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*Interviewer*

Interviewee

*Can you just tell me your name?*

I am Dermot Morrow

*Can you spell that all for me?*

Sure, its d-e-r-m-o-t m-o-r-r-o-w

*And can you tell me the date of your birth?*

It’s the 1st of May 1973

*Brilliant and todays date is?*

It’s the 11th of November 2015

*Excellent and we are in your house in Haringey. So, to start with er actually can we go back a little bit and can you just start by telling me a little bit about your parents [laughs]*

Sure sure

*Sorry I didn’t explain we were going to do that but it’s a life history I want to get a bit of a kind of broad context*

No absolutely erm I I I would of probably started there anyway I guess erm so what sort of lead me to to go to Claremont but my parents erm both parents erm from Ireland my father was from North of Ireland from Belfast my Mother was from Wicklow in the Republic erm they both moved to England in the late 50’s and early 60’s and they moved to Holloway in North London and that was where I was born and grew up so Holloway is a very erm Irish community erm at that point in time and they were erm not so much now days erm but yeah I grew up in a sort of erm in a mixed community there was my my erm I was an only child erm and yeah grew up through the sort of erm late 70’s and through the 80’s through sort of in Holloway and kind of an interesting yeah an interesting time for me erm…shall I just contextualise stuff as I go or do you want to prompt me with questions sorry?

*No I’ll always wait and let you do the talking but if but if I am not…I f I think that you are stalling then I’ll ask a question*

Sure

*But just keep going*

I’ll just ramble

*Keep rambling [laughs]*

Okay, so erm yeah so I suppose for having thought about kind of what made me the person I am I guess probably living through the 80’s and that particular point in time was quite erm quite instructive instrumental for em it was erm a period I guess being a kid erm from an Irish family at that point obviously they was they they Troubles over in Ireland and and the hunger strikes in the early 80’s there was a lot of everything was very raw and very there was stuff on the news sort of all the time there was either sort of you know attacks going or else there was kind of hunger strikes or things like that and my neither of parents were particularly political but I I don’t think that you could sort of help being political in a very you know very small XXXX way at that point in time erm I guess they felt to be not not so much in Holloway but there was kind an awareness of quite a lot of anti-Irish sentiment around at the time. Erm and erm I think particularly around the sort of hunger strike period and stuff after that erm there was stuff was yeah very stuff was being talked about a lot and I suppose that was my first real interest erm in sort of in the wider world seeing things on the news and actually hearing my parents talk about stuff in quite sort of quite sort of emotional ways and it just got to make me aware of the outside world and the big issues of the day

*Hmmm*

So so those are the first the first kinda things erm

*Did you did you go back to Ireland at all? Did you ever?*

Yeah we went erm Ireland was a kind of annual pilgrimage it was sort of ever every August we would go back home as it was you know that was your holiday we were going back home for the summer so we would go either to parent my mums side of the family or to my dad’s and it was pretty much Ireland every year so we’d we’d go over and erm visit the family and you know hear about everything you know that’s going on back there really

*And do you know how they met your parents?*

Erm just just in the Irish diaspora in North London they met in…

*[Clicks] they they moved here separately?*

They did oh yes yes they met in London they me they met in a dance hall in the Archway the Gresham Dance Hall which is no longer there and erm yeah it was er jus just as it always been just erm you know friends of friends kind of thing and they met there

*Excellent, so sorry I interrupted I think I think we were back in London and then you were talking about yeah being aware of the wider world so erm can you remember…you first sort of inklings that you were political with more than a little p.*

Erm [sighs]

*Was there a turning a point?*

I think there’s several my yeah I mean I think I’d I suppose I have little little staging posts in my you know as I look back through my life you know I can I can you know I can go back to the very first awareness of politics and I remember erm I was about five or six and and the Conservatives had just won it was the day after the election and erm my mum was would normally as parents do call you and get you out of bed. I remember she was in a really foil mood that morning and I discovered later it was because Margret Thatcher was had had come into power that was one thing I was like ‘oh okay’ so I there was sides of debate and then people didn’t always fall on one you know people didn’t always the world out there was split along different views erm that was my first inkling. My second inkling probably was a little later it was around erm around as I mentioned around the stuff around the hunger strikes and the sort of feeling around my parents at the time. Erm there is something I mean I am…it’s kind of going off on a tangent but it is quite relevant really I think to Kind of what what made me who I am aswell erm around that time my mum was an alcoholic at the time she was she had a period of probably four or five years erm from I guess the early 80’s onwards erm were she had a real drink problem erm and and she she actually erm she was really upset on the the on the evening that Bobby Sands they one of the hunger strikers erm he died and she actually erm phoned from her own house of course she phoned the police and she made erm a bomb hoax all she was out of her mind erm joke and upset and emotional and anyway she made and there was me and her in the room and I remember it being made and I was like ‘on my god’ I knew I knew that was kind of wrong you know I knew that there would be implications and there would be trouble but erm didn’t quite you know was very sacred and a few hours later, it only took a few hours erm erm I was outside it was the middle of summer and the police came along and er they took her away and I was like #oh my goodness what’s going on?’ and my dad was trying to make the best of it and explain it away as she had been mugged a few months before and they said oh it’s to do with her being mugged and she’s got to go and answer some questions and I wanted to believe but I didn’t really believe it

*And how old were you then?*

So I would have been about erm I would have been eight I think at the time so so that would have been that would have been a big thing really and erm again its sort of it made me sort of put me a little bit like really thinking about you know not just about stuff as the outside world but things come and actually touch you can come and touch you aswell if you take an action or a good action or a bad action you know there are consequences. So so that’s that erm.

*How long was she away for?*

Well no she wasn’t erm I mean in the end it kind of turned in fine it was you know completely different period were she got she she was taken away questioned and erm she was released and she got er she ended up with a fine I think as simple as that a few months later would have been completely different had that taken place today but

*Yeah really*

There you go erm but yeah that’s going off a little bit of a digression but erm I suppose I remember the next the next things I remember very clearly were erm minor strike and it was something that seemed to go on for ever.

*Hmm*

Erm and it you know it didn’t really touch me living in London although I did plenty of collections out on the street but I did I did have a deep feeling that there was something really unjust about it going. I couldn’t quite couldn’t quite put my finger on it [coughs] and

*So was it erm were you aware of it though media or or through your parents or through I mean what was your main?*

It was just through media I think the kind of erm there was a lot of a lot of my learning really came from erm it was you know a traditional thing of well for some families of you know the T.V being on in the corner and just people watching it and my dad was a sort of avid news follower so he’s a you know I kind of didn’t in the days of three or four channel T.V you just followed what dad watched so I saw the news a lot more than a child wants to watch the news but I’d watch it follow it and and actually take a lot of interest in it you know on particular story’s and you know seeing that most evening of the week you you do kind of follow it and its yeah for a child it just felt like it gone on for ten years or something it just felt forever

*Hmm*

But you could kind of yeah really really severe it was just literally unfair that was the only paparticulation I could make of it things weren’t quite things weren’t right and I already had a sense that you know Margaret Thatcher was really bad and just a bad person

*[Laughs] and that was the sense in the household as well?*

That was the sense in the household you know just just you sort of knew which side you were on I suppose erm you know I guess how it feels looking back on it I I maybe I couldn’t of you know being put on the sport at the time I’d be interested to know what I thought but that’s how I can how I can analyse it now years later

*Hmm*

Erm but I suppose that I just I just probably I mean there’s a couple of other points I can remember so things like they they I remember the Battle of the Beanfield on the television where erm the travellers at Stonehenge were attacked on erm on their way to sort XXXX and erm I just I just remember sort of getting sort of media images picture of sort of burned out buses and and people talking about kind of erm what had happened really

*What year was the Battle of the Beanfield?*

Erm that was 80 hold on a minute….

*I should know that*

84 actually I think its 84 yeah

*Yeah*

I I always mix 84 and 85 but because it kind of crosses over with miners strike. I can remember those two instances sort of carouselling around each other

*Hmm*

But I forget which you know

*So did you see them as did you kind of relate the two in anyway?*

Erm not what not at all aside from the fact that I saw on both occasions I mean the media images of the time were of police either carting away travellers or carting away miners I suppose so there was a sort of sense that erm you know if you do things you know if if you I don’t know if you stand up for things you might get arrested

*[Laughs]*

Or might you might need to do something erm but yeah it I was probably eleven or twelve at the time of these of these things so it was all quite you know undeveloped or immature sort of way relating to it erm

*And what was I I what was the what was the general what the sort of wider political feeling about I mean obviously I am think it’s well documented what the wider political feeling around the miners strike was but I am just sort of wondering what the what the wider sense around the Battle of the Beanfield and that kind of because that feels like the very beginnings of what was to become essentially Claremont Road*

Erm honestly I don’t know because I never really met or got a chance to talk to anyone else about it at the time erm

*Was the media did the media reporting of bias in either direction? Can you remember this is quite detailed if you couldn’t remember?*

No one of my abiding memory is I think I saw it it was probably breakfast television or something er kind of one morning erm that the morning after it happened and yeah I just felt this sense that it things I can’t remember bias or you know of the media particularly I remember you know I sort of trusted the media as a sort of impartial erm delivery system really you know erm I I watched and I think I just interpreted for myself the fact that it had been really unfair erm that the police had come and been heavy handed and they you know XXXX was sort of hundreds and hundreds of cops looked like and I just thought ‘well that looks pretty severe to stop people going to Stonehenge’ really

*[Laughs]*

So yeah erm you know I can you can see it now looking back and having having some knowledge years later of of of of the birth of what became some of the sort of you know social movements ten years later maybe erm you you can see some of things for sure you know I am sure we’ll come onto that at some point. Erm shall I continue through?

*Continue through yeah continue through*

So erm probably I think I mean for me it’s the there was two things that that came together around erm my my mid-teens or early-teens and that was a kind of erm sort of getting into kinda of counter-culture sort of punk music or ska music or whatever else erm it was I think probably very fortunate living in where I did in in North London and there was like fantastic just cultural opportunities to go and see music bands erm you know there’s a venue no longer there just recently demolished actually but but erm for many it’s been a venue in Finsbury Park called The George Robey which was it was basically a pub with a big back room but there were the most I mean some really incredible sort of you know nights out I guess but the thing about it wasn’t just sort of bands and things I mean these were sort of these were cultural events and political events because they were always there were fundraisers for things or just generally information evening or whatever and so while you might go along for the music there’d always be kind of stall with information erm about things coming up whether it be a political march or or a some something else it sort of came together with I was you know fitted it focused and gave some direction to where I felt I was probably headed it kind of felt it felt the right community that I wanted to be in a sort just a general a sense of erm we all hated the Tories we all wanted to do things differently you know still trying to work out what that meant you know erm and obviously disagreed with your version and…

*Did they? Was there a…did they at that age in those early beginnings was there a sense of there being lots of jostling around political positions?*

Well I think I would say political positions is probably too erm…to make it too complex of a thing it was just a real sense I suppose it was more around there was probably a real battle between people who are more spiritual kind of hippy side of things erm and people who are more political and they wanted to get out and do actions and there was tension between those two categories really a sort of inward focus spiritual side of things or an outward focus kick it over change it sort of thing. And erm I probably I I vacillated between both I I enjoyed I both things both were great erm and you know it really depended who you met and talked to you know it didn’t they weren’t mutually exclusive either of course erm although for some people they were erm so its kind of interesting interesting to see that there was kind of tension between what felt to me just this great community of lovely kind and sharing people that wanted to change things erm the idea that they might have sort of there’s a whole spectrum of of views and philosophies maybe going so it might be it might be sort of XXXX on one end to kind of anarchies on the other end and a whole set of things in-between erm getting there so I’ve I’ve found that interesting and confusing you know not quite knowing where I were I fitted on the spectrum you know, not you know not questioning that I should there be a spectrum of anything I felt no this where I should be I want to be somewhere on this path here erm that’s still trying to work out what it felt you know where I felt comfortable with it.

*So can you talk me through at all any of these any of your erm engagements with different points on the spectrum? [laughs]*

God it’s getting very er…

*This is I mean you it’s a while ago so don’t*

No no no its

*Don’t feel like you have to answer the questions or if there irrelevant then we can just move on,*

No its fine

*I am just interested in*

Erm erm I think I’ve I was always quite if I look at it I probably did want to change things erm quite a lot and I saw I saw some real erm fun to be had really to be honest as well. Erm being involved with with changing things erm my first I remember my first erm had this really you know the moment that that Thatcher resigned was just amazing I went I remember going away and writing and poem and about it the first poem I attempted erm just really inspired that she had gone erm I just [gasps] ‘brilliant the world will change’ erm

*Can you remember the poem?*

Erm

*Obviously not*

Sadly not no no erm and I lost it was in a book of stuff I used to write, long since gone. But erm its you know it was done but I had a very you know I hadn’t really develop anything I thought well you know the Tories are bad and I’d never experienced what a Labour government would be like but my my parents were lifelong Labour voters. So I thought well that’s that probably you know they take contrary positions to the Tory’s erm that should be you know hope for a Labour government really erm the big thing I guess the thing that changed things quite a lot for me really erm was erm the pole tax that that was a real big thing it it came along at a time when I was kind of fifteen sixteen you know the pole tax campaign started around that time and I yeah it was it came at a point in time were I was actually ready t actually develop you know talk and politics and you know you go into sixth form or something like that and you talk you know you talk to your peers about things and started to have some heated arguments discussions about stuff erm and yeah I it was a really erm really interesting thing it was everybody seemed against it I didn’t know anybody who thought it was a good idea and the community charge you know it was the only the only equivalent thing I can I can compare it with would probably be the you know the build up to the first anti-war demonstration in Iraq in 2003 something it just felt like everybody in the world thought it was wrong erm being 15 or 16 was quite quite you know just amazing thing you just felt like you were you were part of a social wave that was going to wash things away and erm so I didn’t really have any involvement in the campaign as such I wasn’t at the stage of wanting to join things but I followed things and I went along to the erm there was a big demonstration in Islington a little while before the big march in central London and there was a bit of a riot near the town hall and I found that just like ‘oh my god are people are really really angry’ that sort of you know I kind of watched from afar and just kinda taken a back a little bit by it erm you know inspired I guess that people sort of had were wanting to just not meekly go and you know they meant it I suppose and they really did want to stop it like I I I felt it needed to be stopped and I thought ‘oh my god people do’ erm but yeah the for me the moment it was the pole tax demonstration in London it was the first erm the first major demonstration I went on erm and erm I thought it was great I thought you know there probably a quarter of a million people and I thought wow . Then I went along to the next demonstration erm which was some kind of animal rights thing about three months later and it was about a hundred people [laughs]

*[Laughs]*

Devastating I thought every demonstration was about a quarter of a million people I just you know I thought ‘cool politics is great’

*[Laughs]*

You get you you fill the streets with battalions of people and it wasn’t like that really erm oh yes its erm but

*Where you with erm where you with a groups of friends when you went to then pole tax demonstration?*

Yeah I was erm there was two or three of us erm and erm yeah what I think was my girlfriend at the time and I we went a long really you know kind of yeah part of a big demonstration and it was fantastic erm we got we kinda got separated from each other during towards towards the end when it started it stopped being a march and started to being kind of [gasps] becoming a riot sort of pushing and shoving with the police and then people started throwing things and the usual kind of as you know many of demonstrations see often is the these thigs start that way but we we got separated with sort police police horse charging down the road and people running in various directions so I got I got separated by myself I was my friends erm and my girlfriend got they got I I went off in one direction they went off in another [mumbles] but their group also got split aswell and I didn’t probably about…half an hour an hour I you know I didn’t erm I didn’t see them but by the time I came back or rather when I saw them erm a bit later I’d my girlfriend had sort of been hit with by a policeman with kind of sticks and stuff and I mean I got away scott-free really erm but I found that they had sort of my girlfriend and someone she was with had been kind of pretty badly hit with stuff and they were just trying to get out the way really they were scared they were sixteen like me and didn’t really want to you know be attacked and XXXX. Erm but yeah again I it was apart from being the biggest demonstration I’d ever been on and had been would then be for years to come but erm it was it was also it give me a it showed me that actually police weren’t a sort of benign force for just you know kept the status-quo kept the police actually that they weren’t keeping they they were going on the attack and hitting people that didn’t really deserve to be hit and I found that really really it really pissed me off erm of course I guess erm yeah it was it was really scary really scary not knowing where people were erm or what’s going to happen next or which direction I should go in erm and then you know it sort of it not long after we went home and we didn’t see sort of what went on into the evening were things where the riot kinda continued through central London I think for a few hours beyond that but

*Through central London it travelled from Islington?*

Sorry no erm I think I effortlessly moved from what a previous demonstration a little while before a much thing at Islington town hall

*Ah*

To the erm big pole tax march in central London

*…The big one sorry yeah sorry sorry*

I didn’t I didn’t make that clear enough the break no erm yeah this was that thing Islington was an entirely separate event erm but yeah I think the day later a do later the Sunday morning I saw on T.V the erm I think it was the Shadow Home Office Minister the Labour the guy that was you know not the Tory as it where and he totally condemned everybody practically in the demonstration and I was outraged by that and I thought hold on a minute you know your supposed to be the good guys here and I ‘ve been there and I’ve seen what happened and you should be out there saying the police were awful you know people were hurt but they just didn’t just talking about sort of Lamborghini being torched or whatever happened to be erm so that yeah that really that really got me thinking then I suppose I I I by that point there was I was moving away anyway I guess about thinking about traditional forms of politics and political action and I mean I probably just solidified wherever I was going anyway and said you know Labour or you know we didn’t seem to be any other option really with the Labour Party not going to be this great change if the Tory’s ever do come out of power so I continued really and I got really involved in yeah I guess from that point on inspired by the demonstration haven said all the horrible stuff but it was an amazing day erm I just started to just continue to get in to you know go along to things and sort be a spectator initially but but gradually once you become more involved in stuff and you know had a couple of friends that felt the same way so we’d kind of tag along demonstrations and stuff like that

*Erm before we sort of move on into the future and that erm how you got more involved in politics. Just tell me a little about the animal rights demo that you went on next*

Hmm

*Because that I mean I am just interested in what in what in kind of took you from anti pol tax to animal rights, was it just sort general sense of being on the left or was there particular pull to …*

Erm I think there was a certain at the time there a whole sort of bag of political values that that erm mentioned the kind of counter cultural scene I was coming through and you know erm on element apart from wanting to change things by direct action you know there was a big emphasis on vegetarianism or veganism and animal rights erm and things like that and that all erm that all came together erm I I became vegetarian about sixteen and went vegan a little while later. And yeah it just felt that was the next thing coming along it was a erm it was a erm a XXXX day for the XXXX demonstration or something if I can angle it then erm in central London each year so that was the first one I went to well the second then the first was sort of a animal rights demonstration I went on

*And aside from being much much smaller did it feel different in any other, did it was the was there sort of atmosphere different from the anti-pole tax ones or did it feel similarly…erm attempt you know did the how did how how was the political?*

Erm the pole-tax was people were you know there was lots of erm everyone had you know they probably didn’t they didn’t feel as creative or that that the the sort of level of of tension and really want to believe in you things were going to change pretty much. I think I got that fact that I you know they march was more of a well I dunno if its symbolic but it was you know I understand the section or whatever was not going to be stopped by that march there was a clear sense that it was it was a lobbying exercise really erm

*Hmm*

But yeah it was it was smaller erm there were placards you know they as all demonstrations do the the usual forms of placards and leaflets and things like this and we went along and I found it interesting I I took every leaflet that someone would gave me and I think I read everyone and sort of sort of sort of looking at the options really seeing what was there and yeah it was at that point it was like. I've I think I was just hoovering up information you know this sort of veracious appetite to find out about things and erm you know these days you go on it will be a search engine or something erm that’s then it would be picking up leaflets or getting given leaflets and reading them and and then you know if there it was a demonstration in the future you may be going or talking about or what have you so it was yeah it was very much just time of me finding out about what I felt to be wrong and and and how I how I felt things to be I think I’d I I probably I mean I know now I was sort of I was sort of working through this sort of erm dichotomy between sort of reform or radical change I think I was in in the various things they you know seeing the Labour people condemn stuff sort of by that point after the pole-tax erm you know seeing that you know the established opposition aren’t going to do anything then I suppose seeing similar things with animal rights movement you stared to see those you know different gradients there as well erm and I started to see well you know people there’s always there’s always a great tension people want to you know erm I pick out where you fall on the the spectrum of of erm of being just a reformer or campaigner or or doing direct action things I suppose people you know attempt to pigeon hole people I guess sit all so. Yeah I was working out for myself were I felt that I fitted I think I’ve said already

*Yeah no no no yeah that’s that’s interesting*

[Coughs]

*Erm and so were you also going on er on protests? Was there erm what’s my question…where there protests that felt much more in the kind of reforming end of spectrum as well as the kind of the pole-tax riot which essentially I imagine was fairly firmly in the radical*

Hmmm

*Radical change end of the spectrum, were you attending protests that were much more you know kind of erm whatever the word is ‘official’*

Yeah yeah I were I didn’t I didn’t…I wasn’t differentiating or deciding whether to attend as protest or not on on whether it was erm official or erm better coordinated or or whatever erm at that point I mean I I would tend to go along with whatever issue I fet strongly about erm whatever was offered up whether it was a erm a small protest somewhere or a a big march in the centre of London erm I mean there wasn’t a…there were clearly there was stuff going on you you could probably go to something every weekend if you wanted to. At that point I mean I wouldn’t say I was I was attending stuff all the you know continually all the time erm you know there were other things as well I I started I mean I think I probably go up the first thing I got quite heavily involved in was erm the animal rights movement and I started to I became hunt saboteur erm and erm I went out a few time erm with the hunt sabs in erm in West London I think they were I joined the hunt saboteur association but didn’t know anybody involved so you sort of wrote off or something to an office and they they got back in contact with you

*Oh wow [laughs]*

And and gave you and I think they passed your details on to a local group and they’d contact you, we met and went out a few times erm and its probably towards the end of 1992 I guess started in that erm

*And was erm did you join the West London group because that was the closest group to you or?*

Erm there was I think there was a north London group somewhere erm I don’t quite know where they were based but I think it was case that I I think they’re supposed to contact you I think they didn’t contact me or something but West London did and so I went out with them but you know the groups would always link up anyway so sort of west London and south London would sabs would often go off together as a big group several vans and we would go off too

*And where they were were did you tend to go to?*

You’d go to I mean there was several hunts around the south east so there was the Essex farers hunt erm which was probably still today was it [mumbles] a bloody scary place to go probably the most violent hunt in the country in terms of saboteurs getting attacked by erm you know erm not huntsman but you know people you know erm people who are connected with the hunt with sticks you know or jumping out at you and attacking you stuff like that. I mean luckily I never got erm never got attacked but I saw a few situations where people did get attacked and the hunts around it was mainly sort of Surrey, Sussex, Essex were the main areas erm so yeah went out a few times again I didn’t go out every Saturday erm with them I was sort of part-timer at that point partially because living in Holloway was a heck of a schlep to get over to erm Hounslow I think they were meeting at one point erm it’s sort of seven in the morning its really tricky to get over erm so yeah I went out a few times

*Can you talk me through what a hunt sab would look like from the kind of meeting in the morning and you know through the process?*

Sure erm well you would you would all meet at erm an agreed place normally in your urban area of the world so erm we would met up and then the van would come and collect you so whoever had the van would drive along pick you up and you’d hop in the back and erm you’d probably you decided sometimes decide that morning what hunt your going to go to go to but often it would sort of be planned out especially if you were working with other groups you’d a hunt erm and then it would often be a case of erm you would you would turn up either at the erm the stables or were the kennels erm and you might follow the hunt out to where they are going or you might have a sense sometimes people it wasn’t only people who went on erm in the car in the van you know supporters of sabs and stuff or people connected would often go out and [coughs] check you know check if there’s any sort of erm signs there might be a hunt or are their supporters gathering in particular place or erm you know there was lots of established routes but you know erm you’d try and you’d try and intercept them basically that that was the thing

*And where you visible to the hunt from the beginning? You were kind of straightforwardly present or was that we keeping yourself hidden to some extent?*

No we didn’t we didn’t hide from the hunt I mean you would you’d you’d didn’t always erm you didn’t always see them first of all erm it very depended on where you found yourself erm so you could literally be following the hunt and try to intervene but erm you its you are constantly try to keep up with the dogs aswell because there’s you know there trying to stop the fox being maimed so you you know no point trying to chase a horse. Your keeping up with keeping up with the hounds or trying to keep ahead of the hounds so there was a lot of a lot of running through fields erm and listening out for erm the dogs barking erm often ineffective it really depended it really depended where you were in position to the hut itself I mean if if you were fortunate enough erm there was only a few occasions were we sort of erm you know saw the fox came to one side and we were able to sort of stand in front of the hounds and you’d have horns you’d have own sort of horns, you never quite got the hang of blowing sort of properly

*Like hunt horns they were the same?*

Bugle things yeah

*Yeah*

Exactly the same erm and whips sort of homemade whips erm which which the dogs reacted too it was the noise of the whip so if you cracked the whip erm it tended to erm stop the dogs dead they they were trained to to react to to that erm so yeah if you could there was one occasion I mean this wasn’t whilst I was in London I continued this I moved up to the North East to study in ninety three and I got involved with erm hunt saboteur group up there and I was involved with them for a while longer yeah and more regularly involved with them for a while longer. So yeah you would erm…we took the hunt away the pack of hounds away with us for about an hour one afternoon it was a fantastic thing playing the dogs to astonishment and despair of the hunt itself erm but yeah there was there was it was it was you know really I found it really inspiring you know people had obviously worked out the tricks and tactics you know erm laying false trails in the hunt the dogs would follow XXXX rather than a scent f the fox was one thing or erm you know they didn’t want you to go near their dogs in case you sort of rub XXXX into them and just confused the hounds completely and they went around in circles or what have you erm

*So that was a tactic?*

Yeah yeah if you can intervene directly but often yeah often there were days you didn’t see anything at all because the they had just got off ina completely inaccessible place there were fields and fields and you couldn’t get tyour van around there you know you might have had to run half a mile or something to try and get to where it was and by that point it had moved on so it was all it really was cat and mouse erm some days we were the cat some days we were the mouse erm and it was but great real feeling of camaraderie I guess you travelled around in the back of the van and you you know you just a real sense of you going out onto to erm to do something really good do something humane and erm and try and stop things and actually physically stopping a hunt it was a really really empowering thing you’d stopped the days play and you know for me it wasn’t the same for everyone some people felt this way some people XXXX there was also this sense of ‘oh they’re a bunch of toffs we’ve spoilt their fun as well’ I quite you know they’d make quite freely found that quite a few found the idea that we’d sort of you know they they were a class apart really

*And you think there were people that didn’t feel that way [laughs]?*

There were well I wouldn’t I mean there were there were it wasn’t people people wouldn’t be there was…one of the tensions again in well within the hunt saboteur scene I guess erm people who were they were concerned about their sort of erm media image I guess and sort from a more campaigning side of things the idea there was already you know the press would happily say that they’re not interested in saving the foxes lives they’re all given a pack lunch by Linda McCartney you know the famous but apparently genuine erm erm Daily Mail story about hunt saboteurs that Linda McCartney packed our lunches erm

*Really [laughs]*

Yeah funny isn’t it

*[Laughs]*

Erm that yeah but sorry went off on a tangent but erm no but I think it was yeah people were some people were keen that they should be only be seen to be about erm stopping the foxes and it wasn’t it wasn’t that it was only about some other agenda but the fact is you know we we all wanted to stop the hunt and stop foxes being maimed but it didn’t mean that you can’t just package away your political philosophy and just pull out one thread I mean everything comes into play you you’re a whole persona and if your developing politics in many directions the fact that you know a bunch of enormously privileged members of the aristocracy some of them were obviously a lot weren’t but erm you know would erm you l know on their horses come and long down at your or or threaten you or whatever it happened to be it was there was a real sense of this is us you know this…you know there the upper class and we’re we’re going to spoil their fun for the day I think that you know there was that and I don’t think there’s any I don’t have any problem with that fact quite honestly that’s was there to extent for a lot of us.

*And erm so you talked about some er violence from supporters*

Yeah

*Did there erm was there ever was there clashes between hunters and the sabs?*

Erm yeah yup ermmm you know erm people erm sabs that might get hit with erm riding whips or whatever or or or they would you know ride their horses-excuse me- towards you try to scare you off just just generally some of it threatening just just verbal stuff often but erm you know I mean I don’t it would have been even even if we’d wanted to and we never went along with any plan to kind of physically intimidate them or anything else but even if we had gone with a plan like it it would have been suicidal as you know were were a bunch of skinny student looking types and they were big burly sort of farm boys and and people on horse and people on quadbikes erm you know there to see you off so it would have been utterly foolish to try and anything else than just wind them up and spoilt their fun really

*Hmm*

Erm but yeah there was lots of intimidation from certainly we would we would see say okay having a herd of cows charging towards me because they were being they were being sort of erm chased by the quad bikes towards to kind of get us to scarper which we did

*[Laughs]*

Erm people being hit by quadbikes or you coming back and you found that your vans been attacked that happened a few times, windows put in or tires let down or whatever it had to be really so plenty of vandalism plenty of the police you know we obviously had a very partial and biased account of things except that you know but there was really there was a genuine feeling that the police turned a blind eye and couldn’t give a toss erm about our complaints if we’d been intimidated because we were trespassing so you know we we deserved it we knew if we didn’t trespass we wouldn’t of got the got the grief I suppose erm so yeah again a sense of that that the police weren’t on our side again sort of came through from that from that experience really

*And where were you studying?*

I went to study in Sunderland but I lived I lived I stayed there I was there for my first year and erm but I moved further to Newcastle erm because I had most of my friends were in Newcastle at the time and you know a big bunch of those friends were political friends really, people that I developed sort from hunt sabing or from other stuff

*Hmm*

Going on at the time erm I mean

*Sorry go on*

I mean probably hmm I it’s quite relevant I think for erm you know for me to talk about it because its kind of its its very much part of what Claremont was about aswell but erm the thing I haven’t mentioned which was erm a present thing at the time was the erm coming of the criminal justice & public order act erm because that galvanised whole section of erm radical whether it was squatters or hunt saboteurs or people that wanted to go to parties erm rave parties or parties put on free festivals put on by you know New Age travellers and communities around the country all those of were seen with a very broad brush were sort of looking to be erm outlawed all those activities and erm certainly part of the part of what we took up the campaign in the North East around the criminal justice act erm as as as sabs but also you know probably we’d take it up on any of those issues as well because I was very sympathetic to all of them and probably did all of them as well at various points erm…and we we we so we started a campaign up there I mean around the country there was a sort of network of erm a kind of a coalition really around different direct action groups around the country em there starting to campaign against the coming in of the act erm

*Just erm for the sake of the tape you’re the first person toasts really talked about the criminal justice act, so do you want to can you just give me a bit of a low down on you know*

Sure

*What it was what it meant*

Sure

*If that’s that’s…*

This is where my memory will be severely challenged I could of recited the XXX in some of the passages of the act at the time but I certainly can’t now erm so from the from the point of hunt sabing it would of it would of made erm trespass which had been up until that point a civil offence a criminal offence erm if erm if your going basically on if your going onto land to disrupt a lawful activity which which hunting was erm in law so it it so yeah that was section sixty nine I think of of the act erm that was the section that affected me particularly erm it also erm it allowed erm amplified music and it was it was lampooned rally you can imagine legislators attempting to because of in law you can’t just say loud music is outlawed because it clearly outlaws much of our culture as a society so erm they legislators tried to attempt to define in words what rave music was and it was a series of repetitive beats I think it was part of the terminology which kind of hilariously if you enjoy going to raves having some stuffy politicians attempt to

*[Laughs]*

In legalistic terms define what you’re listening to it was just incredibly funny and you know we it was mocked by many people not us lot erm…oh my goodness there’s so much legislation around squatting I can’t remember the particular clauses that affected squatting at the time it may come back to me but but again that’s a community that was under attack and it also imposed restriction on a completely different set of people that was around football fans it was trying to sort of bring in erm stuff around searches and stuff I think erm and just imposing freedom of movement around football fans and trying to account for sort of you know hooliganism and disturbance’s around that time so

*So was there any obviously there was lots of solidarity between you know squatters and ravers and sabs and political types but was there any kind of weird alliance then with football fans, did that come?*

I think at a at a higher level yes link were made sort of fans groups and stuff like that erm but it was wasn’t it certainly didn’t it didn’t translate into sense that you know you’ve got some your local football fans are going to come along and you’ll demo

*[Laughs]*

Because quite honestly you know the legislation comes in for most people go about their lives if it doesn’t touch them they don’t see it and its so far down the news agendas its its barely notices quite honestly so I think for those sections it passed through without a great deal of erm protest erm from fans groups really but but it came in none the less. Erm I I mean I had the notoriety of being I was the first person prosecuted under criminal justice act in the country erm at the time erm because we it sort of came into law erm just as the hunting season was about to start in erm 94’ and erm…yeah I think at some sabs in North Hampton had been erm arrested the week before and then the following week we were out at Hexham in Northumberland doing sab and myself and one other person got arrested erm under the criminal justice act and of course that gave our group a great opportunity to get campaigning and what have you sort of did enormous amount if you know not me personally but eh campaign around sort of press work and working around making sure that the court date when it came would have cameras there

*Hmm*

And stuff like it it made it to the news so

*And were you arrested for trespass?*

Yes yeah yeah section sixty nine erm which you know I’d been arrested a number of time up until that point it was those things weren’t particularly erm daunting I suppose or whatever you become used to things that of course you get involved in and XXXX up on your rights and erm you get a great sense of solidarity so you know we we we all fully expected to be arrested and we’re fine with it really you know occupational hazard it felt like erm yeah we were but yeah had it been for anything particularly heroic it would have been a better tale but I just made it over a five bar gate and as soon as we saw the hunt come out of cover we ran and I got about two steps before slipping in the mood got grabbed by a heavy and pulled off and arrested and that was the end of my day so

*[Laughs]*

But there it was it went to court and ern a couple of month in January 95’ I think and you know there was I think at the time probably there was a feeling that you know as when tough legislation come sin there’s always a focus quite rightly on the harsher end of the sentencing you know that you could potentially get I think it was…three months in prison or six months imprisonment for these acts? But no one really expected anything and as it turned out it was a very light sentence I I again I would I it was a conditional discharge and a hundred fifty pounds fine which someone in the public stood up who I never met and said they would pay, a great act of solidarity and just a local villager from Hexham who didn’t like the hunt coming through their back garden every so often so

*Excellent*

That was wonderful

*Hmm*

A great experience

*And in terms of erm being arrested you you said you saw it as an occupational hazard, did you then did you therefore have a sort standard procedure did you know did you know what you were going to say to the police all of that was it?*

Yeah generally

*Was it a sort of scripted process that you kind of expected you knew what to expect every stage of the…*

It was erm it was I mean you you know generally you knew the offence you would be arrested under because there would be two or three usual offences on any particular day which would just be a public order act offence erm causing alarm harassment or distress or something like that which was essentially catch catch all opportunity to be arrested erm but there very minor offences pretty much and you you know anyone coming in was you got sort full we called it a induction if it was a job but you you got a full induction to what to expect. And you got you got support of people if you were arrested on a demonstration or a hunt whatever you you were never left alone to to worry about what was going to happen you expected and knew there would be people outside waiting for you to come out and sort of going in and go into the custody suit and try and find out information and just generally being a presence and that’s really supportive that’s I found that you know doing it I did more than I experienced it from being arrested erm but I found it yeah it great it allows you the sense that you can carry on doing stuff you know your not left alone and there people come out and do it and there you know there food when you come out if you’d been there a long time and yeah

*Hmm*

It wasn’t erm but we knew you know I mean pretty much you didn’t expect to ever be questioned and if you were you didn’t really say anything but you had solicitors lined up erm who’d represented you previously probably you and your XXXX and people you knew who would be available or knew to be available on the day of these sort of activities

*So you had some sympathetic solicitors that you were working with?*

Yeah or so the people that will represent you and and fought half way decent erm I think every every town and city in the country has similar set-ups and always has done as far as I am aware still do today erm firms of solicitors there’s always a big no if you become if you become a political activist and and sort of things your doing you you got a feeling you’ll be a arrested for is there’s there’s it’s a thing that’s always handed down just never trust the duty solicitor because they’re on call there not really it will probably it may well be a paralegal or a someone from a firm you don’t know who’s not who doesn’t really go with your best interests they just do because there rotated to become and represent you there not really interested in erm getting you the best erm representation you can expect from an easy life all so the advice has gone you know there has been occasions I’ve heard its happened they’ve suggested you plead guilty to stuff to speed the process up a little bit, which is being you know it’s kind of terrible advice really erm its not in a client’s best interest to do that so. So yeah we found solicitors who would come and erm give you a proper defence I suppose

*Excellent, okay this is 94’*

Yup

*We’re moving swiftly on towards…erm the M11 [laughs]*

Yes we are yeah

*Link road era erm is it a reasonable time to ask now how you kind of first came aware of that campaign or are there other things you want to talk about before we get onto that?*

No that’s absolutely I think it’s sort of all coming together really erm the first [shuffling in background] I think the first campaign about a road I became aware of was XXXX around 1990 so its sort of going back a few years between you know from your mid to late teens and early twenties it it sort of my learning and experience accelerated at such a rate of three years is like a massive a massive leap from where I was then to sort of how I felt that time later but erm I yeah I became aware of XXXX erm I can’t remember how I became aware of that actually erm I don’t recall seeing anything second hand about it I think I possibly found some press cuttings in the library or something about and studying or what have you I can’t remember. But I do I think the first thing I remember of it was seeing a photograph of a group of people erm erm the XXXX tribe or people who were supporting them they were campaigning against the erm extension of the M3 through Hampshire erm the Winchester Bypass which would of again one of these things which would cut about three minutes off excuse me or about eight minutes off the journey time from London to Southampton. But actually cut through erm massive amounts of sites scientific interest and erm heritage sights and erm you know sort of long barrows and you know burial grounds of early civilisation so that was all being sort of chiselled about for this so erm yeah I remember a photograph of of the it was sort of direct action thing they were around a digger erm formed a circle with their hands they’d erm they had sort of erm plastic pipes over their arms , probably the first time I seen a kind of lock-on as it were people were sort of they may have just been holding hands at that point erm in the pipes so they couldn’t be pulled apart they they had pipes over their arms which I thought was I thought wow what an amazing tactic that makes sense. Erm I went down a little while later erm so this was before Claremont erm just for a couple of weekends me and a couple of friends hitched out to Winchester to find out what it was all about and and meet these people and find out what XXXX was and remember being really impressed with erm just what they were doing but also the fact that you know they had a kind of they they provided for all their own needs you know they were cooking and living outdoors and self-supporting I just found it really inspiring er thing to be doing and you know not going away just sort of living there for an indefinite amount of time so

*And were they on the site that was proposed to be bulldozed?*

Yeah they were yeah and at various places over time and so as the work went on it moved along erm but I didn’t have a great deal of involvement at that point bar a few XXXX as I say [coughs] the next erm one I can remember was and I didn’t go to this but I think this was just before going to Claremont I my intention had been I really wanted to go down To Oxleas Wood it’s just south of the river erm which has a like a eight thousand year old ancient small patch of ancient woodland which was threatened erm I can’t remember by what probably another road erm never got there I was living in Newcastle at the time so I I was following what was going on there erm but finding clearly I was tried to study as well as be political and the studying took a back seat for most of my degree it would have to be said but erm…Yeah I really wanted I was involved with Oxleas I wanted to be involved with Oxleas but but never got the chance to erm but then I heard about the M11 erm I think I was it would probably be erm when would it have been? Spring or no probably when was it? I am getting my times mixed up actually let me work it out…it must have been around the summer of 93’…spring or summer of 93’ erm and I found about the campaign against the M11 link road. That’s right erm one of my friends erm he first went along, he went up to Wanstead to the big oak tree Wanstead Common erm and came back and told me all about it erm and that was being lifting and and for a I wasn’t around at that point very much, I did go down to see it erm but he he would come back and tell me much more about what was going on doing there and I I was thrilled by it I thought ‘that’s fantastic’ I am going to make sure that I go down erm the next time there’s a big action going on there erm so I think I went down before before I went down to spend erm sometime living there I went to a few larger actions that I’d heard about erm

*At Wanstead or at?*

Erm along the route [sighs] I am trying to I can’t remember erm [gets out of chair] bare with me. As you do go rooting for a couple of bits

Ahhh

I couldn’t find erm I couldn’t find stuff actually [flicking of paper] erm I’ve lost a lot of stuff over the time. So looking at a map trying to get my whereabouts

*[Laughs]*

So George Green was were the oak was erm so I think I the one I can remember erm that came a little time later after the oak had gone erm I am getting my chronology mixed up because I remember spending some time down it it might just been a day down at the oak erm it was after the they put a letter box onto the tree while someone was living there and there kind of a campaign to get it registered as an address because that would give, it confers certain rights so they couldn’t just chuck someone out of the three if it can be sort of deignated as a residence that would give erm some some erm complication to a victim and erm the day that a postman delivered a letter to a tree was a big day because I think I think it became case law or something erm [hesitates] it go it made trickier erm I I can’t remember what that revolved around but the effectively as I said it it was a fact that a letter had been delivered and that was enough I think a judge had rule that erm that that granted the people living in the tree some rights of residence because erm someone had taken to write them a letter there and it had been delivered.

*Do you know whose idea that was?*

Erm I have no idea at all, I wasn’t involved with the campaign at the time and erm yeah I others I others may well remember or or erm who sent the letter or thought about it

*Hmm*

But but yeah it was a good a good ideas that worked for a while, but it didn’t work forever. Erm where was I? So…

*Well we were just talking about where you attended actions along the along the route in-between Leyton and Wanstead I guess.*

Yeah erm

*Or or Redbridge roundabout Green Man roundabout?*

Yeah there was I am trying to I am just trying to place actions in the chronology erm of kind of before I moved to the North East and after living up there because most of the actions I can remember were from a period of time I was living down there by which point erm the sort of Wanstead end was very much flattened so with XXXX moved into kind of 94’ by this point in time

*So where you there when the erm eviction of the tree happened?*

I wasn’t there at the eviction erm

*Or the flattening?*

Post post eviction was when it was still a site erm so this would have been 94’ I remember I remember taking part in actions along the route at Wanstead erm on several occasions erm and that involved you know I mean the boarding’s were up around the site and erm you know because they had been invaded many times over there was sort of barbed wire up that you know that was all very easy to get over with a roll of carpet and being bunked up by everybody so we could all get over and just invade the site and run around for a bit and try and get onto cranes and differs and what have you and just stop work. Cement pools or whatever it happened to be erm so yeah erm I was involved in yes so along this section I think erm where there was it was progressing at a pace erm the map I am looking at isn’t a very good map I have to say but I am trying to remember there was another camp erm of people probably about fifteen or twenty pole I am not sure if it was Bush Wood…somewhere along the route between here and there that that was under threat

*So between George Green and Leytonstone Leytonstonia?*

That’s right sorry yeah erm and it was a period I mean every along along the whole section between sort of Leyton and Wanstead erm there were bits of work going on so certain I am assuming it will be simply because erm you know some of the people some of the houses were erm the owners had erm decided to sell before you know erm what some stayed put others moved out at an early stage, those who had moved out at an early stage I guess those houses were were erm taken down by much early but that allowed erm the squatting of those spaces and putting up of of benders and tarps and structures to live in having fires erm and small kitchens and things around the route so

*So that was that was this that was around here?*

It was yeah

*Around around kind of Green Man roundabout?*

That’s right

*Or was that all the way down to Claremont Road?*

Well there were

*So I’ve I mean I read about the bender side quite a lot but I am not entirely…where there was that happening?*

There were a couple of places now I am the map I am looking at isn’t great but and my recollection because of all I see now is a motorway rather than the road layout but from here there’s Cathall Road you turned erm you turned right on to Cathall Road from Grove Green road and you walked over a tube line, so the tube line was running kind easterly from Leyton towards Wanstead so you went over it you walked over Cathall Road went over a tube the Central Line tube and you continued on erm on a little bit and then my memory begins to fade I am trying to think I am looking at a very partial map

*Hmm*

And I can’t place where erm I never I never lived there but re-visited quite a lot and erm…I over the sort of the summer and you know you you would you would go along the route erm whether it was to an action or just to hang out or to see who was bout at any particular time and so I remember spending a little bit of time on the route before whilst Claremont was thriving erm going to some of the other sights erm yeah I wish I could remember locate exactly where it was.

*No it’s alright that’s alright that’s fine. Erm sorry you never do do do ergh you did say you just said you never lived at Claremont is that right?*

I did

*You did? Sorry*

Well I didn’t live on Claremont Road I lived around the corner so Grove Green Road erm was the road that erm ran parallel to Claremont

*Hmm*

It was a long road from from Leytonstone

*Hmm*

And I continued on down to Leyton erm it was a main road and Claremont was like a residential street erm of probably about two hundred metres two hundred and fifty metres in length that ran parallel erm with Grove Green Road so Grove Green Road was also being erm erm demolished or at least one side of it was being demolished erm and that would of that would have erm that was so that was essentially the section before Claremont. So I lived in a little erm house on Grove Green Road that was erm that was squatted erm…yeah during that summer

*Erm the summer of ninety…*

94’

*94’*

Yes

*Yeah okay so you’d been a few times and at some and where were you at your in your university career at that point?*

I was in my first year

*You were still in your first year okay fine erm so you just moved down for the summer holidays?*

Erm well a little bit before the summer holidays so again abended what I was doing I think probably came down around ermmm end of mid-May end of May and I stayed stayed through until erm early October I think that was the period that I spent down there and didn’t really yeah didn’t really move from so that that was the you know that was the period where I’ve got my you know my most of my knowledge and awareness

*Hmm*

And memories from the M11 link road campaign

*So what was it that erm inspired I mean why did you why did you decided to move down ultimately after having visited a few times*

Erm it was just it I found it to a be an incredibly inspirational campaign erm that people had taken over houses that were going to be bulldozed and they occupied those houses and they were trying to prevent a road being developed through East London brining its pollution noise and danger and everything else with it erm I found that you know the thing I think what I found was the most inspirational thing was the community that had been created because of it erm

*Did you know them? Did you know those people at that point or?*

I probably friends with several people who’d been going along to it friends friends in London I wasn’t friends with particularly with erm people living on Claremont Road or people fully part of the campaign you know I was it more sort of a wider periphery of supporters

*Hmm*

Like minds friends that would come along I mean for all the residents erm on Claremont Road Grove Green Road and all the other sections up to Wanstead all the people that were squatting it erm there was a much wider periphery of daily visitors supporters erm local residents who weren’t affected would along so there was like a very large it felt like a very large community of support

*Hmm*

Outside of just the people living day to day on that route erm and it was yeah I found it my first visit was yeah I just found it it it was pretty fully developed at that point in time you know the whole of the road was occupied by by squatters erm Dolly erm who had been living there all her life erm I suppose effectively became a squatter in her own home

*I suppose she did yeah*

Erm

*So er just just again for the sake of the tape do you just want to clarify how she became a squatter in her own home? What that means?*

Yes she’d she’d erm she’d been born on Claremont Road erm lived her whole life on Claremont Road and erm at the point where erm the M11 link road erm project came into being then the government looked to compulsory purchase the houses on the route from those who hadn’t moved out already erm Dolly refused to move

*How old was she?*

She was ninety three at that point in time yeah I think she was born in yeah 1900 or something or 1901 or what have you I can’t remember for certain. But yeah she she lived there her whole life so the houses probably weren’t a great deal older than she was herself erm she became she became a figurehead of the campaign, she was you know she was a 93 year old woman so you know she frail and didn’t always come out very often erm but she would be you’d you’d normally see her every day, she never ventured out into the road as far as I can remember erm she would only come as far as erm the gates her front gate on the road and sort of stand there hang out there erm and just just chat with her new neighbours.

*[Laughs]*

Erm people she you know she erm I had I had a number conversations with her but I didn’t get to know her very well, I really wish I had of spent some longer periods talking to her to find out more about her erm other people had that great opportunity to do that and then in and and tell you things that she had said and how she felt and erm but she talked about the neighbourliness for instance of living on the road now erm about how you know erm clearly there’s a sort of you know you kinda of you you as a political activist you never really expect favourable media coverage erm and er in this respect it was exactly the same thing you you you see the narratives before they are written almost a bunch of squatters moving in erm doing stuff that’s illegal like squatting or blocking road or whatever and then to have someone like Dolly erm give a counter narrative so when asked and say ‘no no these people are lovely they bring they bring me food they they talk to me they spend the time of day with me I’d never experienced so much friendship’ all those lovely things it was you know it the road itself became a beacon for the kind of community the kind of society that I feel we all wanted really on a wider level it became it as I say a beacon of how to do things now it was a Victorian street and and quite apart from the fact that the houses were some of them were probably falling down by themselves before they were being knocked down but I mean they were erm you know it was it was an art space it was all sort of things that you know that were try to design a community design a psychical space erm it had all the elements that I I would love to see in a physical space and it had erm including you know being able to erm that included socialising and and you know people being able to live in one space get a long you know there was art spaces there was stage for music there was there was two cafes on the street when I say cafes these were these were run by squatters living on the street they were activists who running the café so it was we understood we had to re-produce ourselves we had to feed ourselves we had to erm provide emotional support and everything else. Erm there were clothes rails of of erm second hand or donated clothes erm the people erm many many sort of you know day to day you know the sort of things you need to reproduce your physical needs where a lot of that was provided erm food so the kitchens produced communal meals for people a lot of our food was probably skipped that being that [coughs] meaning that it was it was taken erm probably food from supermarket bins erm passed its sell-by-date so it was taken and generally speaking erm completely eatable and yeah it was

[Pause in Tape]

*And I was just going to ask was it vegan was it entirely vegan?*

No it wasn’t erm it was normally vegetarian erm there would be occasional disagreements when someone had found some skipped eat or something. I remember a couple of erm discussion being had about whether or not people should be providing that in the café but I don’t there was never any great erm tensions round it I think I think it was felt that erm you know most people well I don’t known actually I didn’t do a poll I got the sense that most people were vegetarian erm but there was no no real line on it and certainly erm issues erm around diet that had with each other but general it was provided for the widest possible bunch of people so you produced vegan food and maybe other things to put on if you wanted cheese or whatever

*Erm and just going back to Dolly briefly was she instantly sympathetic and pleased with her new neighbours or do you know if there was any kind of process?*

Well I am only really going on what others have said because erm when I arrived in 94’ to be in the road the community was already established then and so Dolly had a period of time I guess getting to adjust it erm from what I can remember saying it’s you know it’s a massive change erm it took her a while to adjust to it and probably she erm yeah as you may well be your whole the road you’ve known all your life from all you’re your neighbours disappearing and the houses around you becoming empty and then and then these new people arriving and neve haven met them or understanding them or what they might be like I am I think she did say she was she was initially weary erm I recall her saying either seeing her been interviewed and saying it or did the did someone say but she said she’d been she had been a lifelong Tory voter up until that point up until the road was threatened with demolition and then well she didn’t say anything about you know what came after except to say you know in the same sort of paragraph that that you know as a way of defending all her new neighbours that these are some the nicest she’d met and and then went on to aspoice the kind of things they were doing

*And that’s fascinating I didn’t know she was a Tory voter*

Supposedly

*Supposedly*

Yeah Yeah

*Wow so did her politics change or did she just was it a sort of purely personal?*

I don’t know

*…Thing*

I don’t know I don’t you know to what extent politics she thought about politics full stop erm beyond saying what he kind of you know voting history had been

*Hmm*

Erm couldn’t say really

*Okay erm I wonder if we can just talk about briefly about other characters in the area at the time, the kind of key figures on and around Claremont be they activists or other residents. Can you who who were the sort of people that really stick out in your mind?*

Well the other one you mentioned a little earlier perhaps before the recorder but but Mich old Mich was was was a another well he was the character of the campaign really he lived at the end of Claremont Road erm he yeah erm he was in his mid-fifties I guess at the time or late fifties erm and he was he apart from anything he was just the most incredibly athletic guy for a man of his age he erm those were in our teens or early twenties were just amazed how he would you know erm Claremont Road one of the thing about it erm was erm there was a ground level erm but there was also sort of aerial level of netting across between the trees across the road erm the Claremont Road fate there was only houses one side the road erm faced the Central Line tube erm on on the other side of the road erm next to the fence there was lines of trees and erm yeah netting between the houses and the trees and whenever sort of evictions in the offing or what have you so for instance when either end of the road erm was under threat one way of getting across to occupied houses if you were would be across the nets or one way of trying to stop the demolition by being suspended in nets and I I can remember him walking across the nets as he might crossing the crossing the road or something

*[Laughs]*

You know he didn’t really he’d he’d walk across sometime initially at least on his feet, most of might think he was thirty feet above the ground you might be on all fours walking across a net, he seemed to of managed it perhaps he had a life in circus but he managed to kind of I can remember him walking across on several occasions on his feet perhaps before going down on his hands. Erm strong guy I remember him giving the demolition squads he would be pain he they they they didn’t like him at all because he I think probably it was quite easy for some of the people erm you know people working on the campaign like the security guards and they erm demolition squads and and just the contractors and stuff erm easy for them to see this bunch of other people with funny looking hair and funny looking clothes and see them as somehow different as a bunch of outsiders who didn’t really have any sense of erm

*Shall I just do you want to carry on talking? I am just going to sort out the coffee*

So people that didn’t really you know they saw they saw us all as slightly different and I found but Mick on the other hand you never a working class guy erm [kettle boils in background] really strong cockney accent who had you know he done his national service and he he knew you know he kind of you know someone who had the same accents and you know for some people who had lived in the same area as those people who are kind of erm working on the sight as demolition or security or something he knew how to talk to them in ways that some of the rest of us didn’t you know that would actually make them feel really guilty about what they were doing erm I you know I couldn’t try to paraphrase it just it wouldn’t have the potency or the delivery of of of of the way he did it you know he but he would just lambast them from top of the house saying ‘these people there the future your in the past, your world is dead look this these people’ you know and it would just the would do that for ages for like a hour he would be just talking to them and you know it was erm yeah it was a bit like a warfare for your ears it would be kind of

*There’s that amazing sample isn’t there in there’s a erm XXXX*

Yes

*Ask and that’s Mick speaking*

That Mick

*Yeah*

Yeah its they were there’s erm I mean there’s probably widely available video at the time unfortunately not enough capturing Mich at his best erm just little snippets of him erm but yeah he people differed a lot to Mick big big there was respect because he lived on the road erm

*So he was a resident before*

Yeah

*Is that right? He wasn’t an incoming*

No as far as I that’s how I’ve always understood it yeah he lived there before. So it was from what I can work out Mick and Dolly were the two last residents on the street erm Mick fell into the campaign I mean the difference in the act he was a resident there that carried a lot of he stayed respectful of the fact of his experience just you know his life experience and and just respect that he was he meant what he said and you know there was a you know we can all sometimes you know watching out for other people’s feeling like you know not say what we mean to say or be slightly polite and not get the point across Mich didn’t bother about any of that he just if he was annoyed about something or he just say things straight you know and there’d be meetings on the street you know were as you do you need street meetings to work out the practicalities of living together or planning actions or to discuss intentions or work things out well Mick was fully part of those and would you now he wouldn’t he wold say what was on his mind and sometimes that would annoy people sometimes disagreed with him erm but it was all open for challenge you know he didn’t see I don’t think he saw himself as in control of anything particularly I think he he gave you know it was a he understood that politically we didn’t believe really er that it was about us all having an equal say in what we did and he understood that I think and respected that and he was also furciferous and you know made sure his point come across very well very eloquent sometimes

*So he what he didn’t have a history of activism he had a he had a kind of life history*

Yeah I don’t think I don’t others others knew him better might might might be able to clarify that but my understanding of Mick was that he you know he came to it from living on the street and what he discovered by the community had settled around him really and come to join them ermm…I mean you know there was there were other characters hopefully people I suppose erm people like Paul XXXX who erm I heard about Paul because simply because he was a fantastic climber, I think he’d been that’s what he did whatever as a hobby or you know some of a form but he’d he was a great climber and some of the more erm not naming Paul as being necessarily instrumental particularly but you know some of the more erm the actions requiring erm some skill to get up diggers or trees or whatever else at great speed or great dexterity he would be there and you know erm it was one those skills shared he was really great in making sure other people knew what they were doing erm so Mick and erm Paul were two of the people that had got up onto Parliament for the rooftop demo for instance erm at the point

*Do you want to talk a little bit about that action?*

Yeah I I wasn’t I’d gone back up to Newcastle I think that point in time I think temporarily I’d gone back up but but there was erm I think I can’t remember very much about it aside from the fact I managed to scale the fences at erm Palace of Westminster and got themselves up onto parliament and they had put a little like banner drop at Parliament which was erm it certainly got people talking about the security at parliament but it put it in the spotlight erm it was always erm there was always a question of how to get how to keep Claremont in the public eye so you know

*And why was that important?*

Because it was a long campaign and erm it needed there was you know I think quite rightly people erm I was never involved in the know the machinery of the campaign so much just being a erm a willing participant and and squatter and whatever in events so I would I would fully take part in or be in street meetings or stuff but in terms of the strategy of the overall campaign and what was being done wasn’t something I was er involved with really erm but the you know being you know there was two strands you had to physically stop the road which is what we were doing on a day to day basis but you need to keep things in the public eye there was a whole lobbying and and there was other you know groups around it like Transport 2000 I think they were called at the time erm so yeah the strategy of campaigning and lobbying and erm getting you know MP’s and various other people to raise questions well getting MP’s to raise questions in Parliament or or generally getting it talked about in the media yeah that was we needed to do it and as I say find new ways to do it so whether it was going down to the top Department of Transport to do a erm trying tan office occupation and a banner drop for instance that was one one thing we did that summer erm

*Was that where you involved in that?*

Well I was not on the drop itself again that was probably a dozen people or so managed to get in there was probably about a hundred and fifty of us or so set off with them or rather they went ahead and we went down to erm be around the bottom and to cause confusion and to generally be supportive we we all got on the tube at Leyton and piled through the ticket barriers got on the tube travelled down got off at St James’s I think walked up to Victoria erm and yeah there there was scaffolding outside the building so I think people were able to scale it easily and and get in there erm and yeah we hung around the bottom and some people talked to the press and some people just sang songs chanted whatever erm

*Can you remember that a particular focus of this project in theory is the history of music, protest music and song and chants so can you remember any of the chants or songs that were sung?*

Goodness me

*Might be a big ask*

I’d love to be able to erm my memory is that the well there must have been the songs were written people actually put pen to paper and and did produce stuff erm I my memories of the music at the time wee it was people were signing suff that was already you know famous protest songs and things like that

*Like what?*

Well sort of Bob Dylan or don’t know who some of quite you know some of great some of it wasn’t so great erm I’d love to be able to come up with some or remember some to sign but I am afraid non spring to mind

*That’s alright maybe something will at some point*

Yeah

*[Laughs]*

I mean just in terms of the music I mentioned there was a stage set up it was a sort of back of lorry erm in the middle of Claremont Road and they’d you know throughout the summer of 94’ at least there was there was like a Sunday evening session music session which would generally be erm acoustic music or just erm just acapella singing with your voice and an occasionally erm some bands would come down and play erm fairly quite amplified music erm and that was great and that was their own stuff erm so erm a bunch of an Australian band who came own they were erm some erm similar people of a similar bunch of guys they had a band called Mutiny erm some of his music I’ve got on tape that they would of played at the road if erm if you wish to hear any of their music if it’s got relevance

*Hmmm yeah definitely*

You can hear what some of the stuff they were singing at the time erm yeah I am sure I can I can think of people who may of payed but yeah

*Okay I am aware of time so I am just wondering the best thing to focus on is erm maybe you can talk a little bit just the daily life of Claremont Road and just try and give me a sense of what Claremont Road was like as a place to live erm*

Yeah erm…I mean day to day erm so we I lived on a house in Grove Green Road there were two houses knocked together and squatted and painted and there was probably about a dozen of us living there and of course the two houses erm we…we got you know you get up in the morning and you hang out for a bit and then you would then venture down the road erm it it really did depend if you knew something big on the agenda that day so you you may know it maybe a day when you knew there was an action of offing so more than a bunch of you would go off where it might be maybe erm you know er a hundred or something like there was a big action planned you’d be focused around getting to that action erm

*And did that were actions taking place you know every day every week or month?*

There would have been actions pretty much actions every day erm of different sizes when I say actions I mean people would people wouldn’t necessarily wait to plan an action with others erm people were we all felt this we felt ownership over what we were doing over the campaign and there wasn’t a sense of we waited for an action to be called by someone else and we would just turn up erm three or four of you might decide ‘shall we do an action?’ ‘yeah’ did you see the sight you know further up the road there’s only security guard on it today lets go in and do that one erm and you’d just go and do that and you might do it for an hour or two hours what have you and and have a bit of fun. A lot of times the police didn’t pay much attention because their resources were diverted elsewhere erm or they just didn’t have resources at all if it was a small enough scale they often they might send someone along in a car to have a look and go away again or something erm

*So what did that entail those those kind of small actions?*

Erm it would be erm it be you might try and get onto a crane or digger you might try and disrupt a cement our which might be a few of you but basically were there were they they were more crucial actions petty strategic ones I mean if you’ve if you’ve got say they were laying the foundations of a road if your on a sight that’s being cleared and prepared and they’re starting to put down some foundation or other kind of works erm if you can stop a large cement mixer from erm from working erm you have completely scuppered the operation because he cement has to be poured once I kind of ready or clearly it will start to harden erm if you don’t so so people erm it I’ve found one of the most scary things actually was watching people, you’d climb up basically if if anyone can imagine a cement mixer you sort of you got that obviously very large egg shaped mixer on the back of the lorry and the right at the end the tip of it at the back is where erm the cement will come out. Well people there’s a ladder up to the top there and a little sort of erm human size whole that cements poured out of well people would often climb up to the top of the ladder and sort of top of a ladder and sort of not quite get into the mixer but get sufficiently near to the hole for everyone safety they had to stop er stop work erm I mean they were tremendous erm actions when they took place they didn’t need that many people to do

*Hmm*

If you could get someone up there on to it the trick was getting into the site and getting as far as the mixer things like cement pours people got security got very wise to it I think and they you know after the first few you know would be on it and try to make sure they were really *heavily secured*

*Hmm*

Erm they they would be locking onto erm so for instance with like hydraulic erm stuff he’s what I remember Mich doing would be to he would get onto you de-lock yourself on to the hydraulics of a cherry picker crane for instance erm no they have to…

*Around the neck or?*

Erm yeah I can remember him doing it around the neck and I do remember one particular time they the driver erm really freaking out because erm I didn’t realise at the time and I still don’t if it true or whether he was just saying to try and get him to de-lock but we wanted them t cherry picker erm and Mick had de-locked himself to the kind hydraulic pipes the apex of the of were the two sort of arms are erm he climbed up it he walked up the length of got onto the vehicle climbed walked up it an and cherry pick a erm de-locked himself to to to the pivot

*He was kind of laying the length of one arm*

Yes

*And then de-locked?*

Yeah erm

*Terrifying*

The guy driving it said if he turned off the cherry picker that the hydraulics would then erm you know the compressed air would come out and the thing would then start to come down and that would that would probably kill the person who was de-locked so he was you know clearly worried about it erm

*The driver not Mick?*

The driver no Mich maybe knew better erm Mick had probably done this dozen of times already but Mick did outwardly display any fear at all about this kind of stuff erm but yeah I mean people could de-lock themselves it could be it could be something you didn’t need didn’t particularly need equipment you could have a whole mix you know there’s a whole range of types of action from very mild disruption so sitting in the road if you knew stuff was coming down and you could be fairly easily moved on by the society to choose kind of actions were you would stop a cement pourer or or get onto a cherry picker or or climb aboard a digger or something and work would have to stop a real range of things. As I say I mean the day to day thing could be a large action were more planned events were taking place or something were a bunch of friends would decide to do an action. Erm on element which I remember being never present through the summer was the whole tension around lunch hours, so this was this whole thing of this this sense of erm people need to be doing stuff not just coming to kind of smoke weed or get drunk or whatever I mean people there was a kinda of concern in the campaign that erm for all the positive aspects it was attracting in people, people were coming from around the world and particularly around Europe other activists in Germany France whoever would come into join and we lived with a couple of German guys for instance who’d come over too they heard about it and just wanted to be part of it they came to join the campaign for a little bit erm people were coming…there was also it attracted who about the parties or maybe on a Sunday or something and they came down for a party and liked it and decided to stay or decided to keep coming bac and they didn’t have a great deal of interest in keeping it self-sustaining so in terms of didn’t have a great interest in contributing to the up keep or taking part in the action they would just like to hang out in the ambience of the thing. So there would there was a tension around how to deal with that you know people didn’t want to police people people kind of understood that look you know its first of all we all have down time erm but we also we don’t necessarily have to police how choose to hang out but equally people coming along it’s a bit of drain of resources and it was also a wider undertaking that we that we got which was you know for all of our wonderful community living in this kind of island of you know not tranquillity but you know this self-supporting place we’d face each other and erm food as by contribution only and and whatever else we looked out for each it attracted people who had acute needs out there whether they were dependency problems or mental health problems or whatever else you know wider society was looking after people these people and you know people were gravitating to us because frankly we were the only people down there that would actually look out for them or pay them attention or live with them kind of you know erm but that brought it owns tensions I mean we we the folks that campaign shouldn’t we wouldn’t of been we weren’t there for social work either you know to be very hard headed about it it had a you know the plan was to stop a road being built and we couldn’t lose the focus on that either.

*So how was that tension managed?*

Erm well it was not managed very well often erm sometimes resulted in arguments people you know Mich get frustrated as well erm he’d have it out with people and so you know people weren’t pulling their weight or whatever that that would lead to tension about well is it right that we you know we try to morally force people take part in action there was we were all I think it was you know there was a big age range of people and a big set of experiences erm being quit young and inexperience’s myself I found it I found it difficult to [sighs] to quite know how to deal with it myself you know how I could see that I didn’t like the idea there’s a strong moral compulsion to make people do things but equally I could see that it was taking away from the resources and the energy people had an I didn’t want to that to go either I really battled XXXX erm I think people we we just you know we just got on with stuff people let stuff go erm erm…I mean it kinda expected that went on to a certain extent rally erm we were never going to try to you now force people to do stuff or erm guilt tip them or whatever. I am sure I am sure there was a little bit of that went on an individual level though so

*And in terms of you’ve talked about the café and the ways in which you had t be self-sufficient and look after yourself what about kinda of emotional needs you did say we had to look out for each other’s emotional needs. But I was wondering was that was there a kind of were there structures for supporting and you know and things like burnout or emotional the emotional stress of that level active political protest?*

I didn’t I don’t so much about structures I think there was probably an awareness erm, How did it manifest itself? I mean it was it was on a more practical level people just kind of looked out and got an if you living with people all the time you get a sense if someone’s getting to the end of their tether

*Hmm*

And you know it would just be about you know sitting down with someone as a friend and you know you know counselling all that happened to be sometimes we’d sometimes things would flair up in a meeting where someone’s done something and there’s a big discussion about it and you know we all try to I think it was nice meetings were good outlets for erm tensions to come also frustrations about maybe what people were doing or or it might have been ore sort of political like I really don’t think we should of said that or done that you know who gave you the permission to say hat on T.V or or something.

*Hmm*

Much more mundane things like you know lunching it or or someone was tears the other day did know one notice or look out for them or whatever erm one I me one vene springs to mind which summed summed up the social the solidarity for me was erm er a guy called Barney who lived down the campaign for a bit erm really camp guy overly camp guy kind of brilliant persona really funny guy er, he erm he was started getting when when at the end of Claremont Road when thee erm when three houses at the far end of Claremont Road were were taken and demolished there was a building site down at the bottom there so we would go down to the sight every so often anyway this particular end of the sight Barney got some homophobic abuse I think one night from some of the night shifter security down there and he was quite devastated by it all and er weee all discovered the next day what had happened

*What had happened?*

I think it was more more sort of name calling really erm just making him feel you know really kind of er it was kind of of look they’re on our street this our street I can’t just I am not you know I feel really like it’s like they’ve come into my house kind of thing and started abusing me you felt you felt there wasn’t many people around and I think he felt quite intimidated and quit you know just ab bit like you know you can’t say that to me you know it just really not on. I mean I don’t think it didn’t come to anything physical it was just words

*Hmm*

But he was she was pretty hurt but it all

*Hmm*

Erm he quickly got over it but you know it was erm we went to it was kind of very brief discussion we all all the men agreed that we would go down on on I think it must have been towards the end of the week, Saturday was coming up and we just you know erm we all decided to raid the clothes rail and and dressed up various women’s clothes and stuff dresses and to to you know just real kind of ostentatious stuff so all the men dressed up as women and went down and kind of gave a bit of made the security squirm rally, we went down with Barney and just we all just pumped it up really but loads of were down there and people you know were terrible put on bad makeup and whatever else it just felt like one thing you know it was just saying to Barney and anyone else really that known one can get can be singled out for intimidation or erm just being mean to without the rest kind of coming down ad saying those people that’s really not on so yeah it was just a really lovely gesture of solidarity that we had a great fun party out of it aswell

*And was Barney there did he?*

I think Barney yeah Barney was down there yeah so yeah that summed up a nice occasion

*How’re we doing?*

Its kind of kind of time I think erm

*Its time okay*

You have a few more minutes to round off any bits so

*I just wanted can I just ask the final question I mean it could this obviously this could be a huge question but if you can just maybe sum the erm impact that Claremont Roads had on the rest of your life? [laughs]*

Oh an easy one

*[Laughs]*

Erm

*What are the kind of legacy is that period for your life he can just say that in a sentence [laughs]?*

No I I think I ca because it’s as well not a sentence but erm…it showed me how amazingly and creative and imaginative political change can be erm after that after that kind of period erm of you know the next few years going towards the late nineties erm in a number of respects politics became pretty boring and mundane and fairly formulaic erm for me in terms some of the stuff I was involved in erm and I think probably I mean it really I think I realised pretty quickly that any you know trying to change whatever it is your trying to change it needs to be it needs to be about erm aww. I said I could try and some it up let me see, it needs to involve the whole self you know if you if you can erm if you can you can change minds by just by by demonstrating there no I say demonstrating I don’t mean in terms of a demonstration I mean in terms of showing people how alternatives erm it was I found that for it to be sorry I am incoherent

*No its fine*

…Okay so I suppose about you know I think if there one thing it showed me is you know diversity of tactics in terms of what you do that you know if your going to change you need to have the most employ any and every form of tactic if you like and every everything needs to be allowed and everyone needs to be accommodated if your going to change you know the world and change minds erm everyone needs to be involved in that and there was no sort of clearer erm example of everyone being involved and and many tactics being employed and all voices being and you know Claremont and the M11 link road so I think that’s that’s really I can’t think of a more intense intensely erm interesting period were I learned so much in such a short time from that period an d seeing so much ingenuity about how to stop what we might call progress in invert comers erm taking place all the elective mind working out clever tactical ways whether its digging tunnels or you know putting you had into cement so it hardens you can’t get take off a house or or somebody incredibly imaginative barricades erm all to all to stop you know to prevent communities being devastated yeah I think I just found it the most amazing time

*Great okay thank you every so much*

No worries

*I am going to turn it off unless you have any final words*

Er don’t think so

*Okay*

Thank you

[End]

**Interview Details**

**Name of interviewee: Dermot Morrow**

**Project: Voices of Leytonstonia**

**Date of interview: 11/11/15**

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**Venue: Interviewee’s Home**

**Name of interviewer: Polly Rodgers**

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