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*This is an anonymous interview. Today’s date is the 4th March 2016 and my first question is, can you please tell me what stands out for you in your involvement in the M11 Link Road Campaign?*

Yeah. It was officially called the No M11 Link Road Campaign, but we just used to call it the M11 Campaign, or even just the M11, which is kind of ironic, because people talk about ‘when I was involved in the M11’ but they mean the campaign against it.

*Yeah, I interviewed Richard Leighton and he had a funny thing. He was saying ‘The M11 stood for…’ all these wonderful things.*

Exactly. So the M11 actually means the campaign not to have an M11 Link Road. So for me it was the people. It was the community of people that were involved in it that was the most important thing, and what it represented to those people. There was a kind of massive, ramshackle, diverse-ish group of people that got involved and it was a place to live and struggle with each other as well as against the road, as well as a kind of campaign against the incursion of the state into housing and the environment and so on. For me it was …I can talk about how I got involved a bit…

*Yeah, tell me about how you got involved a bit. Even just briefly.*

Yeah, so I was at university and I was suffering from panic attacks and I couldn’t stay at university anymore and so I had to find somewhere to live and a friend had a boyfriend who was squatting in one of the houses on the route of the M11 and he was Greek and he wanted to go back to Greece for the summer and he wanted somebody to live in the house to keep it for him while he was away, so I did that because it was a place to stay. And then there was this massive…turned out, I didn’t know anything about it, it was just a house I could stay in when I couldn’t be at university any more, and it turned out there was this massive long row of houses across several streets that had been compulsorily purchased in order to build this motorway but then they hadn’t actually managed to get ahead with building the motorway, so the houses were empty and largely occupied by squatters and also some long term residents as well, like Dolly, on Claremont Road.

*And was the squat you were staying in on Claremont Road?*

It was, yeah. 66 Claremont Road. And there was Dolly who was in her late 80s at the time I think. She had lived in the house all her life, then there was other really long term squatters, who’d been there I think since the 80s, and were kind of residents and the whole street looked like a fairly normal street at that point, but you kind of knew there was something funny about it, like some of the residents were a bit more odd, and some of the houses were boarded up actually, and were empty, and over the time that I was there that happened more and more. That would have been in 1991 or something, I think.

*Was Mick one of those long term squatters? Is it okay to have said his name?*

Yeah. Lots of people will have. The street went in a kind of…it was facing the tube line, so there were houses on one side of the road and houses and the tube line on the other side of the road and the tube was Overground at that point so you could see the trains going past, and then at the two ends of the street, the street curved round and back to join Grove Green Road, so it was a kind of crescent but a very long, rectangular crescent. Does that make sense?

*Yeah.*

So Mick’s house was the one adjacent to the tube line on the corner of the crescent to the North. And my house was on the main terrace, a couple of houses in on that side, on the North, North or East end of the street.

*Have you seen it in its current state?*

Yeah.

*So the tiny little bit of Claremont Road that still remains will be one end of the crescent, yeah?*

Actually I haven’t seen it recently so I don’t know exactly what houses are still there…

*There’s one house left.*

Really? On Claremont Road?

*It’s a bazaar experience.*

Is it at the far or the near end?

*That’s what I’m not entirely clear about. I think it’s 1 and 2.*

That would have been the other end then because I was 66.

*And would it have been Mick’s end, or the other end from Mick?*

I was at Mick’s end, so the remaining house would probably be at the other end. Unless they numbered the houses really weirdly, unless his house was one and 2 on the outside of the bend, 3 and 4… do you see what I mean? Because their houses were on the outside of the bend and we were on the…

*Yeah.*

But I was aware of Mick, because we’d see each other about, but we didn’t know of each other, I was also aware of a couple of kids that ran about on the street at that point, kind of 11, 12 years old I think. I think it was from 1991. A girl and a boy, and they used to hang about with Mick, and kind of lively kids, I don’t know, you just saw them around, so I ended up living in that house for a few years and getting to know some of the other squatters of the route and there was a community of squatters who used to look out for each other and party together and so on, but they were sort of anti-establishment, by the nature of being squatters but they weren’t massively political, or politicised, and then at a certain point, I because aware that the houses were occupied because they’d been compulsorily purchased and that there was some local people who were…do you know what, I really wasn’t that aware. I think it was only when people came from like Twyford Down, the anti-roads protests, turned up when threat of eviction was much more imminent that I because aware that there had even been any local protest against it or that it was part of a motorway. I think we vaguely knew that they were bought up because they wanted to build a road but that they couldn’t build a road. And I’ve got a bit stuck…

*So initially it was just a vague prospect that you weren’t particularly engaged with. Did you believe that you’d be evicted, that the houses would be knocked down at some point?*

Yeah, exactly, we thought we were lucky to be there that long, mostly squatting was a bit more precarious and we’d been there quite a long time and it was quite straightforward, but then eviction notices started coming and then simultaneously-ish these little leaflets through the door about a protest march, and me and my boyfriend at the time went and joined in on this protest march and um…I kind of am repeating myself, and it’s not very…

*Shall we move on?*

Let’s talk about something else, yeah.

*So, for the sake of the tape, this is a second interview and we’ve got a longer interview that is in the closed part of the archive. So we’re not going to repeat ourselves too much now. So let’s talk about…I know that what you wanted to talk about a little bit was including voices that wouldn’t otherwise be included, so do you want…*

So as the protest and the campaign and the movement developed, I became aware that those two kids that were rattling around on my street were Fi and a little boy called ‘D’, let’s call him. And they were kids that had a hard time at home and found Claremont Road and Mick’s house to be a safe place to run away to and they helped out and were part of the protest, and eventually Claremont Road got closed off at each end by us using rubble from semi-demolished houses and old cars and I can’t remember what else, but we barricaded each end of the street and it became this little open community with houses, trees – because the open edge that was alongside the railway line had these London Plains I think, or were they lime trees? I can’t remember – so there was outdoor space because the road was closed to moving traffic, under Mick’s kind of imagination and direction, lots of furniture got taken out onto the street and set up over one summer, which might have been the summer of ’92 or ’93 I suppose, out on the street and some of the houses, because by then we were resisting eviction and demolition, some of the houses got knocked through the attics, and some underground tunnels, so a lot of the houses were connected up, and even where they weren’t directly physically connected, the doors were open and people would wander in and out and it was all very informal and free and open air kind of culture, so there was shelter but there was also an open space that felt really pleasant, actually, to be in because it was traffic free and had trees, and there were also tree houses. A lot of the trees opposite had tree-houses built in them and then walkways across to the buildings, like incredible, intrepid walkways, so it was like a big adventure playground really, for adults and misfits, and it was very colourful, and there was a woman who I can name, I’m sure she wouldn’t mind, Christine Binny, have you heard of her?

*I’ve heard the name, yeah…*

She was an artist and she became responsible for what became the art house, would have been 68 Claremont Road, I think. It was next door to my house, and she got artists to paint each room of the house, paint the walls and turn them into an art instillation. And you could walk through the house and it was like living art. She also got people to paint murals across the front of the terrace and outside there was a car that said ‘Rust in Peace’ and it had grass growing out of it and so on, so there was a lot of art and it was all very informal and DIY, and there was also the scaffolding tower that got built out of the roof of 66, which became the Campaign Office, that building as well. And we painted the scaffolding tower that protruded from the roof florescent pink and florescent green…

*Ah! I’ve only seen black and white pictures of it, but I’ve got a drawing from a zine that was made at the end and there’s a drawing of the scaffold tower and it says ‘build it higher, build it pinker, build it greener’ and I assumed that was…*

You haven’t seen it. I’ll look for the photos, I’m sorry I haven’t already got them, but yeah, it was very, very pink and very, very green. I remember we searched high and low, we went to these stage shops in the end to get powdered florescent pink and green pigment, it was really important. And it’s an example of what I mean about what was amazing about that campaign was that it was *as important* that it be painted florescent pink and green as it was that it be a really good, solid structure from which to resist eviction. So there was the kind of…and sometimes those two elements of art and creativity and political struggle and resistance… there was a tension between them, but also a fusion between them and I was quite involved in building the scaffolding tower, I really enjoyed it, it was like a giant climbing frame, you just clamber about on it, and also I was scared of heights at the beginning of the campaign, this was a – bless you. Interviewer nearly sneezed [both laugh] – this is a good example right, of what was good about it, was that I was scared of heights, there were these trees, there were walkways from the top of the trees to the houses, and then there was this scaffolding tower, gradually getting taller and taller and taller as a kind of tool of resistance to eviction, out of the roof of number 66, and I know I talked in the other interview about what was good for me, was coming out of having panic attacks and depression and alcohol dependency really, was that it was a space that I could be sheltered, and not have to worry, and also, once the campaign got going, where I could get involved in something outside of myself that was bigger than me and about taking part in something purposeful and meaningful that felt good and kind of worthwhile, i.e. resisting endless development and industrialisation and dependency on car culture and damage to the environment and damage to local communities, so I could be part of that, and also part of joining in a very welcoming, inclusive community, but without any pressure to have to take part and I could be as involved as little or as much as I wanted to, and that felt fantastic, and one example of how it helped me develop as a person is that I was scared of heights, and I could climb a bit up a tree and then down again, and a bit further up a tree the next day, and then down again, and then actually get up into the treehouse and then go a little bit along the walkway and then down again, over a period of weeks and weeks and then eventually get up on the roof of the building and then the scaffold tower started taking shape and I could climb a bit up it, and as it got bigger, I got more and more confident swinging around on these scaff poles, to the point where I could happily walk back and forth across the walkway from the trees to the thing and then eventually, when it came to the final eviction I was one of the last, you know 5 or so, 6 people on the tower at the end, right up at the top and not scared at all. So that’s a mini example of how that campaign was good for me as a person, in that it allowed me to slowly push out of my comfort zone and develop myself, even in terms of fear of heights, something silly, little like that. And so I was quite involved eventually in building the scaff tower, and that’s right, one of the instillations on the street was not just the Rust in Peace car that other people might have talked about, there was another car that was not in use that was filled with concrete and used as a lock on and had scaff poles embedded in concrete sticking out if the windows and up into the sky, so there was like at least 1, maybe 2 scaff poles sticking right up into the sky embedded in concrete, so it got so that as we were working of the scaff tower, I could clamber about on the tower and then when it was time to get down and finish I’d be standing on the edge of the roof – I mean this is amazing to think of now, from someone who was scared of heights – and then you could step off the roof onto the scaff pole that was sticking up from the car on the street and slide down it to the ground, like a fireman’s pole –

*Oh god*

And it was the most fun thing! My favourite bit of the day was sliding down for lunch or for the end of the day, stepping off a scaffolding tower on a roof, onto a pole sticking up into the sky, sliding down and climbing down a concrete filled car. I loved doing that. And that would have been absolutely rid- I never would have dreamed of doing that when I started out. And I’m sure it wasn’t very safe –

*No, it doesn’t sound very safe. Sounds really fun though.*

So I was involved in building this scaff tower, and it was quite a blokey thing to do, to build a scaff tower out of scaffolding poles that had been acquired from a local building site… so there were these blokes, building a scaffolding tower, but one of them was wearing a skirt, and then I was a girl, and there were other women involved in building it, and sometimes there was this bloke called ‘S’, let’s call him ‘S’, cos I don’t want to name him if he doesn’t want to be in it. He was little and he had definitely some difficulties, anyway, he was a lovely bloke but he was quite vulnerable, let’s say he was quite vulnerable, and he used to – or at least I remember one day, him climbing up the scaff tower with a kite and flying a kite from the tower, and some of the more blokey blokes who were building the tower were like ‘fucking hell, we’re trying to…’, you know, there was this kind of culture of Barricade and Resist! And the most important thing was resisting eviction, and fighting the road and it could get quite macho sometimes and there was a thing calling people who didn’t participate *fully* got called lunch-outs. I don’t know if you’ve come across that term already, and people would slate the lunch-outs. And I remember somebody saying ‘fucking lunch-outs’ or something, and just loving this bloke for climbing up the scaff tower in order to fly a kite, and we decided to paint it florescent pink and florescent green and that was important as how tall it got, and that somebody would climb up and spend the day flying a kite from it was as important to me and it getting taller and being stronger and better able to resist. It was all important. It was as important that a vulnerable person could have a moment of pure happiness flying a kite, as it was that it was strong. You know? And I told thingy to fuck off and leave him alone.

*You said earlier that there was an ongoing tension and mutual benefit to the creativity and the resistance… that’s really interesting. I just wondered if you could say any more about the ways in which they were in conflict.*

Er…

*Or maybe you’ve said enough…*

No, so there was this outdoor culture, especially in the summers and although there were fires in the winter, there were a lot of outdoor fires. In fact this is the thing that Rich will have – or certainly said he wanted to talk about – was this thing about traveller culture, and there was a sub-culture in the 90s called New Age Travellers, by the media. I never in my life heard anybody who lived in that culture, who had a travelling lifestyle, refer to themselves ever as New Age Travellers. I don’t know where the hell New Age comes from. They’d just call themselves travellers, if they called themselves anything, or somebody who lived on a site, yeah, I suppose travellers’ site, but yeah, definitely not new age. But that culture was very much around, and especially people who came from the anti-roads protests, but also it blended in a kind of very urban, Londony way with actual homeless culture, rough sleeping culture in Claremont Road, so you’d get this romantic…penny whistles... there was lots of playing penny whistles, and dreadlocks with brightly coloured ribbons, not ribbons, material, woven into your dreadlocks, lots of stripy clothes, stripy jumpers, multi-layered, multi-coloured clothes, especially the girls. Great big army boots, with the laces undone and stripy leggings and several layers of skirts and it was all part of this traveller culture, but there were also rough sleepers from east London were really drawn to it, and especially Claremont Road, I think because it was a street with houses, so real shelter, it wasn’t too… you know, and so in the evenings and during the day actually there was quite often a fire outside, like a campfire, bonfire type thing, there’s be music, either people playing penny whistles or playing a guitar or sound systems and the music of the Prodigy, ‘music for the jilted generation’, that was *the* tape that we played from the scaff tower during the eviction, really loud, so there was a kind of mix of very vulnerable, rough sleeping people, often with addictions, and homelessness and very vulnerable life histories, who were drawn to the out-doorsish, squatty community and who, like me, got enlivened and empowered a bit by this sense of collective purpose as well as finding a place to stay, basically, found something a bit bigger than them, and that was limited by how vulnerable they were I would say. So some of the people who came as activists, or who saw themselves as activists resisting the road, would look on some of those more vulnerable people as lunch-outs who didn’t participate enough in the building of the barricades or the climbing of the diggers, but I would actually see, sometimes, with a can of special brew, or whatever, some of those very vulnerable people joining in on those protests where you climb over the fences and climb onto a digger and say stop the road, and they would do it, which is quite impressive considering how to be locked up in a prison cell when you’ve got an addiction is quite a scary thing, actually, because it means not getting a drink or a smoke or a… you know, for however long, and maybe having a criminal record already which means that you’re in more trouble if you get arrested, so I think those things weren’t always taken into account and also there was what they contributed to the community, so everybody being very unique, special individuals with all of the kind of difference and life experience that they brought. Yeah, so sometimes people would see the sitting around on the street, drinking and smoking and playing music as being lunch-outs, but I think very bound up with that was a feeling of home and community for a lot of people that also extended to those people who saw themselves as activists fighting the road. It was a kind of…blurry, it wasn’t ‘there are these people and those other people’, everybody was a bit activisty, everyone was a bit lunched-out sometimes, you know. Everybody was aware of the collective goal of stopping the road, and some people were more aware of looking out for each other or looking out for the most vulnerable ones, or making something beautiful…flying a kite…yeah. There were two squat caffs on the street at one point, and Rory McLeod came and played – the musician – came and played at the caff at one end of the street and there was a bit of rivalry between the two caffs, and I can’t even remember why, but it probably would have been some sub, sub, sub, sub, sub cultural reason why people associated with one caff didn’t get on with people associated with the other one. And also what is interesting for me is how people have an innate – perhaps innate – tendency to feel safer as part of a group that is in opposition to another group, that there is… I don’t know, it’s something I became more and more aware of, that when I joined in I felt very lonely and isolated, so that squat that I first moved into in ’91 or whatever, the Greek guy who had been living there for years was away and I was literally on my own in the house for long periods of time at a time when I’d just been kicked out of college because I couldn’t cope, and I felt exceptionally alone and very depressed at the beginning and I remember long nights not being able to sleep and waiting for it to be light so that I could go to sleep at dawn, and drinking…you know, it was bleak actually, a very bleak time so when I started to get involved with these other squatters and then protesters it felt very safe. I can’t remember why I started talking about that, what was I saying?

*Well my original question was about the tension and the mutual benefit of the creativity and activityness –*

And the sense of community –

*Yeah, and I think you were talking about the sense of community as an illustration of how that played out.*

I certainly felt like a misfit at the beginning of my time living at Claremont Road and I felt very lonely and a misfit and then I got to know the squatters that were living there before it was a protest, and felt part of that community, and then I got to know the activists and took part in actually resisting the eviction of the houses and found that massively empowering and inclusive and I know I spoke to you in the other interview about hugs, about how that bunch of wooly jumpered, stripy, dreadlocked road protesters, about how they used to hug each other and you all the time and in the beginning I was getting hugged by these almost complete strangers and sort of standing there rigidly feeling like ‘what are you doing? Get off me’, and then eventually yeah, going ‘wow! This is nice actually, these people are really warm and kind’ and there was a very alive warmth. Oh! I know what I was talking about, about being part of something in opposition to something else – I said to you before, off the recording that I’ve heard so many people who were involved in the M11 campaign saying how they don’t think they really fitted in, or they weren’t really important, or they weren’t part of the core group, or they weren’t really…you know, they were just on the edges, and I’ve heard so many people who I think of as really integral to that period of time say that, that I’ve realised that that is perhaps a universal thing, that it was a safe and inclusive place for a lot of misfits, who even in a place which was so inclusive and included so many misfits, still always a bit felt like they didn’t properly belong. But even though I’ve heard them saying that, for me certainly there were moments when walking down Claremont Road in a pair of dungarees with a scaff pole on my shoulder or whatever, and there’s like kids and dogs and people playing music, I remember for the first time in my life feeling really at home, and like I really belong here, and I think even for those other people eho said ‘oh, I didn’t really belong’, that there will have been moments where at least they felt closer to that feeling of belonging somewhere than they will have ever, probably.

*Anywhere else.*

Yeah.

*On that note, at the very beginning you started talking about these two kids…*

Oh yeah.

*And I wonder if we can just very…*

Fi and ‘D’, yeah. So over the years I watched them grow up into kind of teenagers and Mick would get them doing odd jobs on the street when it was a protest street, so there’d be like sweeping up, and he was very good at getting, in fact, people that other people saw as lunch-outs to take part in odd jobs and simple tasks that they could do that made them feel part of something and got other people off their back as well, but that weren’t too demanding. And Fi took part in barricading Mick’s house, and yeah, she was somebody who… her mum was an alcoholic and um…see her mum’s still alive so I’m not sure…. As far as I know, she might be dead.

*Ok. Her mum was a vulnerable person? We’re using a catch all phrase… or maybe we should just not talk about her mum.*

Yeah… and also, I’ve got to go.

*[laughs]. Have you got to go right now?*

Yeah. I should have gone 15 minutes ago. Shit. Well there was this really lovely, vulnerable person called Fi, and she ended up living with me and then she died. That’s the short version. No. that’s useless.

*OK. We’d better stop the recording.*

We’ve got to. I’ve got to go. Sorry.

*Ok. So, for now I’m going to stop this.*

**Interview Details**

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