the steel nets, uh, and then there was, people on, actually sitting on the rooves locked on to the chimney pots, um, and then there was the people in the tower…and inside the buildings people had built wooden bunkers, so there was, um, people inside those and then there was people in the tunnel, but that was mainly used to kind of get supplies in and out of Claremont Road…and, then there was people actually on the street itself…but, maybe locked onto cars, sort of and other objects in the street, so there was lots of different ways of…obstructing the eviction

*And was that the first, were there, were there any false starts or was that just, the one eviction happened and*

No there was a false start because I went to, um one, the first eviction that I went to they took an end house but…we though they were coming for the whole street and, uh, I remember I was on top of the roof and…there was actually, a cameraman tr’, a media person trying to get on the roof and slates were coming off the roof down below and then we actually told him to get on to the back of the house because it was, the slates were going into the garden rather than on top of people, I had to hold his camera and it was like…thousands of pounds worth of [laughs] equipment and he was like, very unsure of himself on the roof but we actually…managed to get him secure on the roof, but…um, we built barricades at the end of the street, and I remember, we thought that day was going to be the eviction…but they took one of, an end house but they didn’t, they didn’t take the whole street…but that had been, you know, a couple of weeks earlier

*So you had, so were you all kind of geared up and set for defending the street at the point?*

Yes, I mean obviously I wasn’t at the, I wasn’t actually at the large eviction, I was, I was outside of the eviction in the sense that I was on the, um, when they, they cordoned off the road…uh, at the final eviction and you couldn’t get anywhere near the road, the roads were blocked but we managed to get quite close to the protest so we were able to see what was going on…but the first eviction, um, I was on the roof and, yeah we were just preparing to lock on to…on to the roof, yeah

*And did you have any kind of, forewarning, before the final eviction?*

Um…yes, I mean I think that...people kind of had a, an inkling of when it might happen cause the, like I said before they had a telephone tree and they just phoned people and said right its going to happen now

*Mmm*

But I think there had been, maybe, there’d been a couple of false alerts, maybe free [three] or four

*Um…so, ok, so then it happened, so then it happened and where, where were you while it was happening, you were just*

I think I was probably working and then I’d, I left work early and I got there in the afternoon, cause it went on to the next day, but by, I think I probably got there about free [three] o’clock in the afternoon, but the streets were totally cordoned off by then

*Can you remember the date?*

Um…it was ninety four, well I think it was…December ninety four

So it was cold?

It was quite cold yes, cause I mean, some of the protesters were wrapped up in sleeping bags on the rooves and they’d been up there for over twenty four hours, yeah

*And how were they kind of supporting each other, were there, what were they doing for food and water, were people cooking and*

Um, well I think they had bottled water and they had like fruit and it kind of like, you know, uh…things that were dry food I suppose, sandwiches and, um…energy bars whatever, you know, they just had things that they didn’t, you know, that they could just put in a bag, a rucksack and just take with them

*So everyone was responsible for their own sustenance?*

Well I think they, people shared out food and they would just carry it on their person, cause I think, you know, they’d have a little day pack or a, a, stuffed in their pockets what they, you know, their food and their water and things

*Mmm*

But I don’t think people would, you’d be able to cook in the middle of, well I don’t know [laughs] I think you’d be

*No I was thinking maybe the café had a roll or*

Oh yeah

*Something like that*

I think it was, I think at the point of the eviction people just had dry food in their, and water

*And was it mostly young people, what was the, what was the kind of…demographic of the people heavily involved?*

Um…all ages

*In terms of age gender ethnicity*

Um…I’d say it was evenly split between men and women, so there was as many women involved as men,

Um…people from seventeen.. right up to about to about... well ninety-three because Dolly was ninety-three. Probably mainly people in their thirties, twenties and thirties but quite a lot of people of all ages really. I mean there’s people, retired people involved, umm… you know, people in their forties, all different ages really. Um… I mean there were Asian… not… I suppose mainly umm… white British I suppose, but there were Asian and African Caribbean and Asian people involved but probably not, you know, it wasn’t…[silence]… diverse in the sense that, I think it was, yeah, probably umm… I few people from different backgrounds.

*And were they mostly, kind of, local people that got involved or were there, umm, activists from diverse backgrounds?*

A lot of activists, yeah, a lot of people probably from Twyford Down. Um… but quite a lot of local residents, I mean, some, a lot of the people actually lived… in Claremont Road there’s a lot of people from Leyton that lived in Leyton and that once said that they were involved

*No but I mean in terms of, kind of, non-white, the non-white British people that were involved, were they mostly local people that were lending their support?*

Umm… I think they were actually protesters, no, they were actually…

*Right, they were protesters, ok*

They were actually people from the protest movement mainly, yeah. Yeah

*I see. Excellent. And so after the, umm… after the eviction had happened, what happened? I mean, what happened immediately after that to Claremont Road and to the protesters? First of all what happened, do you know what happened to Claremont Road immediately after it was evicted, like, how quickly was it demolished? Or, how… what immediately afterwards?*

Well, there was a place called the Dairy where the… a lot of the protesters went to the Dairy. They occupied this old Dairy which was quite new to Claremont Road… and that’s when… sort of, Leytonstonia happened, you know, the houses that were quite new to Leytonstone station they were occupied. Umm… I think the road was pretty much demolished within a few days of after the eviction

*Really?*

It was demolished pretty quickly. It was cordoned off and then demolished. I mean there was a few, umm… you know, we tried to get back into the site but it was all cordoned off and… umm… yeah. So, directly after that a lot of people went to the Dairy and occupied that area.

*So that was just one building, was it?*

Yeah, that was quite a large building that they occupied near to Claremont Road. And then you had Leytonstonia, umm… Montstonia? It was near Fillebrook Road, round the back of Leytonstone station.

*What was Montstonia?*

It was just a house that they just called Montstonia [laughs]

*Do you know why they called it Montstonia?*

I think, just a fun name to call it

*[Laughs]… So everything was ‘onia’, yeah? Wanstonia, Monstonia, Leytonstonia*

It was the whole idea, it was like having an independent state, that you declared yourself an independent state

*And I’ve heard stories about passports and checkpoints and things, is that… do you know of anything like that?*

No I don’t think they had passports. I think, there was a declaration of an independent state of Wanstonia but I don’t think there was…. ‘cos the was a programme, err.. a film called Passport to Pimlico which was about an independent state, it was a comedy, so maybe it was just there were rumours that came from that. There was umm… some people, the Green Man roundabout, there was some trees that were chopped down near the roundabout and the people occupied the trees there as well. Umm… ‘cos I was involved, I was up one of the trees when… during that eviction they just threw us out of the tree and they started getting chainsaws out and chopping the trees down

*Hmmm*

Umm… so…

*What was that like, can you describe your, kind of, that as an experience?*

Well I remember being right at the top of the tree and just… I wasn’t locked on to anything but they tried to grab hold of me. They tried… they sent someone up the tree and they were just both grabbing my legs, and trying to pull me off the tree. So eventually they got me off and they escorted me away from the site, and… you know, just kept me away, but they said, you can either come down of your own accord and you can get arrested, but ‘cos I hadn’t been arrested I thought, well, they’re not gonna… they’re just gonna caution me anyway so I might as well stay up there and they… eventually they pulled me down but I wasn’t arrested because, umm… you know they hadn’t arrested me before and… they, you know, if they arrested every single person there the courts would have been chock-a-block with people

*Were you ever arrested during the whole period?*

No. No, ‘cos I managed to, kind of… I wasn’t as heavily involved as a lot of people were because obviously I was working and I wasn’t living on the sites but I managed to, kind of umm… Sometimes I would change my clothing, like on the day of the chestnut tree I’d… I had four layers of clothing on and I’d take a hat off and put another hat on and take one of my coats off and put something else on, because if they spotted you on a regular basis, the police, and you keep turning up… locked on, you know, laying in the road or your up a tree then eventually they’ll think, right this person, we’re gonna get this person. But if they didn’t really know who you were, you know they kind of pretty much just got you off the site and then left you alone

*Hmmm*

I mean there was ‘wanted’ posters. Some of the people had injunctions taken out against them, umm… that were probably filmed by the people and they… you know they’d been up cranes, and they’d been involved with lots of evictions, and they had they… they had injunctions, they couldn’t go near the areas of some of the sites, the M11 building sites. So they had their posters, like ‘wanted’ posters up on the wa… up on the fences

*What did they look like, can you remember them? The posters*

Well, I remember one of the people was called Paul, Paul [Moritza?], who was… he actually works for Greenpeace now and he was very young at the time and he climbed up one of the cherry-pickers and managed to handcuff himself to a cherry-picker, when they took him out of the tree he managed to slip out of their arms and get on to the arm of the crane and handcuff himself to it. They had a… actually they just had a list of the people’s names on the poster and said if you see these people in this area it’s unlawful for them to be here ‘cos there’s an injunction out against them

*They didn’t have photographs?*

No, it was just like a list of names

*[laughs] Umm… was there sort of a mark of honour to be on that list?*

Yeah, there was a sort of badge that you were proper hardcore protester, not a weekender, like myself [laughs] ‘cos I was a bit of a weekender

*[laughs]*

‘cos I was at work [laughs], but…

*But seriously, was there that sense of a divide between the hardcores and the part-timers*?

I don’t, I don’t think there was a divide, I think people were just happy with the support people gave. Some people just observed and they took… filmed it or they wrote down notes for legal purposes, they’d observe what was going on, residents or… some people would give the protesters food… err, clothing, blankets if they were up a tree or whatever. Umm… some people designed posters and banners for the protest, umm… you know, get the local school kids to make a banner against pollution of the motorway or… They’d be all sorts of different ways people would get involved. I don’t… I think maybe some of the people thought that we’re the serious protesters and they may have, people may have thought that, but I don’t think the majority of them did

*Hmmm*

I think… they were just glad of the support, you know, fighting for the same cause

*Yeah. Ok, so, we’ve left Claremont Road and we’ve gone to the Dairy, can you describe the Dairy?*

Umm, I didn’t actually go to the Dairy but I’d known… I heard about this through other friends, through other people involved with the campaign. I mean at that point I didn’t really get as involved as much umm… apart from the Green Man, where the trees were occupied. That was probably the last kind of time I got involved umm… but umm… actually ‘cos you asked me a question before about the history of the M11, how it has followed me through my life, umm… because my dad was brought up in Leyton, next to Claremont Road, he was brought up in Ashville Road, in the 1920’s and 30’s so he was there during the Second World War and he moved to Leytonstone with my mother when they met in the sixties, and then they moved to Wanstead, so…. Claremont Road was where he was born, pretty much the next road to where he was born, then when they moved to Wanstead the M11 was in Wanstead, where I was growing up as a child with my sister, and then I moved out of Wanstead to near Hackney Wick, which is where the M11 link road ends, so it has pretty much followed me throughout my life [laughs]

*And earlier actually you were also telling me the story of umm… this areas relationship with the M11, can you…*[Both speaking at same time]

Oh yeah

*…tell me that again?*

The housing cooperative where I live now, Grand Union housing co-op, which runs parallel with Victoria Park, umm… originally the M11 link road was going to go through part of Victoria Park but there was huge up cry and protest because obviously it was bequeathed to the people of East London by Queen Victoria, and err.. the road wasn’t demolished but people were asked to leave, left their houses and then the buildings were occupied and squatted in 1975 and then in 1977 they err went to the GLC, Ken Livingstone, and they got the houses err as a housing co-operative. So the housing co-operative has been around since 1977 till 2015, its still going but originally it was gonna be on the route of the M11 campaign. So it literally has followed me through my life [laughs], which is really weird isn’t it?

*[laughs] It is weird, yeah, it is weird. So do you remember when you were in Hackney Wick, was there… was there still stuff going on related to the M11 at that point when you moved to Hackney Wick or had it kind of died down by then?*

Umm… I think it had kind of died down because after, directly after the M11 there was Newbury bypass so a lot of people went to Newbury and then there was the Reclaim the Streets campaigns which were, you know, London wide and they were about, basically about err… reclaiming the streets, umm… as opposed to having more traffic pollution and putting the car first, so it was more about pedestrianised areas, making it safe for cyclists and it was… so that was going on, then there was the Criminal Justice Act which was designed to make it very difficult for people to be involved with peaceful direct action. So those things came straight after the M11, which I was involved with those so I went to Newbury for a week, spent a week at Newbury bypass protesting. Umm… and there was also Whatley quarry which was umm… where most of the aggregate for the motorways comes from Whatley, which is in Somerset and it’s the… one of the largest aggregate mines in Europe, it’s huge. So that was occupied as well as part of the protest against the motorway building

*Hmmmmm*

So there was lots of things happened, that came out of the M11 campaign and there was continual protest going on around the same issues really

*And, just in terms of, kind of the local area, did it umm… were there lots of… was there that sort of sense of lots of places, areas being squatted and just a kind of sense of protest and action in and around East London for quite a while after around kind of Hackney and Newham, all of that area? Did that going for quite a long time?*

Yeah I think a lot of people did, there were a lot of places squatted umm in Stratford, Leytonstone, umm… and East… you know, Forest Gate, all the East London areas as part of you know, protests. Yeah, so I think it did continue, but not to the same level as before

*Yeah, so people kind of moved out of like the Dairy and Claremont Road and started just occupying… [Both speaking at same time]*

Empty properties

*…empty properties around East London?*

Yeah

*And carrying on being involved in… [Both speaking at same time]*

With Reclaim the Streets

*…with Reclaim the Streets and other criminal justice act stuff?*

That’s right, yeah. Yeah, that’s right. It was just other pro... yeah. ‘Cos a lot of people didn’t have anywhere to live that were involved with the campaign and they were squatting because they needed a home, but obviously they were protesting at the same time, so they moved into other squats

*But that was all, sort of part of the legacy of…*

Yes

*…of the M11 campaign?*

That’s right, yeah

*Hmmm*

And actually there was another local issue, after the M11 there was umm… a green field, a two acre field that was gonna be developed on, and some of the M11 protesters were involved with the campaign to stop that from being developed

*Where was that?*

That was in umm, the Evergreen, which was in Wanstead High Street, near Christchurch Green,

*Ok*

And it was… the police were gonna use it as, they were going to build a police station there, because their police station was small but they didn’t and they were going to sell it, sell it for development. So basically, the local people said that it belong to the loc… it was a green space under the unitary development plan. And the… there was a successful campaign to stop that from being… it’s still a green space but it hasn’t… it’s still fenced off sadly but it hasn’t been developed, because it was refused at planning stage… but umm yeah some of the protesters and local residents were involved with that campaign

*Hmmm, and that was successful?*

That was successful, yeah, because we saved that from being developed

*Hmmm, excellent. And in terms of the kind of social life of that, that time and that area, what was kind of going on socially?*

Oh lots of parties, music umm…

*Did you… were you involved, did you go to parties?*

Yeah, lots of… there was lots of parties in the squats that were kind of umm… yeah they’d be things going on like bands playing, and then there’d be rave music in the evenings and people sitting outside and food and sort of fires outsides, things like that

*Hmmm*

And then the street parties obviously, there’d be spontaneous street parties, ummm, with Reclaim the Streets and…

*How often did they happen?*

Well there was one in Camden, Islington, there was one on a motorway actually, umm… I think there was about five altogether but then they happened outside London, so it was just London based. There was Brighton, some in Oxford, they actually spread and then I think actually it went to Europe as well, there was Reclaim the Streets in Europe. So it so of snowballed in a way

*Hmmm*

It started off in London and then it went to other parts of the country and in Europe

*And how often were they happening in Claremont Road, street parties?*

Oh, umm… every weekend

*And was it, was it a similar kind of feel to the kind of warehouse... raves. Did it start off as street parties and then go into the night and turn into a rave?*

Sometimes, sometimes yeah, others would just be during the day and uhh… like street entertainment bands playing and… yeah. Some of them would go on into the night as well

*And what was the music like?*

Oh, mixture, some of it was ummm… jazz, punk, uhhh… guitar, acoustic music, folk, rave music, ummm…. reggae…

*Can you remember any of the names of bands or musicians, or DJs or anything… that were kind of around at the time?*

Not off hand. I mean most of the were unknown kind of bands, people just like, local bands and yeah. On the ummm… life in the fast lane they’ve got the Levellers are playing some music, I think they may have actually played a gig for the M11 campaign, the Levellers. But it was mainly kind of lots of home spun bands that people just put together or that, you know… yeah.

*So was that really kind of the beginning of the rave scene?*

Yeah, it was the early, actually ‘cos the early nineties was the beginning of the rave scene when it all… it was during the Criminal Justice Act because actually the Criminal Justice Act was trying to ban illegal free raves, basically

*So it was kind of protests and raves, were kind of bundled in there together?*

Yes, yes that’s right actually because when the police were trying to stop people from going to Stonehenge and trying to stop lots of free festivals from happening, and it was during the time of rave music, ummm, so there was a connection with the protest movement and that as well, yeah

*Hmmmm. And were, so was there kind of solidarity between... I mean, were they the same people, the people that were big into the rave scene and the people…and the protesters or was it different people and how much kind of overlap was there?*

Ummm... I think, obviously because the rave thing was a commercial thing as well, so I think there was probably… a certain amount of crossover but it wasn’t essentially… everybody who was into rave music was a protester. I think it was the…the free, the free festivals was probably the umm, you know the umm… not the organised, commercial rave parties, but the free… the free events that obviously the police were trying to ban it was, they were probably supporting the campaign protest movement, there was that connection

*So there were also big commercial things going on at the time as well?*

Oh yeah, there was I mean, like, you know it… it’s like all music becomes commercialised in the end, doesn’t it so… originally it comes out of a kind of spontaneous movement and then it gets commercialised, and I mean now there’s loads of clubs where you can go and listen to rave music, but at the time it was people going in a field and just having a spontaneous festival

*But do you think the big… the kind of commercialisation of that scene has, kind of has its roots in the Criminal Justice Act?*

Yeah I suppose originally, it was like the punk music came out of the seventies which was all… I suppose to be against the governments and capitalism and, you know, and the monarchy and authority, and then that become commercialised. Punk music became pop music in the eighties isn’t it you know sort of a lot of the punk bands become pop bands and become… you know I think a lot of… it’s even like Che Guevara’s image becomes commercialised and even, you know, umm… American companies use his image to sell products or you get his t-shirts in Primark, you know, it’s just the commercialisation of… lots of things become you know, adapted by the commercial markets but originally they came from the protests movements

*Hmmm. Umm… so, so where, so where was the kind of, the last area that was occupied before the very end of the…*

I think it was probably ummm… well actually the art house behind ummm Leytonstone station was there for many years after the campaign kind of ended really, so it was probably be around the back of Leytonstone station

*Hmmm*

Near Fillebrook Road

*And what about the last area that was occupied before it was kind of… that was actually on the route, was there… that was ultimately demolished? Where was the last outpost of resistance?*

Probably Montstonia I think, probably. Yeah

*And can you remember it? did you go to Montstonia?*

No

*No*

No. I mean, I’ve seen photographs and read about it but I haven’t, I didn’t go there to that one, yeah. I was mainly involved with… Wanstead and Claremont Road and Cambridge Park Road

*Hmmm*

And the Operation Roadblock as well, I was involved with that

*So, I mean, I asked this question before and I’m still not entirely clear, what it was that kind of sparked your initial interest, why did you, what made you decide to go to that tree on that first day? Did it just…*

Ummm…. It just seemed… it just seemed… I felt compelled to be involved because I’d grown up as a child in Wanstead and I’d played on Wanstead Green and I just remember it being a really lovely place to grow up, and then when I saw the people trying to pull the fence down I thought, right this is a good thing to do, you know, to actually reclaim the land. Ummm… and there was people, elderly people, children, mums with tiny children, pensioners, all sorts of people were there, as well as seasoned protesters and I thought, yeah I’m going to be a part… I want to be a part of it rather than standing on the outside, I wanted to be there, rather than watching really

*Hmmm*

But I remember feeling that I had to go for the eviction in the tree, I really, I didn’t even sleep that night, I was just so ummm… alert to the fact that we had to…. defend the tree. And I remember hearing the klaxon horn and running to the green and actually my parents came about an hour later and they witnessed everything that was going on, then my dad got involved with helping to build the barricades in umm…. Cambridge Park Road in the Edwardian houses. Ummm… so yeah I think, you read about areas that are effected by umm… development, motorways, it could be fracking but when it actually happens to the area that you were brought up in it… you just feel… how can you not resist, it’s almost, you know, you have to, you feel passionate, compelled, ummm… and it… I did find it quite ummm… exhilarating, not exhilar… that’s probably the wrong word exhilarating. I found it empowering actually to protest, I found the whole process of stopping something undemocratic, something people didn’t want, ummm… their you know wishes had been totally ignored and it was just pure profit driven and I just felt it was a really, really good… it was one of the best things I’ve done I think actually being involved with peaceful direct action. I’ve done lots of things in my life but I’ve never forget that, you know, it’s something that will live with me for the rest of my life actually, and I think everybody that was involved will never ever forget that, what the M11 meant to them and all the other protests they were involved with after the M11 and before. You know, my parents, my dad’s 87 now and he still talks about it and, umm… there’s still a lot of the people who live in Wanstead talk about it and they had anniversaries, every December they’d meet on the green and they’d have a fire and they’d talk about it and it went on for quite a few years, they had these anniversary get-togethers

*Wow, they’d have a fire on the green?*

Yeah, they’d have a little fire on the green in a special brazier thing, and they would sing songs and drink and talk about the M11 and that was… it was to mark each…. the day where the tree was knocked down

*Wow, that’s amazing, how long did that go on for?*

It went on for about 18 years

*Every year for 18 years?!*

Yeah, yeah. Every…

*So it only stopped a few years ago?*

A few years ago, yeah. ‘Cos some of the people passed away, some of the elderly people passed away and then ummm… yeah I think people moved out of the area because it was such a long time, some people that lived in the area moved to different parts of the country… you know, ummm, but it went on for about 18 years, they had an anniversary every year to mark the day the chestnut tree came down

*And did you ever go to them?*

Oh yeah, I went to most of the time

*Hmmm. Can you describe them to me more?*

Err… well it’s just, there’d be about 40 people gathering and they would talk and then sing, and we’d share food, they’d take food, share the food, you know people would take some cider or beer, play guitars, ummm… sing songs, stand round the fire, sometimes they’d… ‘cos the tree stump was still there, the actual… they left the trunk, it was probably about 8 foot, no maybe 10 foot in length, part of the trunk left, but then one day it just disappeared, they took the trunk away and we tried to find out what had happened to it because they said it was unsafe because it was hollow inside, and they said somebody… it could be dangerous or whatever but... we did think about ways we could actually ummm… secure it to make it safe because once the tunnel had been put underneath the green, ummm, they put the stump back on the green for a while and we thought, well that’s good ‘cos it… people remember it, you know and it’s still there, but then took it away and they said they put it in umm…. they’ve put it somewhere, you know, safe but they were going to return it, but they haven’t returned it so it’s, that’s a bit of a mystery actually, what’s happened to that trunk because ummm…

*So you’ve got no idea?*

No, someone said it was taken away to make it secure and then it was never returned

*Who’s ‘they’? Who would have taken it away?*

Well, the Department of Transport or Redbridge Council I presume, somebody who umm… has the authority within that area, so it’s worth tracking it down actually, the chestnut tree

*Has there ever been… was it ever… did anybody ever talk about having any kind of memorial or anything there?*

Well because we had the tree stump there, that was kind of the memorial but I mean, you know, it’s worth looking into, it worth be worth finding out if we can get it back or put something there, you know.

*Yeah [?]*

There should be something there to mark it because it was quite, it was history, it’s gone into all the news and… yeah, it was a historical event

*And was that the only tree that was cut down on the green?*

No, there was other trees cut down ummm…

*Why do you think that tree?*

On the perimeter there was cut trees, I think it was ‘cos, ‘cos it was 250 years old, it was the oldest tree

*Hmmmm*

The other trees were younger trees, they were kind of ummm, maybe 50 or so, some of them weren’t as old, yeah, I think it is just ‘cos it was such an old tree

*It really captured people’s imaginations and hearts, didn’t it?*

Yeah, yeah

*Hmmm. Ummm…. Oh I had a question [Silence] Oh my mind’s gone completely blank of what it was I was going to ask you [laughs]*

I’m still in touch with some of the people involved with the campaign

*Hmmm*

Umm I still see Lollipop Jean, she’s on the [la…??]

*Ohhh really, amazing I’d really like to talk to her, I’d really like to talk to her*

Ummm and her husband Ron [Goslin?], yeah their very involved. And there was Doreen who was involved in Wanstead umm… I’m not in touch with Neil but I could probably get hold of Neil, but there’s a few people I still see within the campaign

*Yeah, that would be great. I did want to ask you as well about umm… the kind of… about the rest of your political career history engagement. So obviously you went off to Newbury, how else did being involved in the M11 impact you in later life? I mean did you carry on, what was the lineage of your political engagement?*

Well after the Newbury bypass, I got involved with the Traffic Reduction Bill which was umm… a bill that the Green Party wanted to push through parliament which was to actually combat traffic pollution by actually investing in public transport or pedestrianised areas, localisation. So that got my involved with the Green Party, so from being a protester I thought, well actually what’s the alternative to what we’re protesting about, you know, and then the Traffic Reduction Bill seemed like a good umm… policy to put in place instead of the motorway building, you know. And then I started to think well, ok, that’s one policy that the Green Party’s got so I looked all their other policies and I actually thought, well their probably the closest to my priniciples umm… on social justice, environment, public transport, umm… renewable energy, localisation, and equality, human rights, umm… the NHS, so I joined the Green Party and I’ve been in the Green Party for 21 years umm… and in that time it’s grown and grown the Green Party umm… in Tower Hamlets, this ward where we are now, we’ve got nearly 10% of the vote at the general election, and that’s first past the post system, which is really difficult to make any headway in that system… ummm, I’ve stood in lots of local elections, I got ummm… 1000 votes in this ward, ummm… I think you need to get about 1500 to get elected, so we’re hoping at the next local election to get Greens elected in Tower Hamlets Council, umm… we used to have 30 members, we’ve got about 800 members in Tower Hamlets now and lots of young people have joined err… over the last few years umm… I think we’ve got 70,000 members up and down the country, we’ve got more than the Liberal Democrats and UKIP now in the Green Party, so… it’s kind of the fastest growing party in Britain and it’s since… I think it’s because the other parties are very pro globalisation of corporations, umm… PFI, part-privatisation of health service, they all… basically their all very similar umm… their foreign policy as far as backing America’s errr… wars, and Iraq, they all supported that. So I think it’s the reasons why people are looking at the Green Party now, it’s because they’re the only parry that really is to the left of British politics and is umm… that has a chance of getting in, obviously there’s other left wing parties but they’re… the Greens have got the best chance of getting representation, they’ve got a brilliant MP, Caroline Lucas is a fantastic MP because she’s everything that a public representative should be, she’s compassionate, articulate, calm, intelligent, she’s prepared to get involved with peaceful direct, she works really hard for her constituency, she’s on it, she’s not in it for the money, ummm… she devotes all her time to social justice and the environment

*Hmmm*

Errr… and we’ve got representatives on the GLA, err… Jean Lambert, Jean Lambert is in… she’s the London MEP in Europe. Err… Jenny Jones is in the House of Lords, because we had… the Greens have got umm… representation in parliament we were allowed to have a seat on the House of Lords, although we don’t believe in the House of Lords, we believe in an upper senate, we don’t believe in hereditary peers and people becoming Lords because their captains of industry and they happen to have given to money to parties, we think you should have an elect upper senate, umm… but she’s in the House of Lords which means they can get bill through parliament, Caroline Lucas is try to get… the rails renationalised, so… it’s useful to have a person in the House of Lords for those type of things

*Yeah*

Ummm… there’s Darren Johnson who on the GLA and Jenny Jones is also on the GLA as well, and I think we have over 250 councillors up and down the country umm… so we’ve got quite a big influence and there’s umm… Molly Scott is the MEP for the South West and Keith Taylor is the representative for the South East, so we’ve got three MEPs. Umm… I mean it’s slow process in the sense that the Green Party has been around since the 70s, about mid 70s but it’s mainly because the media have pretty much ignored the Green Party, only recently they’ve taken a keen interest… and obviously the first past the post system works in favour of Labour or the Conservatives… umm we don’t have corporate donors or unions supporting us so… we err, a lot of the funding actually we did through crowd funding, last, as the last election which was really successful, they gained a lot of money from doing that when it was just…a democratic way of doing things as well because people just put however money they can afford. Umm…

*So how did that work? How did you do that?*

Well there was a… err, I kind of crowd funding call and people can donate, put money from £1 or, up to however much they wanted to in and, umm… so if you got your deposit back people would get their money back, it’s like a bond really

*Umm and did you do, was it done through, with the internet, was it…xxxx*

Though the internet, yeah

*There was a website or something?*

Yeah, it was done, it was done locally for local parties for also nationally so it was a really good way of, a democratic way of getting money for the party… because most of the money has just comes from members… doing a direct debit each month or just giving the odd donation, coming when the election when the elections come up

*Ummm*

So I’ve been involved with the Green Party, umm… I’ve been involved with local housing cooperatives as well, two housing cooperatives, umm… obviously I was involved with the anti war protests, umm… yeah so I still go along, I’m involved with lots of community, I do lots of community work as well so, umm… I’ve been involved with… Bow Cemetery Park conservation centre in err Mile End, which is 33 acres of woodland and I’ve done voluntary work there actually doing conservation, umm…

*What, like what does that look like?*

Umm… well we, we you know clear bridal paths, we plant wildlife planting in the forest umm… take out things which are invasive which can take over, hogweed and cow parsley and umm… put bat boxes on trees umm… wildlife flowers to attract pollinating insects, that types of thing

*Yeah*

So I’ve done that. I’ve worked for the Environment Trust for two years before they went bankrupt umm… which was umm to… design umm environmentally friendly gardens for schools, so we maintained 25 school gardens in Tower Hamlets… so we maintained them and designed wildlife gardens. Ummm… yeah so that’s pretty much all my activism really

*Ummm… so that’s your activism and in terms of the activism umm… more broadly, in terms of activism more broadly I get the, I get the sense that the road protests were a really big think in the sort nineties*

Hmmm

*And I’m just interested to know your opinion on the kind of, the way that climate activism today with, you know, to what extent is it connected to… to what extent is it part of the same kind of conversation or political movement, and I mean there’s all sorts of other… groups and obviously there’s climate activism, there was the anti-globalisation stuff of the sort of later nineties*

Ummm

*I just wonder if you’ve got any thoughts on the kind of the relationship between those movements, is it largely the same people? Also who were the... where had they come from, the people who got involved in the anti-road protests in the nineties, who were they, where did they, where did they come from?*

Well I think it’s a continual process because I you know, in the eighties you had the peace movements, CND, which people were involved with direct action against the deployment of cruise missiles at Greenham Common… Molesworth, Faslane and some of those people were involved with the anti-road protests, they knew how to umm… people from the anti-road protest movement got involved with Reclaim the Streets and then umm… you had the anti-globalisation campaign, err, this world is not for sale, which was all about globalisation. Then there was the anti-GM protests which happened in the early nineties when, actually when Labour was in power, they introduced the GM crop sites that, there was lots of protests against that as well, and then, umm… after the GM, I mean it was still going on protest about that, and then there was the whole climate umm… action umm protests as well, so I think the connection actually between… interestingly the road protests, the Iraq war and climate change all link up because… the… we’re a fossil fuel driven economy, obviously the Iraq war was about oil, it wasn’t about human rights because… you know America and Britain and the West have supported regimes that are oppressive, and they supported Iraq during the ‘79 to ‘89 war… against Iran. But umm… you know Iraq, they wanted basically to control the oil in Iraq and that’s basically was the war was all about, so… and then of course, the consumption of fossil fuels… accelerates climate change and you could say that in the last 100 years climate change has happened through industrialisation, but also through use of fossil fuels. So they all interconnected in a way, you know the road protests… well that was mainly for the road building lobby, the car lobby and petroleum, you know the pet… oil interests. Umm… and that connects up to the war in Iraq and to climate change, so their all interconnected so I think people all involved with those protests and they you had Occupy which was about the failure of the present system, which favours the very rich and… the rest of the people suffer, basically I mean it’s umm… you know the whole economic crisis didn’t happen because of the public sector, it didn’t happen because of err.. public spending, it happened because of sub prime loans in America, of basically speculative wealth, people investing and knowing that their high risks and the people wouldn’t be able to pay back these loans and it was just… it’s all about profit and its all… I mean the very richest people have actually become even more rich under, under this system, there’s more of an economic divide now than ummm…. any time you know since the 1930’s. I think in the seventies there was more of an equali…wage equality in the seventies than any other time and so, in history. But now it’s, it’s going down and ummm… so, the whole thing about occupy… was about the… it was protest against the present capitalist system and how we need to change the market model to be about sustainability about people’s needs, so we need to think about really investing in health, education, umm public transport, a clean environment, providing decent homes to people, we need to think about really about quality of life, rather than quantity in life, you know people need decent food, clean air, umm… you know, they shouldn’t be a privilege, it should be a human right to health care and… education, and housing and I think, you know, they want to turn it around so that err the private sector corporations are actually in control of these public services, which is, so everything is interconnected, it all, it sounds different each issue, but their actually all interconnected because it’s the same system

*What’s the thread then?*

Well the thread is… the economic system we have

*Capitalism?*

Capitalism and fossil fuel driven economy, you know if we had a Green sustainable economy then we wouldn’t be building cars, motorways for cars. We wouldn’t be going to the Antartic and drilling for oil err… we wouldn’t be polluting an environment where species die, we wouldn’t umm… be bulldozing down villages for more air errr runways, so we just need a more sustainable economic base, basciallly, we just need a different system. I don’t think it, I don’t believe in a one party state or a… err… an authoritative state, I think it needs to be decentralist Green, kind of economy. Lots of localisation as well because, I said before if you have stronger local economies then people don’t have to travel as far… ummm it keeps the economy going even if there’s a global recession, if you have a strong local economy it protects jobs ummm and it provides work in community… and it creates harmony in the community, I think there’s a lot of division, a lot of err… poverty and… errr through desperation you know, a lot of crime is through desperation I think this is the other thing about the capitalist system is it pits people against one another, it doesn’t umm… create community, it actually divides communities… so I think it’s all interlinked and I think umm… you know there’s lots of, there’s the anti-fracking demonstrations umm… there’s lots of, I mean all the protests are linked and I think people, the same people probably do get involved, but obviously new people come along, you know, lots of young people getting involved for the first time with politics because they feel… umm… inspired by what’s gone on before them… yeah. I mean lots of people that have joined the Green Party for instance said that the day after the election they joined because they felt so… like errrr 35% of the population actually voted for the government because if you think of xxxx maybe only 50% of the population voted… and then out of that 50% that’s a very small percentage actually voted when you count up all the parties and votes… so you actually get, you know… a party that’s going to privatise… health service and public utilities, probably take us into some more unpopular wars, they just umm… scrapped the green deal that they were going to put in place, they claimed to be the greenest government, the Conservatives but they’ve just scrapped the umm… the green, the funding for green energy

*What was that?*

It was to encourage people to umm… use renewable energy and to actually put solar panels on their umm roofs and things for the tariff, green tariff and they’ve just scrapped that so, that’s part of their cuts. Ummm so people are angry that they’ve got a government that they really don’t want to have in power and they’re going to do a lot of damage so, a lot of people are joining like the Green Party, or getting involved with protest movements, direct action

*So do you think you’ll be involved in direct action and protest movements again in your life?*

Errr yes, I mean…

*Or have you seen the Green Party as a kind of an alternative to that?*

Well I think it’s both ‘cos I think a lot of the people in the Green Party are involved with direct action, I mean Caroline Lucas herself as got arrested for being involved with an anti-fracking demonstration umm… and I think lots of Greens get involved with direct action I think… I think with part of the political… wing of the environmental movement… but I think the two go together and that’s what I like about the Green Party is that… yes it’s a political party, they stand at elections, they try to change things within the system, they want a fairer system, they want proportional representation… they want, they believe in participatory democracy, and grassroots democracy, umm… but at the same time they’re involved with the protest movement so they’ll get involved with CND, the anti-road protests, anti-GM protests, Occupy, because to xxxx you can change society with outside parliament and inside parliament, you can do both, I mean some people may disagree with me and they’ll just think that the protest movement… is the only way and I can see that point of view and even Tony Benn the more happens outside of parliament than that ever happens in parliament. More change. But ummm… I still think that… the Green Party offer… a viable alternative, a political alternative….

*Hmmm*

But ummm I think we’re going to see lots and lots more protests, I think there’s gonna be, I mean there could be… the government could drag us into some more wars, umm… they want to go ahead with fracking, err…. They want to be able to build 13 more nuclear power stations… in this country which is opposition too ‘cos of safety reasons and ‘cos it’s not a cheap form of energy, and we should be using green renewable energy… ummm… and there is talk of them bringing back the road building programme, so there’s going to be a lot of protests in the next five years

*Do you think there’d be significant resistance to that, the road protest movement, and mean to the road pro… sorry, to the road building programme, now, do you think there’d be as much?*

I think so yeah, I think because of the… seeing the Heathrow airport expansion there’s a lot of protests against that it’s going through villages that actually are quite wealthy areas and probably where Tories get some support from, and local people are kind of galvanising and getting ready to protest against that

*Hmmmm*

Along with seasoned protesters. So I think umm… yeah I think it’s gonna be very interesting times and a lot more protesting going on. Yeah

*Umm…is there anything else, is there anything that I haven’t asked you that you thought that I might ask you, or that you’d like to talk about?*

Ummm… I think we kind of covered the history, the kind of action that happened on the M11, the people… the type of people that were involved… umm… the reasons why I got involved, and what’s happened after. Yeah

*I wonder if there was just one final question then, I just wonder if there are any kind of stand-out memories, just like, just very personal anecdotal memories that you’ve got of those times?*

Ummm… I think… when people locked on to Dolly that was very emotional in the sense that it called, the last bastion of resistance in Claremont Road was called after Dolly after the oldest resident, and I thought that was really nice that they called it Dolly

*Hmmm*

Errr… and I remember when people, when the chestnut tree was chopped down, and the emotions were very, you know, local people crying, err… school children were crying, I remember that very well… umm… and then just climbing up the cranes I remember thinking, I didn’t even, not being even thinking about the danger because you just felt you were doing the right thing, and actually being right at the top of the crane and looking down, and then, then when eventually you got down you just felt so good that you’d actually done that, but looking back on it you think goodness! [laughs] Did I really climb up about forty foot up that crane? [laughs] with no rope, and sometimes it’d be in the winter and it’d be quick slippery with ice and…

*[laughs]*

I probably wasn’t even wearing the right footwear, you know, it just… it’s miraculous that not more people were hurt but some people were injured, but most, the majority of people weren’t and, you know, we lived through very, very interesting historic moment and one that I don’t think any of us will ever forget, you know. Very inspiring

*Hmmm…[silence]… Ok*

[laughs] Is that ok?

*That’s brilliant! Yeah, that’s excellent umm… I’ll stop it if you…*

Ok

*If your…*

That’s fine, yeah

*If you haven’t got anything, any last thoughts. Umm, thank you very much*

Was there any hesitations or what’s it ok? Was it quite, fluid?

*It was excellent*

**Interview Details**

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