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*OK, so, to start with, can you tell me your full name please?*

My full name is Richard Matthew Forrester-Paton. Forrester-Paton, yeah. We usually use Paton. I say ‘we’, I suppose I mean my immediate family, but Forrester-Paton is the double barrelled full extent of it.

*Can you spell it, the whole…*

F-o-r-r-e-s-t-e-r hyphen P-a-t-o-n. If you’re going to get all exact about dates of birth and everything, you probably er, would like to know that I was born Kenneth, but when I was 6 or 7 I decided I was uncomfortable with my name because I didn’t know anyone else called Kenneth , so for sort of – I was going to say non-conformist reasons, but it’s not, it’s for very much conformist reasons, I changed my name to a name that I thought was more normal and changed my name to Richard and wouldn’t answer to anything but Richard and that has stuck.

*Ok, fair enough, and what was your date of birth?*

Oh, er, it still is the 1st of March 1977 (both laugh)

*1st March 1977, born Kenneth, known to the world today as Richard. Brilliant, and today’s date is 18th December 2015. And we are in Richard’s house in Walthamstow. So, to start with can you just tell me a little bit about your grand-parents?*

Right, well there’s two sides and they’re a bit different. My mother’s side…her… my mum’s dad was Irish and he came over to… he must have come over in about the 40s, anyway, to Lancashire, round about Wigan I think, and he was a security guard. I think he came from a family of pro-English Irish. I think they tended to be policemen and maybe security guards, it was a very large family, and I think they had a troubled family life with a possibly over-bearing father, and so that family scattered to the four winds and there’s some distant cousins all around the world, but he came over, and ended up in Lancashire. My mum’s mother, Ethel, was basically broadly from the north of England, I don’t really have any detail but there may be a connection in Northumbria, anyway, she was lovely, Ethel, and um, very humble and working class. Um, and, so that’s my mum’s side, it’s basically the more sort of, humbler, ordinary sort of side, whereas my dad’s is kind of bourgeois, um, my dad’s parents both went to Oxford, and so did my parents, but my mum was the first of her side to go to university, and … yeah, so… my dad’s side, they’re religious, my dad’s dad was a kind of a missionary, he was a missionary, and my dad was born in Ghana because they were over there doing religious stuff, and my dad pronounces that…although that’s all a bit…er… unfashionable, um these days, apparently they were quite social justice, and my grandmother helped spread contraception around west Africa. Um…Church of Scotland, Presbyterian, now and again my dad will attribute something like his discomfort with wasted food to his Presbyterian upbringing, um, very moral, you see, and I think basically in terms of family culture, obviously a bit more seems to derive from my dad’s side than my mum’s, in terms of the family I grew up in.

*So you’re saying your up-brining was more bourgeois than working class?*

Oh yeah, I mean, my mum went to University, as I say, she was the first of her lot, and she kind of got, well actually, she didn’t have a job when we were first growing up because she was a mum, but she sort of, she went back to work eventually and she was head of suicide research in the prison service, it was sort of the field of mental health, but I mean if you come from approximately a working class, lower middle class upbringing, then you go to university, you don’t kind of stay in the same kind of milieu as you began. And indeed my mum didn’t, so yeah. My dad got a job at the Open University, and hence I, we – my sister and my two brothers – grew up in Milton Keynes. And my parents still live there.

*And did your parents meet at university?*

Yes, they did.

*And what were they studying?*

My mum did English at St Anne’s, and my dad did PPE at New College, and I believe they met in some kind of third world society, type do goody thing. And…what was I going to say? Yeah, there’s a line in…is it Libby Purve…Purvis…on radio 4…Libby Purvis, she’s a bit annoying to be honest, but there’s a line in her autobiography referring to my mother, who she was an early tutorial partner with. She said ‘I went in to the first tutorial at Oxford’ – she also did English at St Anne’s – ‘I went in to the first tutorial at Oxford, and there was this dour, clever little northern girl’ (both laugh)

*That’s a claim to fame!*

So that’s my parents.

*So then you came along in 197-*

1977

*7. And your parents at the time were living in Milton Keynes?*

Actually to be fair, we weren’t. I have no memory of it, but I was born in Cambridge, on Mill Road, so this was obviously pre-open university, pre-OU. Yeah, I think my mum might have been a mental health nurse at the time, and my brother probably has some early memory of Cambridge I think, anyway, but when I was, I think months old, we went to Milton Keynes and they got a mortgage, and that’s where we grew up, and as I said, that’s where they still are for the time being.

*And your dad was working at the OU, as…what was his…?*

Still is, just. Um, nowadays he’s a professor of social enterprise, but basically as I was growing up I was aware of him being a senior lecturer, in the business school.

*And your mum was not working when you were little but then, went into…*

She went into temping for various jobs, I can’t remember…she ended up in the prison service, did she do anything significant before then? Stuck in my mind…prison service…she may have had one or two…oh, Institute of Psychiatry she worked in for a bit in Decrespeny(? – 0.08.10) Park.

*Ok, so what are your early memories of Milton Keynes and growing up in that area?*

Er, it was quite wholesome, quite nice, really, um, people ask, oh, Milton Keynes, isn’t that a bit weird? But it sort of depends, well, firstly it’s not weird, because if you grew up in it, it’s normal, and second of all, we were close to the northern edge of Milton Keynes, I mean there’s lots of oldish bits of Milton Keynes, and we were in a at least partly oldish bit, we were on the edge of New Bradwell, which is going down and then, onto the northern edge which is actually a small river. I think it’s the Great Ooze, isn’t it? And then you sort of wander up into Wolverton in one direction, or along the cycle track, the railway walk, to Great Linford in the other direction. So it’s all sort of fairly pleasant and local, bit of a community. When I was older…ok, you’re doing the whole early like, so I tell you what, I didn’t get on with going to school. When I was very young. I think, I’m not quite sure because it’s obviously in the mists of time for me, but I think I found it quite traumatic, being separated from my mum and being in this sort of bureaucratic environment, where people were being marshalled according to imperatives that I really sort of couldn’t make head or tail of, and being shouted at for things I’d not really grasped what I was supposed to have done, and it all seemed horrible and random. And, I remember a nice teacher and a less nice teacher. I think when I was first there, there was a Mrs Downy, who was actually quite a sympathetic individual, but then she turned out to have been on a long exchange from Canada, and then the original teacher came back, and she was less sympathetic, and I found it all a bit frightful. And I remember going to Bletchley Leisure Centre on a kind of day trip to see…what was it? Tara and Her Amazing Animal Band, something or other…and I remember my mum actually being in the audience, because she’s sort of come along, but she wasn’t part of the school party exactly, so I sort of wanted to go to her, but couldn’t. My mum sort of looked at me like, I’m sorry, there’s nothing I can do! And I was looking as though through a looking glass, and I was like, but that’s my mum! And then I couldn’t, because I in in this invisible bubble of school, where I had to obey different laws, and anyway, it was frightful. And I think at some point they sent a child psychologist in to observe me and he reported that I was very withdrawn and sort of absent in my own mind. Absent from the lesson and not responding. I don’t know. Anyway, they did take me out of school for a couple of years, well in the end it turned into a couple of years. Took me out of school. Educated at home. My mum who earlier had been involved in the la lechle – I think she was the leader of the local la lechle league chapter, which is a breast feeding support group, um, in Milton Keynes, it has various local groups I think, so she’s been involved in that, and then at this stage she was involved in organising Education Otherwise, which is a sort of network for parents who are educating their children at home, out of school, so then…and I had, yeah, a sort of network of friends and one good friend Ruen who I’d met in Pepper Hill, which was the school at the bottom of my garden, the primary school which I was sort of taken out of. And I was also good mates with twins, David and Laurie, from down the road who were in a housing co-op not Spencer Street but The Laurels, a house just on the high street actually.

*The Laurels?*

The name of the house was The Laurels. And it’s a big red brick house, a bit like our house, but this was a multiple occupancy… The Laurels was a multiple occupancy housing co-op, and it’s just like a skip away, a hop and a skip away from Spencer Street, which is the other big housing co-op, bigger housing co-op, um so I was good friends with them, and they must have been educated out of school at the time as well, I think we were all sort of hanging around together for that reason, and then at some point – I tell you what else we did together, we learnt the piano by the Suzuki (sp? – 0.12.50.6) method, so we had a piano teacher come round and we sort of rotated people’s houses and we’d learn bits of piano together.

*What’s the Suzuki method?*

The Suzuki method, well it’s named after the Japanese guy that made it up, called Suzuki, and it’s an approach to learning violin or piano, don’t know if other instruments are involved, but it sort of put, I guess, as far as I gather it puts a lot of emphasis on the feel of the music and the textures of the notes and bringing out the dynamics of feeling, so it’s very good in that sense, but it doesn’t sort of teach you to read music, so on that sort of technical backbone of sight-reading, it’s rubbish. So that was a shame, so I’ve sort of come away having sublimated two or three tunes, like etched on my sub-conscious, which I can still play, but other than that it’s all gone, because I didn’t keep playing it after 6 years, that’s how long I ended up learning. It has its strengths and weaknesses as a method. Anyway, at some point some of those friends started talking about going back to school, or going back to school, which at that point was no longer the little primary – I mean there’s a primary, primary, which goes up to about aged 8, and then there was a – I think we’d call it a middle school, and that went up to 12, it went from 5 as well, but by that point this was a different school, it was New Bradwell County Combined School, just by those two housing co-ops where my friends lived, some of them lived, and um, anyway, so I went back into that, following certain other friends, David and Laurie, and Ruen, when I was 8, and then that was that, then I was back in school.

*And so David and Laurie were educated at home but they weren’t necessarily part of your Education Otherwise…*

I think they were part of it yeah, I believe so.

*So were you doing lessons together and things?*

Na, it was pretty informal. I think my dad kept up with a little bit of maths, but the only time we did anything that resembled a lesson was when the education department inspectors came round and we put on a show. I mean we did things, the Education Otherwise group of parents organised activities. I remember going to bring your own food in a picnic in Woburn Woods, and I remember someone bringing coffee and walnut cake which I loved, and I remember going on a trip to the police station and a trip to the post office sorting office. Royal Mail sorting office. Bits and bobs like that, but we did very little formally.

*If you’ve got ay memory of it, can you just paint me a picture of the occasion when the education officer comes round and the performance that you enact?*

I think that I was in the conservatory, and they were just saying, we’re going to have a chat to them…I guess it was both my parents…I can’t actually remember whether one parent was talking to the officer and one parent was teaching me, I think it’s more likely that at least one parent was talking to the officer, but I was sort of notionally on my own studying, as if that’s what I always did. So I was set up on the table in the conservatory, with books of whatever it was – may have been maths – and they went and well, perhaps they blagged the inspector, I don’t know, but I think there was certainly implying that it was a bit more of a structured day, with more formal learning than we actually did.

*And were you aware of that need to…*

Well it was pretty obvious from what they were doing. It was pretty obvious. Yeah, anyway, so they had a sort of chat with him, or her, I don’t know, in the other room, I think, to be honest, my mum in particular and perhaps my dad, would have, ideologically my mum – I’m aware of this now – she puts an enormous value on unstructured play, and very low store on formal learning, whereas now I’ve got the other way, I’m like no, let’s learn Latin!

*So you’ve got a daughter now?*

I’ve got a daughter now, yeah.

*We’ll get to that. Um… I’m interested in hearing all of this stuff about, kind of the conventional world being – it sounds like it was somehow, kind of a bit scary, and a bit overly structured and a bit er…incomprehensible…is that - ?*

Well that think, I think you’re picking up on was when I first went to primary school. I don’t know exactly what it was. I put it down to being an oversensitive, bed-wetting type, and I found that traumatic, at some level. Er…and they took me out of school. After that, I don’t think there was a sense of conventional scariness, it was just fine. We were just educated out of school. By the time I went back to school it was ok.

*And how old were you when you went back to school?*

8.

*8. And you went back to the middle school with Laurie and David and Ruen. And you were all 4 of you together at the same school?*

Yes.

*And how was that? I mean you’ve said it was fine, but do you have memories of the transition going back into structured learning?*

I remember going to the class, I liked it, it was alright. I remember being given my own activities to do now and then because I was sort of a good reader or whatever.

*So you were a good reader? Your education, your out of school time, you were learning, even in an unstructured way?*

I was probably… yeah I must have been, I mean I’m sure I read things. My dad would have ensured that I didn’t get too neglectful of maths, I mean you cover the basics, but I’m sure I’d have done some reading. I probably did some writing. I don’t think I had any problems at school, no. But then to be honest, if you come to a family environment where people are educated and you’ve got books around, then you don’t have to push hard. Um, I remember sort of falling out with Ruen when we were back at school, or his demeanour changed, he was being more narkey. I think when people are sort of fitting into larger social groups and different environments, I don’t know, things changed. And then what happened was that Ruen’s mum married a French guy and Ruen went away to France at some point, months or years later, perhaps a year later anyway, he wrote me a letter saying, oh sorry I was mean to you in school, do you want to come and visit me in France? So I went and annually visited him on the Swiss borders, near Geneva, in a beautiful place. So I did that quite a bit and in the meantime I was very good friends with David and Laurie, we went skateboarding together, and also a guy called Bootsy, Nigel Large, very charismatic boy.

*Who were Ruen’s parents?*

His Mother, when I first met her, she called herself Julie, which again is probably a conformist move, a bit like mine, but her name’s Guilare (sp? 0.21.03) and she was of Turkish Cypriot stock, and Ruen’s dad Danny…

*Danny…*

Danny…Smith.

*Danny Smith! Long grey ponytail.*

Long grey hair. Now he subsequently got together with Val.

*Yeah, yeah, yeah, and he lived in our housing co-op for years. Anyway, another story. This is…*

Right, yeah. So anyway, that was Ruen’s parents.

*I knew I recognised that name Ruen, I just couldn’t place it.*

Um that was Ruen’s parents. Where did we get up to? I was mates with David and Laurie, we skated a lot, we slept round each other’s houses and we had midnight feasts with Bootsy. Bootsy at one point said, oh, midnight feasts aren’t fun unless Rich is there. It was fun! We’d egg each other on and have a good laugh.

*And you were how old at this point?*

We must have been between 8 and 12.

*And tell me about a midnight feast.*

I don’t know, we’d probably hide things. I can’t really remember to be honest, I think we just sort of you know, just transgressions isn’t it? I tell you what else we did actually, at some point later we threw…on Spencer Street they’d have a box…they had kind of a small holding out the back…

*Hang on, for the sake of the recording, can you tell me what Spencer Street was?*

Spencer Street was the larger housing co-op. David and Laurie lived in the red-brick house which was a multiple occupancy housing co-op on the high street, but spencer street was actually a whole street of former railway cottages. We just knew it as The Street. I don’t think I ever used the term ‘housing co-op’ about it. I was aware that it was a bit different and an interesting mix of hippies lived there, and a white witch at one end and my mum’s old friend who used to bake bread at the other end, and various people that we had more or less connection with, so I knew the street stuck out as being a bit interesting, and different, I don’t think I was aware of such a thing as a housing co-op existing. Anyway, so that was Spencer Street, we just called it The Street, it was a pretty cool place anyway, so um, lovely old cottages and out the back on one side they had, um I think some land which they subsequently sold for more development, for more houses, but it had animals, I don’t know if it had hoofed animals, it had ducks anyway, and chickens, so there was a box , there was a community house, the one house that people didn’t live in, and we went in there and I remember fighting over whether we were going to watch children’s BBC or children’s ITV, with one of the sisters of someone we knew, anyway, on the outside of the community house, which was a house that everyone could use, from the Co-op, for communal purposes, for meetings and so on, and watching TV, and one the outside of the community house they had a box for the duck eggs, I guess that people would go and help themselves, anyway, we helped ourselves, we went and raided it for duck eggs and threw them at cars, at moving vehicles. We did that for a bit, then after I went to secondary school I had a different friend Martin, we got into throwing water bombs at cars, but no, when it was still with David and Laurie, and Bootsy, we got the eggs, the duck eggs, and we had places where we’d lurk and wait for cars to go past and we’d throw them and splat the windscreen. Yeah, that was fun too.

*Ok, so let’s move on to secondary school. That year you went to Stantonbury? Is that right?*

I did.

*Tell me about Stantonbury. Is it an entirely ‘normal’ state school, or is it special in any way?*

It’s very large. It was set up in the 70s, around, well not that much after the New Town of Milton Keynes, and I think there was obviously some sort of progressive ethos when it was set up, the most obvious, emblematic feature of which is calling the teachers by their first names, other than that it really depends… teaching’s just a relationship thing isn’t it? It just depends on your teacher. I don’t know, I wasn’t aware of any particularly progressive doctrine, I just think it was a school, more or less. Yeah, to be fair, it was probably the absence of things like uniform, or certain sorts of disciplinary measurement procedures, so it’s stuff that I might have been aware of had I come from a more conventional school, but as it was, it was a school. Obviously they didn’t do sets, streaming, they didn’t do that kind of thing. It was probably in the curriculum…basically you take your options from what the exam board gives you the option to do, don’t you? But I think for example in history, I don’t think we did much good history. I didn’t learn about a single king, but I did learn about the…what are they called?...the Luddites, and Boys From the Black Stuff we did, and de-Nazification.

*Are you saying that is good, or not good?*

Well I wouldn’t have minded having a bit more of a joined up sense of… a bit more of a sweep. I think they were sort of cherry picking… it’s what I remember anyway… bits that had a certain kind of, sort of, progressive value, like the miners’ strike, and the luddites. Well that’s fine, but it would have been pretty good to learn about the Reformation. There you go.

*I can sense a pattern here, with teaching you daughter Latin (both laugh), and the rejection of unstructured learning.*

I don’t actually teach her Latin. I teach her Old English. So, um, no, yes, it’s true, it’s true, it’s true, what you say. I mean I would learn ballet, but I’d be sodded if I was going to learn interpretative dance. Yeah. Um, that’s true. Alright then where are we up to?

*Secondary school. Stantonbury. Were Laurie and co at Stantonbury with you?*

David and Laurie. As I said, Ruen had already moved to France, or been removed, all be it to a lovely place. David and Laurie, yeah they did, but Stantonbury’s a big school and it’s basically divided into four bits and they were in a different bit. Um, so, and also they sort of…people kind of moving into adolescence, aren’t they? So their kind of demeanour…priorities changed… I don’t know, I think they just got a bit naughtier, and slightly more disaffected with learning. Whereas I was never disaffected with learning. At some point they took up smoking and they were in a band or two, so there was kind of more alternative culture, which is probably kind of cooler than what I was involved in.

*What were you involved in?*

What was I involved in? Just mucking about to be honest. I didn’t…I suppose I neglected to mention, if we’re being completest, the last year of primary sachol, I made some other friends, I was still friends with David and Laurie at that point, but probably more out of school, whereas in school I’d made these other friends, Martin and this guy called Sunny, and we did some other Tom Sayer type naughtiness, like finding our way into the school attic. We could kind of steal away into the music room stock cupboard, all the shelves up the walls you could use as a ladder and get into the attic and at some point we found a tank of water, which we thought from the warning from the head teacher in assembly not to drink the water in the cookery area because it’s from a big tank in the roof, we thought this must be the tank, so then we went and bought loads of green food colouring, and we got a stick and hid it under the piano in the music room so we could stir it in the tank and we were going to do that. Unfortunately, the day to execute the plan came, and then when we went in, we hadn’t waited for the last teacher to go from the classroom down to the staffroom, because this all took place over, I guess lunch time, so she did check in the music room, on her way down and I think she caught sight of somebody and said ‘what are you doing in there?’ and by the time she came into the stock cupboard my feet were dangling from the hatch in the ceiling, so that got rumbled, although they never realised that our plan was to contaminate the water supply (laughs).

*And so you never went back to the plan?*

No, we couldn’t really do that. That was great. So I wasn’t friends with David and Laurie particularly from secondary school, but I was friends with Martin still, and one or two others, I’m not sure what happened to Sunny, but…there’s nothing hugely remarkable, I got on fine in school, I was reasonably well liked. I think my teacher at some stage said, this was at a parents evening, said ‘he’s good, he’s like a swat but he gets away with it because he’s funny’. Which is sort of nice, if not a self-aggrandising thing to remember, but I was alright. I mean, its fine.

*Swotty funny kid.*

Maybe. What else? The thing is, and this is more meat to your purpose, because there’s nothing particularly remarkable about those years, I think towards when I was 15 however, I initially got wind, there was a green newsletter, Milton Keynes area newsletter which I picked up in the library which had listings for events and on it I saw there was an animal rights group meeting, so then I went to the animal rights group meeting and I’d been aware, I think my dad had mentioned there were such things as hunt saboteurs, and you only have to know what the idea of a hunt sab is for it to be extremely beautiful, kind of romantic, just, you know, it’s just a brilliant idea. I was like, brilliant! They do that, that’s amazing! Um, so then I ended up at this animal rights group meeting and I learned that there was a local sab group and that was obviously something I wanted to do, and I was 15 by then, so I started going hunt sabbing every Saturday, I done it for years.

*Tell me about what you remember from your hunt sabbing days*

Well, I’d get up more or less early, from August through to October it was quite early, like really, you could get up at 3, because they go cub hunting, but in the full season from November, it’s sort of a bit more civilised. Anyway, it’s interesting actually, you go out into the countryside in a beaten up old van with an interesting motley mix of people, different sorts of people who are attracted to hunt sab groups, mostly pretty cool , sound people, there was some sort of class war punks, but they were very sweet, brilliant individuals, like more in the South Bucks end of things so they weren’t really in our group, but we met up with them sometimes to kind of go on a regional sab together, especially if the week before someone had got beaten up by a huntsman, then we’d all go and do a show of strength, but we mainly sabbed the Bicester with Whaddon Chase Fox Hunt, which is based in Stratton Audley, just outside Bicester, that’s where the kennels were, but we took up with sabs from Northampton, we were based in Milton Keynes, anyway, that was…I mean, it’s an interesting activity, as a first political activity to get involved in because I was once speaking to an old activist of some description and we were reflecting on our previous involvement and she was saying ‘oh right’, she was talking about street activity, she said ‘you haven’t been involved in a street activity?’ and I talked about hunt sabbing, and she said ‘oh yeah, that is what I call a street activity, you’re going out and there’s confrontation’, you know there’s a sort of physical confrontation in it, and that experience, I don’t know, it must mark you in a certain kind of way. It’s different from marches, to be honest, or letter writing, just as a sort of adrenaline, and risk.

*And do you think certain types of people are attracted to that kind of confrontation, or do you think that once you’ve been involved in it you become slightly addicted to the adrenaline?*

I didn’t have a sense of being addicted, and as for people being attracted to it, um, I don’t know, people get attracted, sort of very…I mean everyone I met through hunt sabbing was pretty cool, but they were quite a range of people, there were some pretty conventional people. There was a farmer from Northants…

*There was a farmer?*

Yeah. I mean it depends what kind of farmer I guess, but you know, he was pissed off with the hunt trespassing on his land. There was a vicar from Swindon, he said ‘Jesus was a law breaker!’ and then there was the sort of kind of feminist punks from Luton, there was various bits of sub-culture.

*Was it overtly radical?*

Do you mean politically radical? You mean ideologically radical?

*What do I mean? Politically radical. Did it feel politically radical? Do you think that the erm tactics…it was more about tactics…*

More about tactics. Ideologically the ethos is more sort of broadly animal rightsish, but even that’s not absolutely…it’s pretty unusual, but there were one or two people who I came across sabbing who ate meat, but by and large people were vegetarian or vegan, so there’s not a sort of rigorous ideology to it, but it was semi-detached from a broader animal rights thing.

*So it didn’t spill over into different political positions?*

Well yes, but not quite directly. I mean it spilled over in the sense that what you’ve got with hunt sabbing is a really sort of cogent tactic, and it’s a thing that works and that everyone can kind of see, and get, see the sense of, because you don’t really need much explaining to you, because if you’re going and intervening in a hunt to save a fox, morally it’s really clear. It’s symbolic, but it’s a clear practical thing, you know, you go and divert the hounds and cover the scent, so we were doing that, and it’s not like something like a squat or a social centre, it doesn’t have a physical base on the other hand, you’re doing it every week, it’s like a fixture, it’s a regular presence, something that people can kind of refer to and go, oh, the sabs, they’re there, and go and find people and so people are drawn to it and then when you’ve got this milieu with people with possibly with radical sorts of sympathies rubbing shoulders, when there’s other things going on at the same time, people then get involved in it, which is sort of what happened to me because as I say I was sort of 15, 16, I hitch hiked for the first time when I was 16 and it was because I was phoning around I guess I was an action junky, I really wanted to go to lots of demonstrations and so I was phoning round trying to go to this one or that one and then there was one I couldn’t get to. I couldn’t find someone that was driving past Milton Keynes up the M1, and it was something called the Meat Free March in Manchester, an anti-meat march and then eventually out of frustration I went to bed, and I hadn’t found a lift so then in the morning I thought oh, I’ll just hitch hike. Because I remember my uncle – oh, that’s the bit of family history which actually I should have – I missed out, but my dad’s brother, speaking of reacting against the family ethos again, that’s another theme, but anyway, so my dad’s brother, from the same sort of Presbyterian parents, my dad’s older brother, he seemed to be the one wayward tearaway, declined Oxbridge in favour of Keele, because Keele was then the sort of radical centre, er, and declined any sort of conventional career, was deeply involved in the 70s counter culture, and goddess feminism and the peace movement, so my uncle Keith, his name was, so he was Keith Forrester-Paton, but then he changed his name to Motherson, and then he was involved in the peace movement, very heavily involved in that and I knew Keith because he came every year with – he was separated from I guess his wife, if they were married, but anyway, he was separated from his ex, and they’d had a daughter, our cousin Katie, and they would see each other possibly once a year, I don’t know, but they’d see each other at our place in Milton Keynes in the summer. They’d come and stay and we’d have a midnight feast, that’s where I really knew midnight feasts from, it was Keith, and it was a sort of a secret that we were inducted into once we’d reached… when I was about 6 or 7 I was first told about this midnight feast, the institution of the midnight feast, which was kept secret from my parents and we’d go and make a bonfire somewhere and sing native American songs that Keith would teach us to do.

*Do you remember any of the songs that you sang?*

They were probably along the lines of…I don’t know because they’ve slightly been overlain by songs from the M11 actually, because they were pretty similar.

*Well the Woodcraft Folk that I’m doing this project with have a particular interest in the songs of the time, so any memories of songs you have is great…*

I think they’re versions of similar kinds of songs, but I think Keith taught us one that was kind of a round, an incantational round – [sings] ‘You can’t kill the spirit, she’s like a mountain, old and strong, she goes on and on and on…’ and it goes round and round. I’m pretty sure Keith taught us a version of that, and some other similar ones. Um, yeah, Keith, I think didn’t have the sort of stability in his life to really er, make a go of family relationships, being a stable father which may have been why he mainly saw his daughter at our place, um, and then later still in life, but by this time we’re kind of grown up, he got really into being a 9/11 sceptic which I’m pleased to say I never succumbed to that. he got really into that. Christ on a bike. And then he died suddenly, this was probably around 2010. I remember thinking it was a little bit too early I think to see the Arab Spring, which he would have been interested by, but I guess it was about 5 years ago and then some of his 9/11 sceptic mates were suspecting foul play which was entertaining, but he did die suddenly, something on the brain, something quite unusual. But um, yeah, so that was Keith, but basically, to tie it back to me, there was a intimated worry on the part of my parents that I might end up like Keith, praps I have, I don’t know, but I think intellectually I’m slightly more grounded, but I don’t know. There you go. With respect to Keith.

*And that worry was based on your involvement with hunt sabbing?*

What was it based on? It was based on…probably not specifically that I went hunt sabbing, my parents probably thought it some ways that’s a wholesome activity at some level, you know, it takes you out into the countryside, you’re doing something focussed and morally committed, they weren’t pleased when I went sabbing angling, it’s a bit like errrrr… yeah, why were they concerned about that, and when? I’m not sure, but I think it’s a square peg thing, and about reacting against authorised stuff and doing things to the extent that you might cut of your nose to spite your face kind of thing.

*It’s interesting, because your parents were clearly reacting – maybe reacting’s the wrong word – but they weren’t conventional people by the sounds of it…*

They weren’t wholly, they were by no means card carrying hippies, but there was an air of alternative hippidom…

*And there was Education Otherwise, and they were intellectuals by the sounds of it, so there was some kind of rejection…*

But they were very stable, and I think actually, on my parents’ part, the common thing for both of them was that neither of them came from really intact family homes. My dad’s parents were probably in some sense stable, but my mum’s parents split up, and my mum’s sister, my aunt Susan, I think never saw her dad again, I think she came to Patrick’s funeral but I think she just sort of cut him out, which I think my mum gave this heroic speech at her dad’s funeral, which she wrote because she was trying to reconcile competing impulses and being true to not closing over what she saw as his problems, but also trying to honour his memory at the same time. It was a great speech, but she used the phrase ‘it was very difficult growing up seeing my Mother castigated by him’, so that basically implies some level of violence, and so that was a broken home, and my dad’s home was not broken, but his older sister, was my dad the youngest? He may have been, I think there were three, so he may have been the youngest, so his older sister, Helen my aunt, I think was in therapy because I think they were more committed to the church, well, at least they voted with their feet. They stayed in Ghana and my dad was lodged in a place called Cunningham House which was a bording school for children of church people who were going off doing church business, missionaries I guess, so that was a thing. It’s a recognised thing I gather, but it’s not something I know anything about, but the offspring of missionaries or people who are doing that activity abroad, sort of palm off the kids on an institution. Which is probably a little…I don’t think my dad had any complaints of it as an institution, but possibly all three of them felt a bit abandoned, that’s certainly reading between the lines a bit, but that’s what I’ve got wind of, as I say, with Helen being peeved about it. I think the kind of thing with my mum and dad was that they got together and they put an enormous premium on a stable family home, which is what we had.

*So back to the round peg, square hole…theme, erm, what were you saying?*

I was just saying, I’m not sure exactly what it was *apropos* of, or at what point, there was this sensible concern that being like Keith, or ending up like Keith, is somehow batting against anything conventional in a way that’s sort of self-defeating because it doesn’t let you fit into anything, and I don’t think they were worried simply because I was going on demonstrations, and to be honest, I mean when I started – I mean we’re up to road protesting I think – when I started, there were quite a few people, some of whom you may have spoken to, prominent activists, who one way or another, some of them because they got involved in it because…there were quite a few people that dropped out of their studies, university courses, and some of those people kind of got involved in it because they were in houses that were condemned for one or another road scheme, not just the M11, and then they’d become deeply involved in it, and other people just kind of got involved in the counter culture and found the protests, but either way, there was a fair handful of people I came across who dropped out of university courses, and at that point I was slightly younger than them because I was really doing A Levels, first road protest I went on was the summer just before my A Level, and the point I’m making was that I never had any thought of dropping out of formal education, I was totally on that track. However, afterwards, at the end of university, is another matter. I never had any sort of a plan for what I was going to do after, er which is probably a failure of sorts, it would have been prescient to you know, but erm, have a sense of a career, but as it was I was doing education because that’s what you do, and you sort of at leave have that under you, but I had no sense of needing to do a better…build up a sense of being able to do a thing in order to get money for it.

*Do you think your involvement in the road protest scene contributed to that attitude?*

I think it probably went hand in hand with it, it’s probably not the fundamental driver. It’s quite weird, when I look back there’s kind of several things, I mean to be fair, first of all in the political milieu there’s sort of anti-capitalist ideology and when I was in university and we’d come across something like the Industrial Society, Cambridge Industrial Society, which is for people who want to make links early with generally blue chip big businesses, with a view to getting recruited when they graduate. No at the time I’d been very sniffy about that, I’d kind of poo pooed it, whereas now I can kind of see, oh well, I can kind of see why it would have made a certain sense. So I’d have poo pooed it, and yes, that’s certainly given some force by the sniffiness about capitalism in the radical milieu, I think there’s already a… by no means a whole sale anti-capitalism, I’m talking about my family, there’s by no means a whole sale anti-capitalism, although to be fair, I mean what my parents’ views were in the late 60s when they were students, is maybe something else, because then you’ve got maybe a time which is the late 60s, and they were possibly more radical, but my dad’s a liberal really, and I’m only talking about a very informal sort of sense of ethos really, an informal discomfort with capitalism, which at the level of values that certainly exists in my family, as I say, my dad’s side has this Christian moralism, and it’s a socially minded moralism. So, there’s that, but what that means in most cases is that people end up being academics, or going into the arts, or public service professions and so forth, which is what my parents did, and broadly speaking my brothers and sisters have done. I then got involved with people with a much more radical posture and I found that very cool, and I got an enormous amount of meeting from it personally, it does not deliver you to a place where you’re then ready and able to make a living, that’s true. By default, and that’s not something, being young, that I had a great sense of being a problem, or foresight around.

*Yes. So let’s go back to your first road protest. [at this point the tape is stopped and the interviewee gets a glass of water. The recording that followed was wiped because the recorder fell over; the section lost was re-recorded at a later date and has been added on to the end of this interview]*

…

*The bender site…*

I can’t locate it.

*Claremont Road I think?*

No. There could have been benders here and there, but there was something called The Bender Site, and it was basically at least one houses’ back garden, it could have been in Leytonstone, I mean things moved, the work moved down the path of the proposed road which went from Redbridge down Eastern Avenue, Wanstead, Cambridge Park Road, and thence to Leytonstone, and then to Leyton. At some point it hits the Greenman Roundabout, I’ve forgotten where that is.

*Its further north I think.*

Towards the Epping Forest end, isn’t it? But now I’m pretty much living near all this stuff, and I’ve had cause to, you know, pass by bits of the route, it’s not far from Stratford, so I’ve found myself on bits in Leyton or Leytonstone and there are bits I half remember, but I don’t remember… actually Leyton tube where the street rises up and goes over the railway, that’s a clear memory, but I can’t then remember which ways I walked, I don’t always remember the geography visually as much as I thought I might have done, but some of the road names…Grove Green Road…I remember very well, and then there was a squat on somewhere called…I can’t…it begins with an F…

*Fillibrooke Road?*

Fillibrook Road! That’s right!

*Monstonia?*

I wonder if that’s where the bender site was

*Well that’s just behind Claremont Road [this is actually incorrect, Fillibrook Road is further north east than Claremont road]*

I do remember Fillibrooke Road. And I remember a squat, I wonder if it was just somewhere that happened to be a squat, rather than somewhere that was condemned for the road, it was covered in political graffiti, to which I added an animal liberation graffiti in amongst all the other graffiti, punk graffiti… I remember a guy called Noel, with…big fat dreads, sweet guy, I wonder where he was from. Er… I remember staying in these places.

*So this was post Wanstonia?*

I guess so, by now we’re probably talking about post Wanstonia, because that happened in like February 16 or something, quite early, so I was going down to the M11 quite regularly by then, but what happened in March was there was something called Operation Roadblock. I remember Roger being involved in that, and organising it, so there was supposed to be a rota to stop work every day, so I must have gone down as often as I went down, I can’t remember, and in those days it was fairly free of repercussions. You could go and jump on a bulldozer, sit on it for a day…that’s where I met Kath from Leeds, I remember talking to her, just sitting on a bulldozer, Kath is involved in Earth First! And not long after that, well same year really, anti-Criminal Justice Bill campaign… I got very involved in that as well. God, it was part of the same period of time, because then I started commuting not only to the M11, but also to Brixton, so I was basically either in North east London at the M11 squats and protests, or a place called Cool Tan Arts which was a big social centre squat in an ex-dole house on Cold Harbour Lane. Now demolished. Erm apparently John Major had signed on there once anyway but it was an amazing sort of counter-cultural sort of fixing point and there were enormous parties there which at that point I just didn’t it didn’t occur to me the dance but that was when I went to university and took drugs and then went on dancing but…

*[Laughs]*

Before then but by that point I was just politics you know what I mean this kind of morally driven whatever so then but I would go there and I’d stay up all night sticking you know like copying out lists of Charter 88 groups or doing something erm and

*[Laughs] at the parties?*

Well it was a benefit party I wasn’t at it, I was in the office doing political stuff and then errr…What was I going to say so that was yeah actually it came a bit a bit sort of dual focused must sort of political er horizons in London was in Brixton or the M11 or going between the two so in March there was a Operation Roadblock there was a lot of things, what I really remember and what’s the kind of evocative soundtrack to that period is erm is er The Levellers album what’s it called? The Weapon Called the Word I came across that and I remember first of all it was at a huntsab party so I did go to a party it was in erm the the lovely huntsab called Elspeth her parents lived South Bucks, Kings Langley or somewhere and we ended up we had a party there once and we were crashing out on the floor and it was all just cool and I remember like hitchhiking down from Milton Keynes after it was already dark it was probably winter it was the hunting season and hitching around the M25 which you never do because terrible road for hitching. I managed to get a lift just round a little of the M25 and then up to Kings Langley and then then we just kinda hung out and had a party I didn’t drink then not because I was pro-actively nonconformist because I didn’t see any point in it you know I didn’t have any conformist impulse either I just thought this doesn’t taste nice but it’s why I don’t drink [laughs] another mistake but erm

*[Laughs]*

[Laughs] and then erm I remember anyway er free associating but basically I remember like one of the sabs putting on the record by the World Freak Show by The Levellers and there was again it’s like the force of a rumour it’s like you kind pay attention to what other people paying attention too and your like ‘wow okay this is the thing, this is the thing you know’ so then and then I probably everything I think I got into in music was written on the on a Milton Keynes library card for them to order to the library then I ‘d go pick it up. So I must of got that er the Weapon Called the Word album which is a very sort of erm well it’s very… quite accomplished music to be honest erm and it’s got you know it’s kind of hugely driven by this kind of mythic vision erm and quite naive in its way but kind of beautiful so if your seventeen sixteen seventeen it’s probably just the ticket and and for going down the M11 and I just remember those kind of tunes very sort of emotional tunes just I mean I could probably play them now it would come rushing back still but erm and that’s what I was kinda playing in in when I was commuting by hitchhiking the M11 I think that’s what was going around my mind, erm yeah…where are we up to? Operation Roadblock to be honest my my my memory of all this I can do a certain amount of chronologising saying this happened then happened then, but mostly nit isn’t chronological mostly its visual images and bit of kind of its images and and bits of emotion here and there

*Where you ever did you spend any time on Claremont Rd?*

Yeah I did I went there a lot what I missed out on was eviction because of being a lot of false alarms

*Hmmm*

Crying wolf so at some point I think I’d just got back from somewhere else and then like the umpteenth yet another kind of alarm call came saying ‘it’s going to be eviction tomorrow’ and I just kinda thought ‘blimey I dunno if I can be faffed’ it was also because the assumption was that when they evict they’re going to come early and I thought am I really gonna try and get down there this evening because it would be too late to go in the morning

*Hmmm*

And so I didn’t go that evening and therefore I thought I am going to go in morning because it would be too late if it happens anyway and actual fact they didn’t move in dead early they didn’t do some kind of dawn manoeuvre I think they came I could of got up early and gone down so anyway then I heard it wasn’t it hadn’t been a false that alarm that time and erm and they’d come later in the day but that was that. So I did go down but it was really just to kind of by that point you’d have to be a bit of a ninja to kind of break through the police find a way through the police lines or probably bailiff lines or maybe police lines I can’t remember, but erm, yeah probably police, so but it would very difficult to get in the eviction if you hadn’t started there

*Hmmm*

So I just kinda went down to say hello erm yeah

*And did you know did you have any involvement with any of the residents around of Claremont Rd or Colville Rd or?*

Well I didn’t know before it was squatted

*No but after after*

…I remember Dolly was oh you mean

*Yeah like people*

Afterwards

*People like Dolly or Richard Leighton or I mean did you know…?*

I don’t think so

*Did you know Dolly?*

I knew to say hello to

*Hmmm and Richard Leighton doesn’t ring a bell?*

The name definitely rings a bell did he fix bikes, am I getting him confused with old Mick?

*Yeah probably getting him confused with old Mick I don’t I don’t know*

But to be honest these names it its really clear from the way people have spoken and also from the buzz around the cremation of old Mick

*Tell me a bit…*

Well I didn’t go to it you see but I was at the…Strawberry Fair on Friday night one year whenever it happened and I and there was

*Strawberry Fair in Cambridge*

Strawberry Fair in Cambridge yeah erm on Midsummer Common and I’d gone there and I was kind of thing with Strawberry Faire anyways because a lot of kind of er counter-culture type friends went to it but also… this is probably after I’d graduated but I was obviously sort of…

*You were at university at in Cambridge?*

I was in University of Cambridge yeah which I remember that summer that nineteen ninety four summer ninety four being in the office of the Freedom Network which was the anti-Criminal Justice Bill networking hub based in this cool town art centre in Brixton on Coldharbour Lane and I remember filling in my ACAS and filling in my Cambridge application form I remember doing that. Now I then went to Cambridge in nineteen ninety six and by that point sort of road protesting was still going but it had basically got to point of Newbury just about to move into the direct action phase at Newbury in between you’d had sort of Bath Easton bypass you’d had some other stuff which I was not involved in like in Glasgow there’s a Pollock something or other and the M74 whatever it was there was road trip it was too far I didn’t go to that erm probably some other actions here and there, and I’d first gone to Newbury what it was probably the summer of ninety five it was long before the actions started I just remember it was a sort idyllic place in we went swimming I think in the river so that was Newbury and then and then I went ended up going to Cambridge oh it was late ninety five that’s right, so I went in October ninety five and then January ninety six my second term at Cambridge that was when erm…the work started on the Newbury bypass and therefore direct action phase of the protest began and I was a bit like ‘oh god what am I doing at university I should be protesting’ so I felt a bit like one of those kind of people who dropped out to go protesting not that again it didn’t cross my mind to actually drop out but I was a bit conflicted erm

*What were you studying?*

Eng…well I went up actually to do Philosophy and then for whimsical reasons I changed to English erm and we did we sort of organised buses like mini buses to go twice a week between Newbury and Cambridge and we set up a camp and tried to keep the camp going just with people from Cambridge and Newbury bypass there was so much such a long about nine miles I think it was so there’s plenty of trees to live and places to squat but it was winter erm and errr… I that actually was I think that work in evictions and the direct action thing was pretty much done busted flush by about Easter so it was fairly sort of intense period of winter turning into spring

*Hmmm*

And because that was really the culmination of the whole kind of anti-road movement trajectory there wasn’t really anywhere for it to go after that if that would in any sense would maintain a sense of momentum. I remember quite a bit of naval gazing at sort our Earth First! meetings and gatherings about where do we go what we do because you’ve got his thing that kind of really worked and got enormous amount of attention and just people and involvement and commitment and it had been very dynamic and people had been involved at all sorts of levels and you know it hadn’t been orchestrated particularly there was a kind of a road alert office to kind of co-ordinate things a bit but basically it was a kind of self-sustaining movement it was brilliant and it had involved so many people and found such productive focus and then when it kind of came to a natural conclusion at Newbury I mean it must have been around then when the government announced alright we’re going back down on a lot of road schemes so that was sort of victory so then there was a bit like ‘ohhh where do you go?’ and in a way because there had been kind of an Earth First movement or at least some sense of an Earth First movement beforehand and in fact Reclaim The Streets strictly speaking pre-dates the M11 campaign but obviously everything got subsumed by the M11 because it was this kind of enormous focus and urgency and just things you can do it’s like tactics it’s like hunt sabbing, it’s like ‘oh, right this actually works, brilliant’

*Hmmm*

Erm so after that you’d be like ‘okay what do we do again? What does Earth First so called do?’ and there was naval gazing around that at meetings and in benders and places at gatherings er actually in the London out of the M11 the M11 side of things reclaim the streets was resurrected which was actually did have quite interesting things going on, so that was one of the more productive aftermaths and it was particularly from the M11 er M11 campaign relatively local in terms of where people organising from. erm so yeah because I suppose there was a there was a really kind listen very good erm affinity’s and kind of cliques possibly but you know people had kind of er gelled and knitted together and worked together well from that and so they kind of resurrected Reclaim the Streets and then erm done er which was a sort of Reclaim the Streets was a sort of transport focused campaign to try and it was kind of against car culture so called and ermmm I think basically they hitched a kind of broader anti-systemic anti-capitalist er critique on the back of er complaining about cars [laughs] about too much traffic which was a kind of thing they did and and really the kind of concrete thing they did was erm do sort of erm unannounced street parties trying to take back a road for a little bit like a Temporary Autonomous Zones there called urm taking it back from traffic and er which erm I mean you probably know about this anyway but

*Yeah but I know yeah but the tape doesn’t [laughs]*

Okay so anyway so this is what came out of in in the way the M11 and erm and so the idea was yeah wouldn’t it be great to have a party and er and take back a road for an afternoon and then we can like a kind of beautiful vision of what the street could be about conviviality and people errm mixing and having traffic free environment rather than people trying to get from A-B and live this sort of instrumentalised existence which then seemed to be an expression of capitalist social relations erm so then, so they did that first in nineteen ninety five you see, the first one of those, and because it sort of, the whole gig was, it’s obviously not un-planned, is was very planned, but it’s secret, and you sort of take back the road. Rather than a demonstration organised by the police which would then have all sorts of restrictions on it, it seemed to be this sort of, taking it back, expression of autonomous um, er, resistance to cars, traffic, capitalism. So therefor, what this in practice means is that you’ve got a secret plan which therefor can’t be communicated outside a small bunch of people, um, and then you’ve got a wider bunch of people who are more or less involved because they support the idea of the plan but they don’t know what it is, and then you’ve got the police who are frustrated and anxious, but probably the police may not have been than anxious the first time because they were taken by surprise. The first one was about May the…15th or something, middle of May ninety five, it was Camden High Street, and it was great. Some of the secret plans were really cool. They got two beaten up old cars, drove them into each other as if to make a crash, and then got out and started pretending, the two drivers pretending to fight each other, and then they started smashing up the cars, and then I can’t remember, but music and balloons and other things arrived and they had a street party. The second one was what, only a month or two later in Islington High Street, which is Upper Street, actually, and at that point they got a dumper truck of sand to come and dump it on the highway, on the road, to make a sandpit, so it was all very cool, really, and even some of these ideas have been taken up by councils and authorities doing similar things but in an organised, officially prescribed way. And the one after that, this was in nineteen ninety six, and by this time I’m at university…

*And you’re still travelling back to London?*

What by the time I went to university? Nineteen ninety five was a relatively fallow year for protests, whereas ninety four was incredibly intense, and then I started university…London? Well the M11 Campaign has finished, Cool Tan still existed, the Criminal Justice Bill became the Criminal Justice Act in November 1994, so Cool Tan Arts was still there for a while, I think, I wasn’t going to work in that office, Freedom Network, I'm was still hunt sabbing at least for a bit when I was at university. I remember there was a Cambridge Sab group, we’d go out sometimes and I remember going on one sab in the summer you see, fox hunts were not hunting anyway, but what you did have was mink hunts, and there aren’t that many of those, and there’s one called the Yetney, which is down in Somerset I think, we went on some long journey with the Cambridge hunt sabs to sab the Yetney, and I remember going back to the college bar afterwards and telling people about it. I think my involvement with sabbing must have petered out at some stage. I had about a good 4 years of regular sabbing, 4 seasons. So no, I wasn’t commuting to London. What I do remember about the end of the M11 Campaign was that I was surprised and shocked, after Claremont, because it was like I really didn’t expect it to end. When you’re young you have no sense of the future, but that whole year of 1994 was so intense, and there was so much going on. I didn’t have a sense of it being exceptional, as in, ‘oh this is a busy year’, it was more like, when it came to 95, it was like ‘oh, there’s not much going on.’ But the M11 Link Road, I was so caught up with it and everything that it meant, and I was going down there the whole time and I was meeting people, and it was just an incredibly urgent project, it just sort of represented a lot to me, it was like…it’s difficult to evoke it, but when it came to the end I was basically a bit ‘oh, it’s ended. I didn’t expect it to end’.

*Were you surprised that the road was built?*

No, I can’t have been surprised that it was built. I can’t imagine anyone was surprised it was built. I just think it’s really my personal sense of time. Yeah, I don’t really have a sense of a horizon, a limit. But I remember the last year or two in secondary school, or the last year, of going to expressive arts lessons, I never really did anything in expressive arts, during the lessons anyway, talk about sabbing, because that was what was urgent to me really, and I think going round to the hunt sab parties and getting wind of things…this is really a statement about adolescence really, more than it is about road protest, but getting wind of things which then you’re kind of like ‘ah! Ah! *That’s* what’s important’, there was a band called Blaggers ITA, which I don’t think I listened to, but I saw some of the other punk sabs from South Bucks, they were into them, and I was like ‘ah ha, these are what’s important, ok’, and it’s just kind of following those signals, trying to get to the centre of some kind of milieu, some kind of gesture of refusal, some really kind of cogent stance on the world, I think. So it was sort of a moral quest I suppose.

*I want to ask a complicated question that I can’t quite get my head round about the kind of…like where that moral quest took you, and your relationship to it now…*

Do you mean protesting and what it meant to me and how did it…

*I guess I mean it on different levels, I mean it on a tangible…we’ve got 20 minutes before you have to go…*

Half an hour actually. I need to go have a wee. You compose your question.

*So I guess my question is two-fold, and it’s about where that moral quest has taken you, and where you’re at now, where it took you practically from adolescence into adulthood, and where it took you intellectually, politically, philosophically.*

Yeah, I get your question I think, you mean where did all this lead, but you also mean what have I ended up doing, don’t you?

*Yeah, I mean what have you ended up doing? I mean what happened in the environmental movement? Where did all this lead personally? Where did all this lead politically? And where did all this lead personally, politically, philosophically?*

Well, what happened to me right, I was still very involved…

*It’s a complicated question, sorry.*

No, it’s alight, it’s just different facets. I understand what you’re getting at, but I was very involved in politics and radical politics, for the rest of the 90s. As I said I’d come from a slightly more single issue type animal rights type thing, um, I mean the M11 and the road protest movement, well, that’s kind of eco-radicalism, potentially single issue in a way, but then kind of a hippydom, slightly anti-modernist ethos, well that’s kind of romantic, and that’s kind of beautiful as well, but um, but then you sort of get politics proper, kind of modernist, political ideas, urm, and where did that catch up with us? I tell you when it was, it was in 1996, why? I remember anarchism started being spoken about explicitly, and I’m talking here about a milieu, not really personally, well personally as well, I mean I went to university and started ordering books from the AK press catalogue, which is a sort of anarchist press catalogue, you know what I mean? You’re just kind of hungry for stuff, it’s like, you know, I suppose rather than picking up hints and rumours of what’s important and urgent, with bands and protests, or another bit of the scene, you kind of go, oh, I’ve got a catalogue here. I was being a bit more pro-active I suppose so then I was kind of consuming radical ideas where I could, and as I say, the broader milieu kind of…once the activists…my friend, who I met at university, but had radical involvements in his background, and then he got really involved in Newbury, he was a graduate student, I mean he kind of sent me this cynical email, years later after he’s moved to Israel, and he was going, ‘well, activist gets involved in tree protest, whatever, activist grows up and finds Marx’, and I think he was sort of at a stage beyond that again and being cynical about that, but basically people kind of got this sort of got this libertarian Marxist idiom of talking about capitalism. And…but really, 96, did that happen in 96? Yeah, probably because it was in the wake of Newbury, but the other thing that kind of followed maybe by co-incidence, but followed not far after that, just in the chronology of how things happened, was the following year, again I was probably going to various protests, this was the period when there were a lot of reclaim the streets street parties, right. It was post road protest really, certainly post M11. Street parties were still a thing, the first couple had been in London, 96 there was a really big one. Before that it had all been a bit innocent, but there was a really big one on the M41 in 1996 and after that, although they were being replicated and done in whatever cities, the police were communicating to each other about this is trouble. Anyway, that was the thing that was going on, all these street parties, these kind of impromptu – not impromptu, but kind of, actual staged protest parties, but at some point I got wind of a thing happening in Spain which was organised by Zapatista solidarity groups and it was a kind of international gathering, and I was like ‘oh, shall I go to it?’ It was all a bit kind of last minute I heard about it, what is it anyway? Shall I go down to see what it is? Well I did go down, and I came back with my eyes as wide as dinner plates. I was amazed. It was a 9 day thing, ‘against neo-liberalism and for humanity’ it was billed, and so sure enough there were about 800 Italians there, people from all over the world, every continent…

*What year was this, sorry, did you say?*

July going into August, 97.

*Ok.*

So this was…I tell you what else had happened, is I had been invited, towards the end of my second year in college, when I was studying English, in University, I’d been invited but not forced, to take a year away from my studies, to review my academic motivation, right, this has something to do with politics, but probably also just to do with just being young, and well, I discovered alcohol was nice after all, and drugs and dancing, and basically having fun, so I was busy being adolescent really, fair enough, anyway so I sort of took them up on the offer of taking a year out, that actually became 2 years out for obscure reasons, but anyway, the summer when I’d just sort of left after my second year of university I ended up going to Spain, and that was an amazing experience, and it was just bonkers, because it took place in places all over Spain, it started outside Madrid in a town called Burgos and then different thematic bits of this conference would take place…Andalucía, (XXX@1:27:39), I went to a bit on alternative media in Barcelona, and there were probably fewer than 10 brits there and not all of whom knew each other anyway, but had ended up there but there were a lot of Italians. The Italian radical scene was heavily into Zapatista solidarity so they knew about it, it was part of their head-space, and there were anti-NAFTA North American activists, there were people from Africa – far fewer people from Africa – but there were people from Africa, and I think there were Indian peasant movements, some kind of various…they had some kind of foot in it as well, so there were these networks which just kind of blew our heads off. I mean there were different scenes and realities and different groups. And different experiences like being on this almost 24 hour long train journey ride from Madrid down to Barcelona and journeying through the night, and it’s one of those old fashioned trains with like a corridor and then little bunkers, little cabins, and you’d find a cabin, you’d settle down and relax once you got some private space, and then you’d go and explore, up and down this private train full of, bursting with activists from all over the world, drinking tequila and singing songs and the middle carriage was actually a bar, because it was like a pressure cooker, people drumming and hanging off the ceiling – it was incredible! And another of those train journeys, going all the way down to a squatted farm in Andalucía for the end of it. So that was an incredible experience, absolutely bonkers, so we came back saying ‘oh my god! We were concerned about the Criminal Justice Bill!’ but then it suddenly seemed rather parochial in some ways. The big focus for us in 1994 had been the criminal justice bill and this sort of radical non-Marxist left, right, but in America it had been NAFTA, which had already been much more international, and also about economics, and political economy. So we at that stage, certainly, I mean I think post road protest, there were parts of that milieu that went off into permaculture and other kinds of living in the woods, with a more sort of back to the land kind of ethic, but certainly in the circles I was bound up in, discovered political economy really, and internationalism. We talked about anti-capitalism, and what that led to really was summit hopping and going to Prague and Genoa and causing trouble at those kind of things, which I think was okay, it was a bit like the taste for big, flash point show-down protests, it’s not entirely sustainable, because what do you do? It becomes a bit symbolic. But I went to Genoa and Prague, but before that, actually… the big first summit that was done, I didn’t go to, it was in North America, it was Seattle, but the same year, just before Seattle, and this does follow more directly from re-claim the streets, and therefore the M11, was June 18th big protest come quasi riot in the city of London, and that was where this new anti-Capitalist kind of thing expressed itself. Broadly it was an evolution of the re-claim the streets party, and the tactics and approach to organising it were there. It was kind of secret plan, small group, core group enacting the plan, and then orchestrating, re-directing…this was the basic framework plan from the street parties, was that you had the group in possession of the secret plan, you then had everyone else who was told to go to a point whence they would be directed by signals – like following pink flags, or whatever it was – and that was what happened. It was in the city of London because symbolically, and maybe for more concrete reasons, it seemed to be this high expression of capitalism and the financial sector, and there ended up being a ruck, or certainly there were windows broken. Relatively harmless, but where it really kicked off a bit, it was inside…what was it called? LIFFE? The Futures Exchange. And so some people got in and went up to the top of the escalators before being blocked by security guards. But generally it was a run around the city. Anyway, so the police seemed to have been caught on the back foot that day…yeah, so that was kind of what came out of it in terms of different focusses, and the evolution of that political focus. For me, now I was very much involved in it, and kept up with it and still had the same uncritical belief, broadly speaking at least up to then.

*Sorry, can I just ask a question? I just want to clarify something. You’ve got the tactics, and the practical influence is really clear, but in terms of the theoretical influence, I’m just interested, beyond Marx…was there an awareness of a theoretical influence?*

Well the thing is, no. I’ve probably slightly…by citing my friend’s cynical email, he put Marx into it, right, but what he was putting a definition on, probably correctly, was that yes, that was what we were leaning on, that’s what people were… channelling.

*Consciously or unconsciously?*

Well exactly. People didn’t really talk about Marx. Well, they probably did, but they’d probably have been quite sniffy about him in the milieu that we were in, because it was anarchist. So people were sniffy about the old left, and we thought a lot about ourselves, because we’d had this brilliant road protest movement for a start. And re-claim the streets was pretty cool, and pretty sexy, and then we done the big anti-city protest riot on June 18th and that had got the attention of a generation of slightly older politicos, that were involved in the 80s in Stop the City, and they thought we were a load of fluffy tree huggers, and then they thought ‘oh, right, they’re actually doing something…’ and I remember some kind of conference in Bradford in…ooh, I can’t remember when, well it must have been after 1999, no maybe it was 98. Maybe it followed on from…what I somehow didn’t mention was that reclaim the streets, although organisationally it came out of east London, out of the M11 protests, but it did things like hooking up with the Liverpool Dockers because you had some kind of leftism, I suppose an orthodox leftism in the background, I’m not sure who, because it never really came out in conversations, but anyway, they were consciously trying to make a link between the hippy counter-culture left, which is basically an iteration of the new left, which kind of happens about twice a generation I think, it re-news itself. So you’ve got that, and that new left is brilliant and dynamic and inventive. It doesn’t have much memory, cos it doesn’t really have the institutional capacity to learn, whereas you’ve got the old, more orthodox left, and that has its limits but one thing you won’t say about it is that it lacks a memory. It’s got a very clear memory of its history and its past defeats and victories. So, anyway, so 1996, to go back, this was post Newbury, and obviously a little way post M11 campaign, and around the country, in broader Earth First circles, that was why said about navel gazing gatherings… ‘where do we go from the road protests? What do we find to do?’… But that particular milieu that came out of the M11 campaign, was finding some quite creative things to do. It did the street parties, but it also hooked up with the Liverpool Dockers who were on strike then, so they were deliberately making a kind of link with this kind of more traditional worker’s struggle, and that was cool, so we went up in, I think it was September 96, and occupied Liverpool Docks and closed it down. And the taste of solidarity is very beautiful, it’s brilliant, because obviously the dockers were enormously gratified that these interesting crew of mixed hippies and activists were just, you know, doing it out of political generosity, I suppose, and then that led to a kind of March for Social Justice in 1997, so it’s already becoming kind of focussed on political economy. 1997, and that march, was I can’t remember when…early summer? Late spring? And that was the same year that I went to the Zapatista Encuentro and we came back like evangelists for the international movement against neo-liberal capitalism, so then there was the June 18th thing in 1999, and then there was Seattle that was going on in the background, because I didn’t go to it…and what was your question, sorry?

*My most recent question was theoretical influences…*

Sorry. I digressed a lot. But basically the point is that people talked about Marx generally in a sniffy way. Although there was a thing with the Liverpool Dockers, we generally thought quite a bit of ourselves politically *vis-a-vi* the Old Left. And the Trots, the Trotskyists, we were sniffy about. So Marx we probably would have talked about in a sniffy way. Having said that, as my friend mentioned in an email, some years later, obviously we were channelling Marx. I mean, you know, because we were talking about capitalism! And class, basically. I think at one Earth First gathering, there were some North American Earth First activists who had come over and said, ‘oh well, you’ve got this really sorted critique of political economy, but when are you going to talk about nature?’ (both laugh) And the wilderness, you know. Because that’s what Earth First came from, a much more, sort of in a sense more innocent, a-political, almost, reverence for Mother Earth. Anyway, so by that time people were certainly against, there’s different circles, and in terms of the road protest movement, that coalesced in places like the M11 campaign, you know there’s always different bits of it, and it went off in different directions, but a large sense of momentum was in a slightly more politicised, political economy focussed and internationally focussed protest movement, and that went into so called anti-globalisation movements, and summits in the year after. Now what happened to me, was that I was still sort of fairly uncritically believing in and involved in all of that up until the end of the 90s. I don’t think… at some point I have the sense that it lost meaning for me. And I think I’ve since thought, ‘oh, no, well it didn’t suddenly lose meaning for me’. What happened was, it coincided with me going back into university, because as you remember, I took what became 2 years out, so I went back to my final year in October 1999, so I’d done that, and in between I’d been based in Brighton and working at Schnews which was a sort of Anarchist – broadly Anarchist – counter-cultural news sheet, which came entirely from that direct action milieu, and so I’d been very involved in it. So then I had some physical distance, going back to Cambridge, place of intellect and learning, and at some point, it didn’t have a sudden loss of meaning, but I had a need to catch up intellectually, because I’d been physically involved in it for all this time, and I wanted to kind of have some perspective on it and I wanted to… the way I saw it was that I wanted to go to the books and get the background, get more secure and more solid on the background as to why I was right. Because I kind of knew this was all right, and I just wanted to read up so I was really secure in it but what that leads to… that’s slightly naïve, because what that leads to, or what it led to was taking a longer and longer series of detours trying to recover the kind of moral clarity I had in the first place, and I never really got there. So I just became more sort of, dialectically detached in a way, so then at some point, maybe it was around 2006, In think I was writing an email to my friend, sort of going ‘ohh, well, I don’t know about this…’ and…where am I now? Aside from going to Prague and Genoa, I wasn’t hugely involved in an awful lot in that first decade of the millennium. I went on the Iraq march, but I wasn’t hugely involved in anti-war activism, so that was kind of that. There was one local campaign in Hackney.

*What was that?*

That was…you know when Broadway Market was sort of sold off? Er it was, there was imputed corruption, and it was all very dodgy and then the people who were supposed to have first refusal on buying their shops – the right to keep trading, because they were tenants – they got undercut and done out of their livelihoods, and then you got dodgy faceless entities based in a PO Box in the Bahamas which basically bought up half of Hackney for peanuts. Anyway, so that was all, one little local campaign because it was down the road, but basically I wasn’t very heavily involved in politics, so much, I was trying to catch up with it intellectually, I was gathering a lot of books for example, I mean the atmosphere changed. The atmosphere changes when 9/11 happened, and looking back you kind of have that sense of the 90s as being almost this beautifully naïve time after the end of the Cold War when we thought ‘ah ha! We’ve cast of this dead weight of authoritarian Marxism, and now we can actually do something different’… and we can of fight over what comes… it’s almost like a cleaner fight. Rather than being overshadowed by the USSR, we’re sort of free to talk about different utopian stuff I suppose, and…I don’t know. In some ways it was a bit weightless. I mean you didn’t have… once you’ve got the kind of logic of ‘oh shit, we’re going into Iraq’ and then there’s terrorism, and everything’s brought down to this ‘oh fuck’, you know, it’s like er, security becomes very corrosive to ideals, because then you’re like ‘oh’, because you know, people are going to die. I don’t know, this was sort of in the background, because for probably my own reasons I wasn’t heavily involved. But I think the political atmosphere changes when you’re like, ‘oh!’ Rather than… if you’re kind of arguing with the Washington consensus neo-liberal orthodoxy, so to speak, and you’re trying to put some kind of counter-point to that, in whatever kind of possibly coherent or incoherent way, I don’t know, there’s not bodies being shot. It’s slightly different. Anyway. So that was the atmosphere in the 90s, kind of gleefully sniffy about the Trotskyist Left selling their papers and appearing not to have their own sense of direction, and we appeared to have a sense of direction. The atmosphere changed. I was just trying to catch up intellectually with things and at some point obviously I got a very diluted sense of moral impetus. What did happen though is that I ended up – again by coincidence, a fairly whimsical thing – studying economics, after the crash, the financial crash. It was still a coincidence because I went to study journalism, got cold feet, they wouldn’t give the money back, this was at Birkbeck, and they let me re-assign the credit, and I looked around at other courses and went, ‘oh, economics’, because if you’re sort of involved in… if you’re a politico, I think there’s often an impulse to kind of get to grips with economics properly because it’s a bit of an esoteric, difficult discipline, but if you’re given to thinking about political economy, and arguing about it, then obviously you think ‘oh, maybe I should get to grips with it.’ Anyway, I sort of thought I should get to grips with it so I went to study economics, it’s what’s called a certificate of higher education. It’s not a full degree. But I ended up doing the whole certificate and didn’t really feel I’d got to grips with it, so I spent the next 18 months really diligently, almost obsessively going through economics – certainly macroeconomics – textbooks, until it was really intuitive to think about economics in my head, and then Occupy happened, and so then out of a sense of opportunism, I got involved in Occupy, the big protest outside St Pauls, with the tents on the steps of St Pauls. Because I just thought ‘blimey! This is serendipity, in a way’, because you had the Church of England in a really awkward position, which just meant, for better or worse, that there was a lot of attention going on to it. Otherwise they’d have got evicted much quicker because the City of London Corporation would have evicted them, but first of all there was the politics around the church, whose land they were partly on, and second of all then it became clear the City of London Corporation isn’t just a local authority, it’d got a whole background which makes it the focus of perennial criticism, for basically being…well, they’ve got a load of money. They’re a pre-Norman institution with a big wealth legacy, a lot of historic wealth and they use that for lobbying, so the fact that they were trying to evict the protesters, but were in principle kind of in a politically vulnerable position, because you can say ‘well you lot are stinky, aren’t you?’ So I just kind of went down and thought ‘brilliant! Let’s go and make hay while the sun shines’, it was an opportunity to do some legitimacy games, I think I’d call them. So I went down and got involved in that, and then I started phoning round academics and people that knew about things, because I thought let’s try and use this opportunity to kind of command attention basically, so I did. I got involved in, I suppose, campaigning PR type stuff and got involved in the banking issue, because there was a time when, even though it was post-crash, it was a bit out on a limb to criticise the banks, the idea that there was something fundamentally amiss with banking institutions was still really a marginal idea. It’s difficult to get people in the mainstream interested in it anyway, because it’s boring and technical. I’m talking about the period after the crash but before Libel happened. When Libel happened everyone was like ‘oh god, this really is stinky’, then it became out in the open, on the surface – there was something deeply wrong with the banks, but before that it was like a secret. It was known to a few people who I ended up speaking to in the period of the occupy camp, so I became one of the initiates, initiated to the view that ‘oh god, look how bad the banks are’, it’s to do with moral hazard and complicit subsidy, but a load of other stuff as well, and about you know, I don’t know, I could…. But without going back into it… So I organised an event with one quite esteemed academic, professor of economics at the LSE and a guy from the Manchester Business School who runs CRESC it’s called, which is an ESRC funded research centre and he’s quite political as well, and what happened was that in the wake of Occupy, obviously it died down again, and then Libel happened and one link which had been mooted as something we might do, but had not been made was with a guy called Andy Haldane at the Bank of England who was at that time still the Executive Director of Financial Stability, and is now the Chief Economist. I had had one brief email exchange with him, inviting him to a thing he couldn’t make, but then in the wake of Libel I thought oh, this is an opportunity again! Basically I’ve got a sense of political opportunism, so I’ve thought Libel’s just happened, great, let’s make hay again, so I sent him the email addressed to the Bank of England saying we’ll respond to your availability this time, do you want to come and address an event? So he said yep. And it’s really weird communicating with people at the top of the Bank of England because it’s quite anonymous and truncated emails, and you’re imputing what you think might be going on, probably both ways because we didn’t know each other, but he was obviously up for it, and I was emailing him from bendyrich@... You know, my email address, he didn’t know me from Adam, I could have been swivel eyed, it’s to his credit really that he was up for coming and standing on an Occupy platform and he made some eye-catching remarks. It was cool, because then it got all the press. He said @occupy is right. Not only morally right, but intellectually right’ he said, ‘it’s in the intellectual as well as the moral ground that they’ve taken’, something like that. And then he kind of gave an account of the relationship of economic inequality and instability.

*Wow.*

So that was cool. I mean the other half of his speech was about the elite project of bank reform and how it was going, and it was a little bit more… it came across as a project of reassurance, which is always going to rub activists up the wrong way anyway, cos they don’t want to be reassured, right, but that was at the Quaker Meeting House, Friend’s Meeting House, and the audience was approximately half activists, maybe, or maybe a third activists, a third Quakers and a third financial sector people, but it was very big. So anyway, I done that, and that was great, other than that I’m a part time teacher, I haven’t really found my (xx – 1.53.43.7).

*What do you teach?*

I teach, basically I teach poetry at the moment. I’ve been trying to teach metre, because I think that gets under…over-looked at school, because they think it’s too difficult. Maybe it is, but it’s very systematic. I’ve been teaching poetic metre and versification and how to recognise different metres and how stress patterns vary and what that does, so I’m trying to do that with GCSE and below and last year I was teaching A-Levels, but this year I’m not. It’s supplementary teaching, but the last thing I got really into in the wake of that Occupy and post-Occupy political stuff, after the Haldane thing I kept going with the bank reform thing for a little bit, erm, that’s right, we did a demonstration at Canary Warf, End Bank Welfare was the slogan, and then I got the sense that basically, it was a bit of an education, because after learning macro-economics particularly from a textbook, and then I just read loads of Andy Haldane’s speeches and they were pretty good. They’re like mini-monographs; they’re a very good genre of speech and one of the things that made me think – well apart from the fact that one or two of the academic contacts were saying he’s a man to watch, he’s quite cool – but sure enough when you read his speeches they are quite cool, they’ve got a very sort of demotic turn of phrase which uses sort of colourful metaphors which seem obviously to be addressed to an audience beyond the technocratic audience that he’s in principle speaking to, and they’re very readable, but they’re also very educational if you don’t know nothing about finance really, like I didn’t, and all these kind of technical issues become wondrously quite clear. So I just read loads of his speeches and that was my education in finance in a way. And then at some point I thought rather than this slightly ad hoc reading into things that have an immediate link to something else I’m poised to campaign about, I’d actually like to systematically slot in the kind of bases, get oriented in a sense of economics, as in what are the basic variables? So I started going through the National Accounts and making an uber spread sheet and putting in the variables here and the variables there, so that I could have a more solid contextual sense of what was what, so that when I read somebody’s critique about something that was happening and there was variable x and variable y, I’d have a sense of what it related to, I just wanted to get oriented, so I was doing that and then I left off because I moved house, and that’s where I should pick it up again, because right now I’m a bit out of the loop, I’m not in the head space of politics. For one reason or another which you’ll derive from the account I’ve just given you, but I’ve not kept up with environmental, ecological understanding. I mean at some level – look, there’s a dictionary of ecology on my shelf, which probably is testament to a sense of ‘I must get to grips with ecology’, but I haven’t done that. I have got to grips with economics. So basically I haven’t really felt as urgently as no doubt I should have done, about climate change, because I just haven’t kept up with… I mean the difference between me now and me 15 years ago…15…? 20? Is that I took on trust the things that my mates were saying were important and true. Whereas now I’d be like ‘ok…’ I just wouldn’t have any faith if an activist or lefty milieu said something, I’m like ‘ok, it might be nonsense though’. I’d kind of like to believe stuff, but I don’t fundamentally trust someone’s perspective even if I like where they might be coming from. So I’m a bit intellectually cut off. But that’s probably normal. I don’t know.

*Is it a good thing?*

Pros and cons. I don’t know. Maybe, yeah, as far as you’ve got time to read into something, then it’s actually good to get a slightly better perspective on something.

*Given the chance now, would you take the red pill of complexity or would you take the green pill of simplicity and intellectual and moral certainty?*

And having a clearer group of friends that you all see eye to eye, clear community…

*All of that, encompassed in that question, I’m sure you understand.*

Na, I’d probably take the pill that I’ve taken. I don’t read a lot of political ideas. I read economics, well… as I say I haven’t actually done that, but I do mean to go back to that, I’d happily read that. If I was going to read political ideas I’d rather pick up Aristotle or Machiavelli on Livy, you know what I mean? I’d rather read some old stuff. I don’t think ‘oh right we’ve gotta read…’ whoever the latest anarchist thinker is, or ‘I’d better read Marx’, I would like to read bits and bobs of Marx, but you know, but I like old books because they’ve been around, so they’re probably a bit better quality…

*Stood the test of time…*

Stood the test of time, yeah.

*I promised that we’d come back to talking about teaching your daughter old English or whatever it was, and we haven’t done that, but I think maybe that, I mean what you’ve just said encompasses that, intellectually.*

Well you probably rightly picked up in me, I think it’s something about kind of post-war humanistic ethos that my parents …certainly my mum, although with my mum I’ve also thought it’s not just a random intellectual disagreement, sort of ideological thing, she’s also probably emotionally reacting to her upbringing, I don’t know, so she’s got this kind of sentimental, very moral identification with the experience of kids actually, babies and so structureless play, you can’t push anything, you can’t kind of push structure on people, so I’m a bit like ‘nah, teach ‘em structure. Yeah’. So it’s probably right that you picked up on it. So I’m teaching Delphi, that’s my 7 year old daughter, I’m teaching her Anglo Saxon. I started off teaching her Latin, cos I was like ‘that’s a dead language, Latin’, cos I just really wanted to teach her a dead language, I thought it was funny, then I thought ‘oh well, we’d better do Greek, because the Greeks were basically much more interesting than the Romans’, and then I thought ‘they’re not very local are they? These are not my people’, so then we went for Anglo Saxon. Anyway, they’ve all got pros and cons, we’ll p’raps do one or two of the other languages in a bit. What else are we doing? We’re doing Kung Fu. I really like the Chinese tradition – a very deep well of classicism which I’m very attracted to. I think that’s very cool. Very old histories, and official court histories. And the Four Great Classical novels, yeah, there’s a lot of cool old stuff. Taoist texts, they’re brilliant, East Asian Buddhism’s pretty cool. Erm… we’ve been watching martial arts films. What else do I do? I do lots of teaching Delphi.

*I’m conscious of your time as well… do you have any final words before I shut the thing down?*

I need a wee! Um, not really, no. I think we’ve wrapped it.

*Thanks! Go and wee.*

*[At this point the interview ends, what follows is a follow up interview recorded on the 27th January 2016, to recover the lost portion of this interview]*

*Now it’s on…*

Right, you want me to jump off with this question about the nature of adolescence, which I was thinking about when I was driving along, and you know when you came round last time, and we’re trying to pick up for the lost portion of conversation, and I was saying are you going to bring some prompt material and pictures and words, and you said basically you’d prefer not to do that because it might lead in certain directions, which is fair enough, right and then I thought the real kind of thing that you want isn’t actually pictures…maybe, but it’s not necessarily documents from the time. What it is, it’s the music you know (xxx - .2.02.30) The music that I happened to be listening to, it was when I was 16 which was the period we really got up to, and that’s really where the involvement in music becomes very, very passionate and I was very, very absorbed in what I was doing – the protest scene and different bits of it that I was discovering. So that period was the summer of 93. We’d already discussed how I was at school still in Milton Keynes. I was actually in the summer of 93 (xxx) GCSEs and by that point I’d been hunt sabbing for a few months, so I’ve got involved in fairly locally based, quite cool activity and that was great, I was really into that, it really meant that what was occupying my mind was not the people I knew in school, so if I was talking about my own commitments I would naturally talk about the things I was doing outside of school. I didn’t really hang out with my school friends anymore, unless I was in school. Anyway, but broadly the hunt sabbing thing was a locally based scene even though it took us a little bit further afield, so that was good, right, and then where we got up to, right last time, first time you… sorry, I’m talking in quite an unstructured order, but it all pertains to the same thing, right so we were talking about the first time I went hitch hiking, which as we’ve covered reflects the influence of my uncle who was a long time hitch hiker, right, ok, and noted black sheep of the family, and I did that basically because I think I’d sort of felt the impulse to go beyond sabbing or going to the odd local demo that was organised by people I immediately knew, to go to other demos, and I wanted to kind of go to more things, I found it very urgent to go to more things, different animal rights demos, or whatever was available, really, and this was sort of coming into 1993 when I was 16, in March 93, so I was about 16 and I got wind of an anti-meat march in Manchester, called Meat Free March, and that’s what first made me go hitch hiking. I’ll come back to the music, sorry, I know I’m jumping around a bit. I’d spent the evening before phoning around a lot trying to get a lift from this network of animal rights contacts I had, I’d gone to bed disconsolate because I couldn’t find a lift, got up the next morning and thought ‘fuck it, I’ll just go hitch hike, I’ll give that a go’. I didn’t really know how to do it, I stood on a hard shoulder by the service station, so someone kind of told me ‘you can’t stand there, you’ve got to stand on the slip road’, so I did that and luckily it’s very easy to get lists when you’re 16 and look younger, because you’re young and innocent and youthful, so I got lifts all the way up, and I remember running around Manchester because I didn’t get there for the actual assembly for the march where they met, and it’s already gone, and I remember it had gone maybe up to an hour ago, and as I chased where people had pointed out where it had gone, progressively people were going ‘went that way, 40 minutes ago’, or ‘went that way, 20 minutes ago!’ by the time I got there it was just finishing, I just caught up with it when it was finishing so I had the experience of running around Manchester, that was funny, then I got some people, I got a lift back with some London based activists actually, who said they’d seen me standing on the hard shoulder on the way up and thought blimey, that looks a bit dodgy, but anyway, that was fine, so that was what kind of broke the limits of my home counties world, um, and Milton Keynes, and that was June, that’s interesting, I wonder if I’d done or not done all my GCSEs at that point…but it was some Saturday in early June, but that was that, and then there was that big thing, must have talked about this last time, there was a conference in Brighton which went by the – apparently it was an annual gig, some organisation which went by the acronym FILASA, Federation of European Laboratory Animal Science Associations, so the animal rights groups got wind of this and obviously hated the idea of it and organised a big protest throughout the 4 or 5 day, 4 days I think, it was at the Brighton Conference Centre, and there we were camped on the sea front, shouting abuse at the delegates going in and out. And I went down with a hunt sab mate from Northampton, we were just both up for it and we had like a camper van actually, and it was actually a great few days, it was really fun, and we were staying on the floor of, again, some local activists, it just all comes together very, very, very easily indeed. You barely need to do anything, you assume everyone’s in the same mind, and I must have…I guess I wasn’t doing GCSE’s anymore, and I think the guy I went down with was unemployed, but he was a sound bloke Ian, I remember him, anyway, so we went down and had a fascinating few days, very intense in some ways with various bits of protest. So that was great, that was quite intense, I got a train back with the money my parents had given me for contingencies, but while I was down there – and this is the significant next link in the chain – I picked up a radical green newspaper called Wild, which was I think supposed to be the newspaper of the British Earth First movement, but only one copy was ever produced, and this was the copy, and it had a list of all the – I guess that was before what was called the Earth First Action Update, which was a simpler thing but lasted much longer, and it had all the networks of local groups listed on the back, and it also mentioned Reclaim the Streets –again, this was summer ’93 – in its original incarnation before the M11 Campaign, so I sort of got wind of these things then and basically I think what happened – well I was going to say I ran out of animal rights things to go to, not before I’d gone to a thing in July, there was a thing – I remember everything quite detailed really, and very chronologically placed, because I remember in July there was a live exports protest, because I was so plugged into the network whatever was happening really had my attention, so I went down and camped in a campsite between Dover and Deal, so we’d go to Dover each day and protest the live exports and erm, at that camp site, off the Dover-Deal road, must have been closer to Dover than Deal, a guy who – maybe that was the first time I saw him actually, a guy called Lee, who I subsequently hunt sabbed with, he was from Huntingdon, and he came on with a sign that said Group 4 Securitas, which he was very pleased with because he’s got it from…he said ‘I’ve just come from Twyford Down!’ And Group 4 were sort of infamous for being, well, to many of us, for being the security guards at Twyford Down and that was the first time I remember hearing of Twyford Down, but it was the kind of thing that always pricked up my ears and I was very sensitive to signs and indicators for what was happening and where the most kind of urgent and important things were happening, because whatever was happening in this world of protest which I was still kind of getting to grips with or at least finding more of, just seemed to me the most urgent and important things to do and this is going back to adolescence really, because essentially everything I’m saying here is kind of obvious, it’s as much about being an adolescent as it is about anything that was particularly happening at the time. I don’t know what I can add, almost, but it’s a very strange and wondrous and mysterious thing, trying to think back to how I saw it at the time, and why I had the sense of urgency, and I guess a sense of promise…and potency, and that really became more intense when I got to the M11 Link Road Campaign, and road protesting in general. Because the first protest I went to was not the M11, it was the same summer, just the final day of summer, arguably, the final day of August ’93, as I say I’d run out of animal rights demos to go to after that kind of live exports gig for a few days in July. And I looked about and it may well have been through that Wild newspaper, and the Cradlewell bypass was being built in Newcastle and it was destroying or partially destroying a place called Jesman Dean, which was a green space close to the city centre, and looking back I think it was the first direct action anti-road protest after Twyford Down, I never actually made it to Twyford which I was quite pained about subsequently. All the road protests, and everything I just kind of came across as a potent rumour, just like ‘wow, something’s going on, somethings going on over here, and this is where the energy’s going to be’, and I just went because I wanted to see what was going on, and in those days I must have hitched about 3 times, maybe this was the 3rd time, anyway, my dad liked me to phone home once I’d got to a place to let him know I’d arrived safely, and I set off, presumably the day before the protest, from Newport Pagnell Service Station, which is the place I always hitched to and from because it’s a couple of miles from where I lived, so anyway, I got there and phoned back and my dad was like ‘I couldn’t have driven it in that time’, because I got there in about 2 and a half hours, really quick, to er Newcastle and then had had a cup of tea in a little caravan and talked to some of the activists. Then the next day, it was a beautiful sunny day and everyone got arrested basically, apart from me, because I’d volunteered for the video camera – people wanted to make a film out of it, and I made a nice little film actually, I remember, I’ve still got it on VHS somewhere, of people invading the road site and locking themselves to things. Everyone got nicked … I think it was the Trade Union Labour Relations Act, this was prior to the Aggravated Trespass being brought in in 1994, and they wanted to throw the book at the activists and say that it was illegal, so they used this thing which was supposed to be used against Trade Unionists, anyway, um, yeah… going and discovering that, I think there’s more of a mythology to buy into with road protesting, which is sort of obvious, the sort of anti-modernist eco-warrior mythos. It’s quite beautiful in a way, for me it was like falling in love. I’ve said this before, but for me it was very much like…I was quite bowled over by how cool it was, and the sense of, I suppose there’s more of an effective gang of people, who are I suppose putting themselves forward as an authentic community, and it’s got that oppositional edge of being against the corruption and lies of the wider world, so I was a push over. I thought ‘this is amazing! It’s beautiful!’ so as I said, I didn’t get arrested, it must have been the night before, or the night after the protest, borrowing someone’s driving licence so I could get into a Back to the Planet gig because I was under 18, and it didn’t seem to be difficult. Like I say, all these things just kind of happened, that’s partly to do with being young actually that kind of camaraderie really is just young people. As well as activists, and shared ideology, so it was very easy to fall in with people. It’s even easier with toddlers, I watch my daughter, you know, young kids, they just play with each other at the drop of a hat, so I suppose it was the same for me as a teenager, but anyway, yeah. That was a very significant new door opened, because then I was like, ‘wow, this is a brilliant thing’, it’s a focus and a sense of values that was not completely identical to the animal rights thing, so there what I did get wind of as the next focus was the M11 Link Road Campaign, which of course was more local to me, being in Milton Keynes. And I think I went back after that one off event in Newcastle. I did go back to Newcastle, it was probably the following year, not for the road protests but because there used to be a thing which I trust no longer goes on, but it was called The Northumberland Beagling Festival, must be illegal now, and that was an annual hare hunting gig, so that got sabbed a lot, there was an away week for sabs to come and sleep on local sabs’ floors for a week, and go out and try and catch these beaglers, anyway, I did that the following year and that was the one time I went back to Newcastle. I think I went to that Cradelway Bypass thing, it was the 31st August, and I think about 3 or 4 days – maybe 2 days, it was ridiculous, almost immediately I was back and going to a sixth form thing…well anyway, there was a very abrupt change of scene. I think it may have been the day after I got back from Newcastle, hitched back to Milton Keynes and then went to the induction day at sixth form , so then I immediately joined sixth form and was doing my A levels, so that was the summer between my GCSEs and A Levels, all these experience which had a great impact on me.

*So you want to move on to the M11?*

Well yeah, that’s where it goes, and what I started saying earlier and left off, was about music as being this big prompt to memory, and it seems to absorb so much of the emotion and sensation of being in a time and a place, what I happened to be listening to, certainly the later part of that summer, was certainly The Levellers, which is a sort of folk, punk, pop band, which is an authentic expression of the new age protest sensibility and milieu whence the band emerged and anyway – did I talk about going to my friend Elsbeth’s party in Kings Langley?

*Yes, I’m pretty sure that that was on there.*

Because that was where someone played a Levellers record. It’s like a game, it’s like the first time that you encounter something, or get wind of something when you’re this young impressionable age, and it just seems like ‘ah ha! That’s the way forward!’

*Yeah.*

‘This is the real thing’, and it’s so difficult to describe quite what the sense of promise or importance was, apart from saying it just seemed intensely urgent, but I think that I was listening to – The Weapon Called The Word is the album, and it’s very emotionally rich songs, musically I think it’s very good, really, and so that’s what I was listening to, and certainly the songs, pretty much all of them, is travelling from Milton Keynes to Wanstead in East London and going through, it was fairly grey and dull because it was coming on for winter by the time I got there. And so that… yeah. I’d heard about it at Newcastle and I think what happened in between going there and the moment I actually went there, was hearing on the BBC or whatever, Newsroom South East, about the eviction of George Green and the chestnut tree on George Green. Now I wasn’t present for that, but obviously I pricked up my ears and I was like ‘ah ha! This is the M11’ and so probably fairly soon after that I went down, and I think probably just having had a burst of activity the campaign was pretty quiet then, so I had a fairly unsatisfying couple of nights, I think I stayed in a residential squat where 3 or 4 people were living, on Eastern Avenue, which is about the Northern most point of the route, nearest to Redbridge, it’s Cambridge Park Road while it’s still a bit less like a pedestrian road and more like a thoroughfare, anyway it was one of the houses there, but nothing was really going on. I felt like one or two of the people squatting there were not particularly warm either, and they were distracted or whatever, it wasn’t a user friendly hub where people were being drawn in and directed to where they could go. Actually I was directed to one other house and there I came across Potty Phil, who I think’s still in Oxford these days, I came across him a bit later as well and I remember talking to him. He had a funny, slightly claustrophobic sensibility I think. I didn’t immediately, I wasn’t drawn into a lot of conversations about what was going on because there wasn’t much going on. So I do remember pottering into town and queuing to go into the public gallery at Parliament for want of anything better to do. So that wasn’t particularly exciting. And then I went back, and what happened then was – well, at least I must have been linked in, I must have got the contacts and whatever was necessary to be linked to the communication network, and after there was Wanstonia, so that was still on Cambridge Park Road, but it was after George Green, and Wanstonia was…well whatever the numbers of the houses were, a series of, were they semi-detached I can’t remember, and you’re nodding, so yeah.

*They were either detached or semi-detached. They were big.*

They were either detached or semi-detached. Victorian or Edwardian houses, yeah, they were nice houses. Trees in the garden. Anyway, so the tactic was, or the posture was to make a unilateral declaration of independence. I wasn’t involved in it, but I gather that people were faxing various hostile embassies around the world getting them to recognise Wanstonia in order to make a problem for the government, anyway, that didn’t – but it was quite a fun thing to do. I said I was the Minister for Agriculture, minister for this and that or the other, so that was the thing. And what I do remember quite vividly, was when it came to be evicted, it wasn’t a surprise eviction, people had reasonable wind of it before it happened, I remember staying up and collectively keeping vigil downstairs in the front room, which had a beautiful bay window actually, it must have been quite a nice house, but loads of us. I don’t know if people were drumming, but certainly sitting around chatting, and I bagged an arm chair eventually in my sleeping bag, chatting to people, a girl called Sam Meden, I mentioned her, I was going to try and find her contact, staying up talking to people. That was much more sort of invigorating. There were lots of people I bumped into there, and lots of enthusiastic, committed people and so it becomes a really cool dynamic. It’s brilliant, because once you’ve got a lot of energy and commitment and a lot of irreverence and a sense of fun, and to put in various illicit tactics to get in the way of the authorities, it was brilliant, and to try and obstruct the road, it’s not a purely anti-authority thing, but obviously that is a lot of the moral energy that goes into it. But obviously people believed in stopping the road and saving houses and trees. And then comes the morning. I ended up on the landing of the upper floor and there were others, I think possibly Becca, and I think also, what was her name? Who was actually one of the residents there…Anglo-Indian woman…anyway, there were two people like that, with their hands kind of handcuffed together, or locked together in some way, in the middle of an oil drum that was filled with concrete but had had a tube set into it and they’d locked – they’d sort of done these obstructive tactics, and they’d bricked themselves into an adjacent room off the landing I think, so I wasn’t quite at the centre of the most difficult bit of the resistance effort, or most difficult for the bailiffs to get rid of. But I was much easier to get rid of, actually, they just marched me out, but we spent I guess it must have been the first part of the morning, all squashed in, bodies on the floor of the landing, arms linked together, singing hippy songs…yeah…

*Can you remember what?*

Yeah, it’s on the other tape, I think it was stuff like [singing] ‘Can’t kill the spirit...’ the trouble with that is I think I’m remembering something we sang with Keith at a midnight feast [both laugh], but it was something like that…

*The ever present midnight feasts…*

The ever present midnight feasts. Right, so…ah, no. I’ll tell you what it was, [singing in a different tune] ‘You can’t kill the spirit, can’t kill the spirit, you can’t kill the spirit of the dragon’ I think it was that one. It was pretty much like almost chanting round and round. But essentially it just seemed to tap into a sense of values and power that was missing or forgotten or suppressed within modern, adult, rational existence. So it was the discovery of a focus of value which is actually outside of what you know, or has been supressed by the way of living that you’re sort of quite minded to kick against. That’s what’s exciting. And that’s what was pushing me through a lot of this. The thing about the music, I mean I happened to be listening to a lot of that music, but I think that what’s weird about it is that I was just looking for signals, and following it like…I was so wrapped up in it, almost mesmerised by these signals that I’d like… someone played a Levellers record at a party that I’d hitched to, a hunt sab party, but then also, it could have been that same summer, probably was actually, I probably mentioned this already, it’s kind of ridiculous, but someone had a sticker, I’m sure I talked about this last time, a sticker of some kind of hip hop punk rap outfit, I think, or whatever music they were playing, but they were called the Blaggers ITA, ITA notionally standing for In The Area. Now I don’t think I ever even listened to any of their stuff, but I saw the sticker and that was enough, because the sticker had a certain style, a certain aesthetic, and it was off the moment, it was a bit underground and the sense of style that it was presenting was as I say, it was a bit hip hop and a bit this and a bit that, but it was enough for me to know that that was definitely the most compelling version of opposing what you don’t like, in the vaguest terms. It’s kind of like…I just think I was looking for the most compelling way of kicking against the world I didn’t like in the way that has the most integrity, and the most purest sense of values I suppose. I was just looking for values; it was a sensibility I think. All that makes it sound like teenagers following a band, which is exactly what it is, it a sense. In a sense. Instead of road protests, I could have been following bands, that’s absolutely true, that doesn’t mean I didn’t absorb a load of ideas about ecology and politics and that those ideas don’t matter. But in a sense that’s not what I’m amazed by, when I look back on my own experience of it. I mean really I can get quite absorbed, it’s like a vortex of memory, the experience of the excitement of discovery and, yeah. Ho hum. I think what I’m amazed by is the purity of the impulse. I didn’t have…that’s what was beautiful, and when I happened across that scenario in Newcastle, these people actually living in trees, and the little caravan with the hippies with their dreads. They’re quite interesting, cool hippies that are doing something very active and practical and there’s a whole story about why that’s important, which I thought was great. So it’s a very pure impulse, that’s all I can really get to, about it, and I spent that winter following that impulse and commuting from my parents’ home and from my 6th form in Milton Keynes, commuting probably I don’t know how often to be honest, maybe weekly. And to be honest 6th form didn’t take the whole week, I may have had 3 days, 2 and a half days, so it left quite a bit of time for going down to London, so I’d go there, and in February, well obviously there was the eviction at Wanstonia – I’m back on the script now, actual events – so that got evicted, and once it got evicted I think I was left to stand on the road and I went and hitched back and still had time to view it on regional news. And then there was something called Operation Road Block, which I believe went on for the month of March, and everyone was supposed to bagsy a day, book a day to go and stop work and the idea was that it would be stopped for more or less the whole month, so I’m sure I went down for a day or 2. It was innocent in more ways than one really. Certainly objectively innocent aspects to that time. It wasn’t just the fact that I was young, it was also the fact that the law was a great deal more lenient than it is now, so you’d go there and it was fairly…with impunity…you’d get off Scott free. Go sit of a bulldozer, stop work, then get kicked out, then that was that, really. Like I say, the police in Newcastle had been a bit more creative in trying to throw the book at protesters, but in London, prior to aggravated trespass, we were fine, and actually when that law did come in – November ’94 – ooh, bit over really, I can’t remember., When was the eviction at Claremont?

*December? No…Was it December? Or January…*

’95 you mean?

*No…’94.*

If it was January it would have been ’95.

*Yes, if it was January it would have been ’95. But I think it was ’94. So it would have been December. [It was November]*

Yeah, anyway, so it nearly coincides with the law coming in, and I’m still hunt sabbing, each Saturday mind you, so what I was probably doing was spending part of the week – at least many if not most weeks – in London, and going back to sab on Saturday, which makes sense because there might not have been work going on over the whole weekend at least. And after…I don’t… most of the period, with the exception of that first visit, and the eviction of Wanstonia, most of the period is kind of like a blur, I remember individual – I can’t date them, must have been sometime over the summer – I remember individual moments of sitting on bulldozers, and I remember meeting a friend Kath who I don’t see very often, but I’m still in touch with her, she’s a good friend, she’s like an activist in Leeds, well, activist…anyway, she’s in Leeds and I remember meeting her on a bulldozer, and I remember meeting Brave Sir Rob, as he’s called, now in Bristol. A bunch of people who I’ve basically stayed in touch with, at least at some remove, because that kind of milieu, the eco-protest scene, has maintained some kind of coherence I suppose, mainly through the force of social relationships, but also through what some people have continued doing together somewhat. I tell you what I was going to say, the other thing that was occupying us a bit, and maybe that was happening after the point where we got to, though, I think it did, we were talking about the ideology and how that morphed from …

*Yeah, we talked about that*

Was that captured?

*I’m pretty sure we’ve got that. I mean maybe it’s worth just saying a sentence in case we haven’t got anything, but I’m pretty sure that happened towards the end of the discussion last time. Do you want to give an executive summary of the transition?*

Well, I think to be honest, what that relates to, in terms of time, if the period after Newbury and after Newbury, and then my eyes were opened to more political economy and the international dimension of politics at the same time by going to this event in Spain in 1997, late summer of ’97, organised by Zapatista Solidarity groups at the behest of the Zapatistas apparently, and that was amazing, that was the beginning of the transition away from the beautiful and poetic but in some sense naïve, naïve both in a good and a bad sense, mainly in a good sense, um, appreciation of protest as a response to animal rights, or threatening ecological places, threatening countryside and houses. It was all quite immediate and concrete stuff, which is actually what’s good about it, because you can bring to bear theories upon that and why it’s happening, and what should happen instead, but basically that’s what I mean about the simplicity of it, it’s a very positive thing, and that’s obviously true with hunt sabbing because it takes very little explanation to say what you’re trying to do: You stand there, you do that, you stand between the fox and the hounds, and you try and thwart the hunt, and it’s a bit the same with sitting on a bulldozer isn’t it? You know, the thing you’re doing is immediately clear, and that’s why it’s brilliant, and that’s why it’s compelling. I may well be repeating stuff I said earlier, but there’s a line by the Father of a hunt sab mate who I don’t think I ever knew, who sabbed in another local group which we sometimes were with, anyway, someone I may have sabbed with sometimes, her dad, wrote sometimes for newspapers, and he wrote in the Observer once that the natural idealism of youth has found a channel through which it flows to great effect, which is a very brilliant way of putting it really, because that’s true, so when you sort of – I mean I came back from the Zapatista Encuentro with my eyes as big as dinner plates because that was insane, you know there were people from all over the world, but essentially what it sort of brought up was a move away from immediate issue based, quite idealistic, pro-nature posture, to a sort of anti-systemic, anti-capitalist thing. So then you go on to talk about summits and summit hopping and protests. So that’s all that, But at this stage and right up until Newbury really, it wasn’t endowed with a great sense of history, except in a vague. Mythic sense. Ok, so that’s part of what I’m looking back to with a sense of wonder, is my own kind of… the universe I lived in, which didn’t have a lot of distancing. You know what I mean? It hadn’t looked at history and kind of…I had an ability to embrace something in a way which I couldn’t now because it could mean everything. It wouldn’t be problematized or offset by a sense of ‘well, where does this come from? What’s the underlying cause of this? And where is…’ You know. Now I couldn’t help to contextualise, or try to contextualise everything – more or less adequately in all sorts of ways. It hampers the poetry a bit. There you go. But as for the chronology, it becomes a bit blurry…Because I live here now, or fairly close in Walthamstow to where the M11 stuff happened, and I occasionally go up or down Grove Green Road, and every time I go up or down it I’m well aware that I would have gone up or down it a lot some years ago, but geographically and visually my memory is no longer very particular or every detailed I don’t think. If I wandered round, or if I spent some time wandering round Leyton and Leytonstone, it’s possible that I’d be very likely that I might have a sense of *Déjà vu.* But aside from the hill, the bridge, where the road rises to go over actually the new A12 and the railway at Leyton Tube, I don’t have many kind of clear visual memories, and when I was at Leyton Tube in the old days I don’t know which way I walked. So I went down there a bit, quite a bit, and I sat of bulldozers quite a bit, and I broke my collarbone at one stage, at a late action, or at a reunion? – but opportunistically I kind of dodged when a security guard’s attention was momentarily distracted I thought that would give me an opportunity – because he was actually keeping us out of the road site, maybe we’d already been kicked out, or more likely we’d arrived at a time when we weren’t early enough to pre-empt their securing the site, so the security guards were blocking out way and we were just outside the gate which was otherwise open, and he looked the other way and I thought I could dodge past him, which I kind of did, but not with enough er… distance between us, so he grabbed me from behind and that had the effect of tripping me over and I flew head first into a slope which was actually quite hard, I think it was maybe clay or something, but it was very hard and then I went and sat in the waiting room at a local GP surgery on something like Cambridge Heath Road, and they called an ambulance but it didn’t come for ages, and I remember slumping there and almost sleeping till eventually the GP woman from the reception knocked off her shift and said ‘this is a bit irregular, but I’ll take you in the car to Whipps Cross’, so she dropped me in the car to the hospital. Then the hospital said – I said ‘what I’ve done is I’ve dislocated my shoulder’, so the doctor that I first saw gave it a feel and said ‘oh yeah, you’ve definitely dislocated your shoulder, sometimes it just pops back into place’, so she started manipulating my arm, and I went ‘argh!’ it really hurt so then she x-rayed it and it was actually a broken collar bone. Is there anything else I can squeeze out of the M11? I don’t think so. Well Claremont you see. Yes, the thing about Claremont Road – this is where it rounds off – because there were a number of false alarms, and after all manner of digger diving and road blocking all over the summer – that I remember that, visually I remember as being sunny because it probably was sunny, it was summer most of the time I was doing that. I remember a dark, dim period of going commuting to these east London streets with that Levellers sound track and I remember that a lot, but actually sitting on bulldozers we probably did much more in summer, so we did spend a lot of the summer doing that. I also remember Fillibrooke Road, there was a squat which was not a condemned house but happened to be squatted, and it was filled with radical graffiti, and I think I added some animal rights malarkey, and a guy called Noel, who had massive dreads – I wonder where he is now – and that was where the question you’d asked at the last section, ‘what about the bender site?’ and I think the squat on Fillibrooke Road if that’s where it was, the squat I’m remembering which was not a condemned house, that would not have been the bender site, the bender site was somewhere else, that was on the path of the road, and I think I stayed there once or twice because that was easy. You could always stay at the bender site, you didn’t have to ask if there was enough room. Anyway, I stayed in someone’s bender and that was just in the garden of a house, I don’t know where it was. So that was what was going off and on during the summer. And then at some point it came like, well, Wanstonia had gone, since February, they must have been progressing through Leytonstone, and Claremont was the focus and as for people like Dolly, I saw her around, I said hello to her, I don’t remember the big wheels or figure heads of the campaign. I probably knew Richard Leyton to say hello to, I can’t remember now. And then there was Old Mick, I think I knew him to say hello to, but I don’t think they were the main people I spent time with. There were such a lot of people coming and going. I remember spending quite a lot of time on Claremont Road. I remember one time actually when they did try and move in with the crane. I think Paul Morotzo went and sat of the elbow of the long arm of a crane. I think we watched from a roof, or maybe we were outside. Anyway, I remember that incident, maybe that was late summer or autumn, I don’t know.

*Yeah. I think Roger Geffin was telling me that story as well. Or definitely a story…*

I can’t remember my vantage point. I think that we were actually in the houses, it’s possible that we were watching from outside a security cordon, but I think we were inside, anyway, or maybe not, but anyway, what mainly stopped it was Paul sitting on the crane, but by that point it was obvious that the heat was on Claremont, and that was the last place, the last stand and so there was the phone tree, the phone trees and the phone trees, and with all this mounting anticipation, you had to be there, and um, I think there’s been a couple of false alarms already, so it was a bit like crying wolf, maybe they did it deliberately, who knows, but it was probably activists being jumpy, and at some point, I think I’d just come back from somewhere one weekend, and coming back to my parents’ house, maybe with my parents, and getting a call saying ‘the eviction’s due tomorrow’ and I thought ‘hmmm… yeah…’ and it was just a bit late to go down that evening, and I thought ‘yeah, maybe it is, but maybe it isn’t’, so I didn’t go down. As it was, if I had got up early and gone down the next morning, I still would have got in before the security cordon was formed properly, but I wouldn’t have anticipated that either because I was used to the idea that they go in at dawn to try and head off any attempt to swell the ranks of protesters, so basically I missed out so to speak, on being cold for many days.

*I think I’ll stop you there because I know we’ve got this, I’m basically 100% sure.*

That’s fine.

*So are you happy to stop there? Brilliant. Thank you.*

**Name of interviewee: Richard Matthew Forrester-Paton (born Kenneth, changed to Richard aged 6 or 7)**

**Project: Voices of Leytonstonia**

**Date of interview: 18/12/2015**

**Language: English**

**Venue: Interviewee’s home**

**Name of interviewer: Polly Rodgers**

**Length of interview: 2.53.16**

**Transcribed by: Polly Rodgers (first half and last quarter) Josh Adams (third quarter)**

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