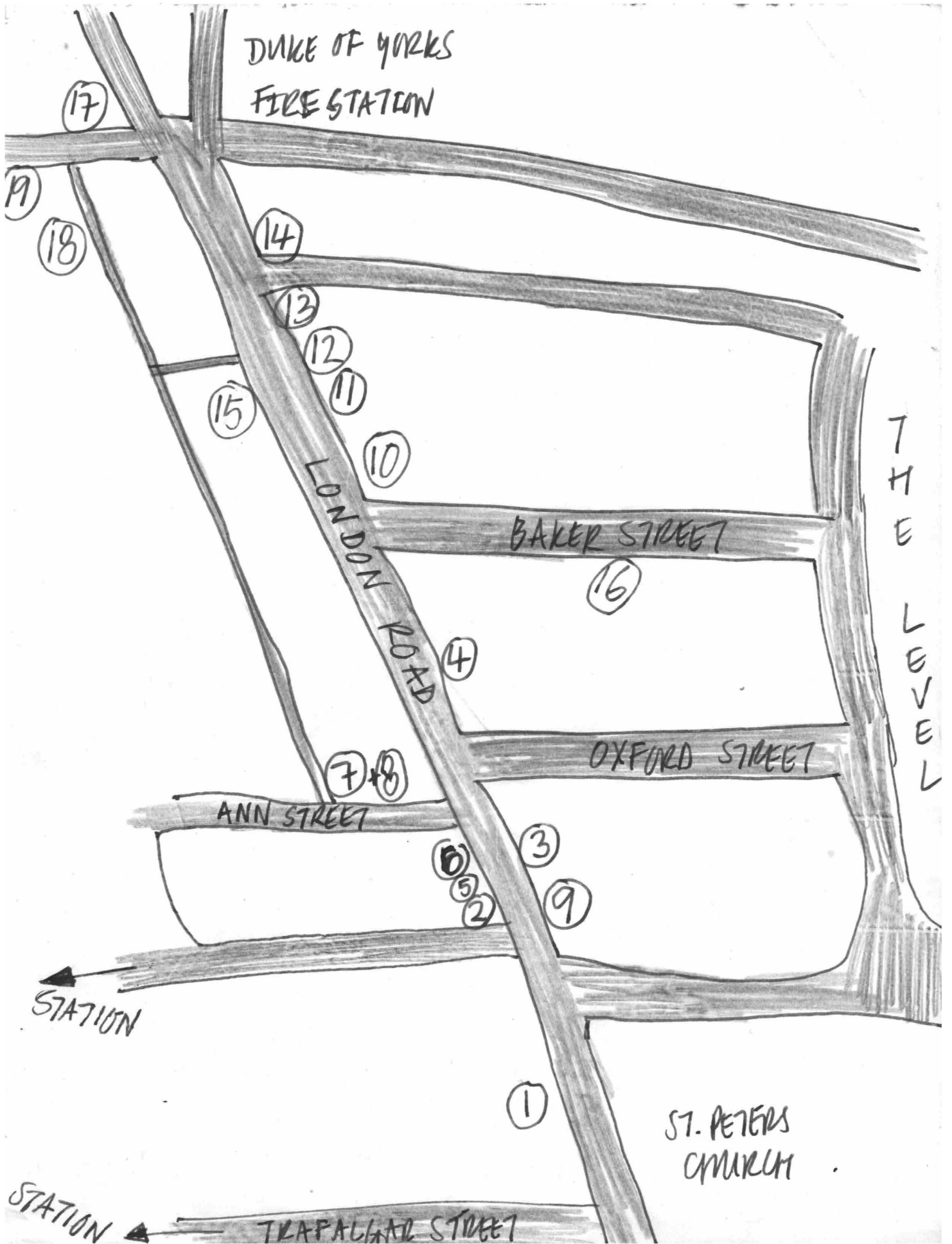


london road



using space fifteen



Recent (2020) squats in Brighton on the short stretch of London Road which goes from St. Peters Church up to Preston Circus led me to reflect on this area's incredibly active radical history. To focus on just one element, let's walk past the sites of former squats on London Road...

- 1 SPOR
- 2 325 benefit
- 3 Anarchist Teapot
- 4 HSBC squat
- 5 Abbey National squat
- [6 Cowley Club]
- 7 Bob Dobbs
- 8 AHS v1
- [9 Gentrification storytime]
- 10Coop convergence
- 11Church
- 12 Blockbuster
- 13 Kodak 1
- 14 Lightshop
- 15 Poundstretcher
- 16 Pizzapop
- 17 Radical Bank
- 18 AHS v2
- 19 Gamer Heaven

Starting off down at Saint Peters Church, just about where the Hisbe supermarket is nowadays there was a month-long SPOR event **[1]** in the late 1990s. The place was really long, since the shopfronts go quite far back. It was sort of like a TAA, I guess although I only got there from London in time for the closing rave (Hekate, maybe KDU as well).

I have fond memories, by which I mean after a day on the beach I spent most of the party curled up inside a bass-bin kommuning with the planet on a very deep and powerful level. Memories are therefore quite jagged: A robot made of of scrap metal at the door, which caused an armed police response; Mutoid Waste peeps who had been awake the entire month doing their sculpture stuff; A guy playing speedcore in the chillout, mixing using a telephone receiver held to his ear; A big wooden sculpture in the St Peters gardens getting burnt in the early evening. That's about all I got.

Moving up past the Hobgoblin onto London Road itself, these two were before my time but I heard about a 325 benefit party **[2]** in the building (now Aldi) on the corner. Also there was the Anarchist Teapot **[3]** on the other side of the road in an old Donut King place near to McDs.

In the 2010s period, the flat above the HSBC bank on the righthand side of the road was squatted **[4]**, now Presuming Ed's coffeeshop. In trying to get the water turned back on, anonymous miscreants managed to flood the bank below leading to quite a considerable number of cops turning up, only to be matched by a large rabble. Back in those days we could mobilise quite a lot of people! The squat was quickly evicted though.

On the other side of the road, there was an old Abbey National which got raved around 2011.**[5]** Doesn't seem like it would be big enough to rave and it all went horribly wrong, because a firm felt

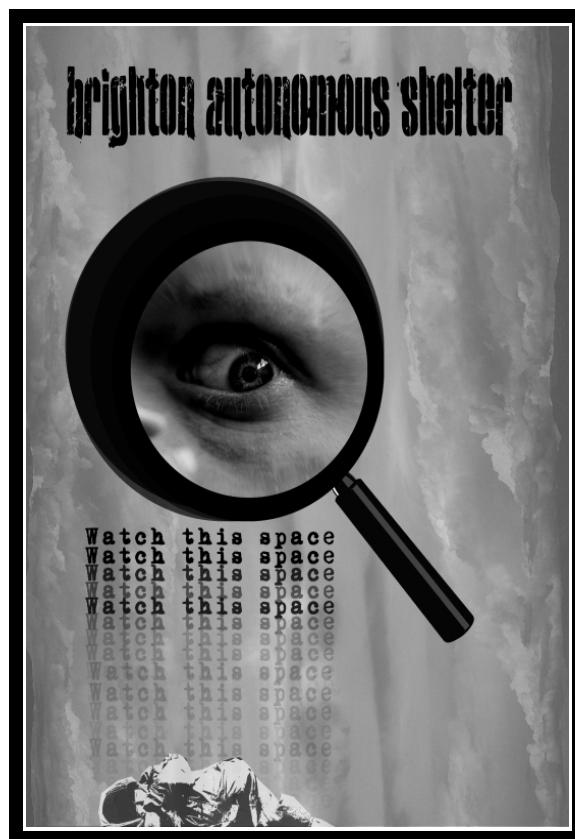
its weed-dealing empire was being impinged upon by some squatters, so the party got raided by a masked gang who then held everyone hostage and robbed them.

Moving up that side of the street, there were some residential squats above shops (and some places look pretty derelict in 2020 ... now of course squatting a residential is criminalised, even if it's hard to prove you are actually living there). Then we come to the Cowley Club **[6]**, a bought social centre which came out of various strands including environmental activism and squatting. Sadly, it's now quite adrift of those roots nowadays, although I hope a new crew will sort it out soon! Round the corner from the Cowley, up by the start of Providence Place there was Bobs Dobbs on the corner, where now there's an ugly glass and concrete building with apartments above and a commercial unit below (which has been empty a loooooong time by the way, just sayin').



Window display at the Cowley back in 2012

Bob Dobbs was a screen-printing workshop for years, then it got evicted and the building was squatpartied [7] but it went horribly wrong just like at Abbey National. Dodgy wankers arrived, gave out free K then mugged everyone. It sounds 'orrible, although you have to remember plenty of squat parties go off fine, history only records the sensational stuff. After that the building was empty and we squatted it for around 6 months for the Autonomous Homeless Shelter (AHS).[8] AHS was a cool project; in solidarity with homeless people who wanted a somewhat stable place we squatted the Bob Dobbs, fixed it up and negotiated with the developers to stay until they were demolishing.



AHS

It was quite nerve-wracking at first, I was worried would go wrong but it worked out fairly well overall and people got housed. What probably helped was that a few squatters (some of them themselves longterm homeless) got evicted at the same time and moved in there as well, so there was a crew to hold it down, merging with street homeless people and this meant informal rules were quickly established like no hard drugs or drunkenness inside. This ensured things went more smoothly than they otherwise would have, although it did then create issues of hierarchy.

There's an optional graf tour here down Providence Place but you could also do it from the other end. This isn't directly squatting related but it'll be in front of you as you come back to London Road from Bob Dobbs, so I'll drop it in now. At 132 London Road **[9]** there used to be a Boots and Co-op supermarket with a Rileys snooker centre upstairs.

As of 2020, it is all getting demolished. What's gonna happen there? Well it's gonna be student flats. The argument would go well ok that's shit, but maybe that's what Brighton needs, at least it won't be homes for rich people, social housing would've been better but ok students have to live somewhere too and it's better than converting houses on residential streets into houses of multiple occupation then pissing off the neighbours. However in this case, it's gonna be flats for an international school, a school called Kings which is around the corner. Looking at their website, the 2020/2021 UK student fees for a two year A-Level

course and Medical Foundation course are each £27,180 per annum! For international students it's so much money they don't even say, you have to contact the college for more info!! And does that figure include accommodation? Nope. The 2020/2021 accommodation fees for student residences such as the soon-to-be boutique flats on "gritty" London Road are £11,630 - £14,573 per annum. WHAT THE FUCK!?! So the parents of these kids will be paying around £30,000 a year!?

We squatted the old Co-operative department store **[10]** in 2012. It was undoubtedly the highpoint of our small squatting scene, which for a year or so was pretty active before things fell apart again, as they do in a town as transitory as Brighton. The main reason for the implosion was a case of multiple sexual assaults in the scene.

Looking back it threw up very complex issues and I very much doubt anyone would go about the accountability processes in the same way again. Plus around that time, there was of course the criminalisation of squatting.

We had a long London Road related courtcase, more on that below. Back in 2012, we were quickly taken to court by the Co-op Group, which refused to negotiate (not very co-operative of them). We won an adjournment in court thanks to some genius who implied we had been given a license to be there. I wasn't much help sitting at the front, I was brutally hungover and got the shakes then hassled by the judge!



*How it was in 2012
and how it is now in 2020*

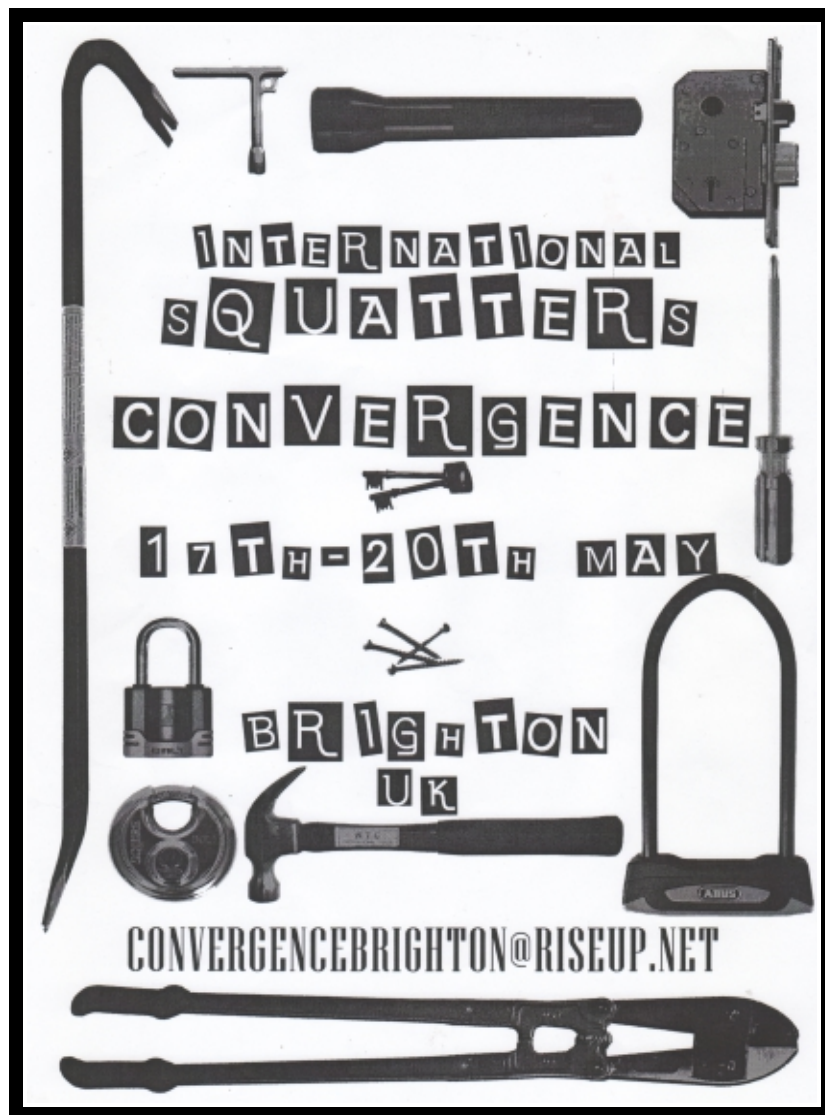


The judge then took everyone's names and adjourned for lunch and when we came back wanted to check who was still there, so he did a roll call then we all sniggered when Emma Goldman appeared to have left the building. Despite Ms Goldman having another engagement, we were still in a group of 20 people and the judge got fed up and adjourned it for a week which was absolutely fine by us, since we only wanted the building for the event anyways.

The Convergence itself went pretty well, we got people coming from all over the place (I remember France, Dublin, Bristol, London, Cardiff and I'm sure there were more). Our publicity machine had been excellent, cranking out a press release in English / German / Swedish / French / Spanish / Catalan / Norwegian / Dutch / Italian ... basically just through the people in our scene, we were proudly international.

There were some funny discussions on how to translate the essential Brighton squat terminology of "gak" and "faff". It's all a bit of a blur now but I do remember bits ...

We got in through an open window really high up. Most of the building had been empty for decades and the water damage was spectacular, there were fascinating towers of green algae! One bit of the place had been in use more recently, it had been a Co-op supermarket on the sidestreet off London Road (Baker Street).



Convergence poster 2012

This shows just how vast the building was if a supermarket took up a tiny part of it. (Incidentally, the shop moved round the corner onto London Road next to Boots and has now been demolished, only to move again to the former Maplins!). We found some weird stuff in the storage, like these animal noise badges, good times. The shop had an alarm which I got a fit of giggles silencing with a broom handle. The mighty Zibabu played a great huntsab benefit gig (plus I found a usb stick with Pirates of the Caribbean on it on the dancefloor!?). My self-organised shopping trolley bar annoyed people even

though all the profits were being ploughed back into the organisation of the event. Last but not least, screening THX 1138 (my favourite ever movie) and passing out through a combination of exhaustion and bliss before the event had even begun. It was a truly massive building, like 6 floors high, over a 100 metres long with a creepy basement.

Early on in the week the Fire Brigade came, sent no doubt by the pigs, and we showed them around, demonstrating we had health and safety awareness, fire extinguishers and marked exits. Luckily for us the building had multiple escape routes since the fire are normally alright and non-political, but they can't let a death trap happen. They left and we were happy to have got that pathetic eviction attempt by the cops out of the way ... I went to sleep on a mattress in a room I'd (controversially) put a lock on way up at the top of the building, only to hear the next morning after a good night's sleep that a hippy dickhead had been burning sage to purify the building and managed to set the fire alarms off in the other half of the building! This is the thing about squatting in Brighton - you can never predict what will happen next. Every day brings new surprises.

As a small collective, it gave us a lot of power to occupy a big building and hold it down. Let's not forget that the bowels of the building gave birth to the CRAB gallery space. That crew then squatted a few other buildings (maps.squat.net/brighton). We'd been able to pull off an international convergence which was great but we clearly weren't able to hold

down such a massive building when there were plenty of twats rolling up the whole time only wanting to get fucked up. I was impressed to see that for some people a squatters convergence means nothing more than an implied invitation to turn up with eight beers, drink them then go get eight more and that is an eloquent demonstration of how fucked radical social movements are here. They could have done that literally every other day of their lives! We left the building empty and then apparently it got squatted again by munters who raved it, a brilliant sendoff in my opinion and I would have liked to have been there but not something we wanted to held be responsible for as a housing justice group. The department store eventually got redeveloped into student flats ... The facade of the building still stands but behind it is all newbuild, so that the windows of the old facade don't even line up with the floors inside, which just looks shit.

That old building had beautiful staircases and art deco features ... I still feel quite conflicted about this; by the time we squatted the building, as I said already parts were in a really awful state after over twenty years of water damage, so at least now the building (or rather its facade lol) is getting used, but then on the flipside it's still not used by the local community, it's foreign students from rich families paying through the nose to live there. It's hard for London Road to survive gentrification this savage. Anyway back to the squatting ... A few doors up the road from the Co-op, the Methodist Church at 88 London Road **[11]** can tell a few stories.



Evicted 2008

...



Empty 2010

It was constructed around 1894 (by architect James Weir) and received a front extension onto the street in 1910 which might explain its weird look, I dunno. It was sold in 2006 and presumably stood empty until it was occupied in April 2008 as part of the global days of action in support of squats and autonomous spaces. After an amusing struggle with the demented religious owners, it was evicted in July 2008. It was then squatted again for a week as a SmashEDO convergence space around 2011, which didn't last long.

The church then became a cafe with a theatre in the back room which operated for a year or so. Unfortunately, it didn't work out, first the cafe closed and then the theatre soon after. My researches showed that the theatre was never actually licensed for various reasons, but the council allowed it to happen anyway, that's cool. Why not be flexible sometimes? Whilst still ensuring health and safety standards are met, obviously! The owner, property developer James Delicata said in 2016 "I have absolutely no intention of developing this building into flats. I will be carrying out some renovation works, and will then be looking

for a new tenant to take on the new premises. I have already had a number of enquires from possible new tenants and am confident a new theatre will be opening very shortly." He then put people in flats upstairs. In fact developers had already tried and failed to demolish it and build yuppy flats in 2006! And 2007!! So maybe that informed Mr Delicata's delicate thought processes.

In any case, I don't think much more happened in the building and by 2020 it was looking pretty derelict and had been re-added to the squat research list before the scaffolding went up. Bah! You snooze, you lose. A quick check of the planning shows that it is being redeveloped into a new building for Dice Saloon which at the moment is up on New England Street in an old industrial unit. It's a gaming centre in the sense of boardgames and stuff.

So great that the church has again resisted becoming yuppy flats but fuck developers like Delicata who come with the blabla about social engagement and then still go for the cash money, every single time.

A bit further up from the church is Al Campo at 84-86 London Road.**[12]** Downstairs used to be a Blockbusters and upstairs was a weird church space with a kitchen and a big hall plus stage. There was also office space which became bedrooms and because the crew was quite big (mainly the Broad Street punx).



Blockbuster soon after eviction

People ended up living in the alcoves behind the stage and in the bar, so I'd go round in the afternoon to set up the projector for a film night and people would wake up and emerge from various corners. Someone was sleeping down by the chained up doors (we only used the back entrance) and another guy was living out on the back roof in a weird utility space! Having the hall was cool, there were gigs and circus (Cabarave). The film nights were fun, we screened squat documentaries from around the world and of course a wee bit of riot porn too. We also showed films from John Waters, Gaspar Noe and so on. The building was known by different names, I called it Blockbuster even though that was officially downstairs and it was there for least a year.



lightshoppe occupato

Just up the road, the old light shop was then squatted by a bunch of people who'd been together in several social centres and Lightside/Darkside on St James Street. **[14]** It's now Fatto a Krappa, a shitty pizza place who call the cops on squatters. The owner of the light shop was a prick, he tried to do a common law eviction by running straight in when the door was opened and punching somebody in the head. That attempt didn't work out for him, then most likely thanks to his moaning the police evicted it right after Section 144 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act came into usage on 1 September 1 2012.

It was 3 September when the police busted into the light shop. They came very slowly - it actually took them ten minutes to break through ... The barricades were so shit and springy that the battering ram had no effect! There's a hilarious film on youtubes. They were watched by a large crowd and a couple of people on the roof. Inside, three people went to the attic and superglued themselves together, getting arrested several hours later.

We had actually been planning to squat a residential building to test the new law, then we were overtaken by events and fairplay to the supergluers for the fast-thinking. The ensuing courtcase took a while, eventually all three people who were arrested walked free, since the cops were unable to prove that anyone actually lived there. Two of the three had their cases thrown out immediately, the other one was convicted and had to go to appeal because the police claimed he had admitted to living there, in a rooftop interview no less. As soon as an actual judge (with actual legal knowledge as opposed to magistrates) heard this, he asked if he was interviewed under caution and of course he hadn't been, so the case was quashed. In any case, the ticking timebomb that we never had to release was that the building had never even been zoned residential in the first place! This was one of the first squatting cases heard under s144 and we had a lot of fun resisting it, with great solidarity from as far away as Lausanne and Prague :)

The moral of the story as outlined at **rooftopresistance.squat.net** is always give a “no comment” interview and don't admit to anything.

Now just a pile of rubble, the building located on the other side of the street from the lightshop was the first iteration of the DiY Kodak Homeless Shelter.**[13]**

This awesome project started off at Xmas 2019 and sadly the wanker property developers were quick to evict it.



Kodak occupato



Post Kodak

They had very smooth lawyers who made mincemeat out of our stunningly flimsy moral arguments in court, despite not even having finalised their planning applications. The judge did say we were morally in the right though, lol. They will of course be building ... student flats. We were quickly evicted and by March 2020, the building had been demolished already.

We moved on to Poundstretcher and then Pizza Pop. Opposite the big old Co-op building, the old Poundstretcher **[15]** at 46-47 London Road was the

second iteration of the DiY Kodak Homeless Shelter which started off up the road. This was too big a building for us to hold down (that's the short version!).



Poundstretcher in 2020

Still, it did have quite a funny story attached to it since it turned out to be owned by no other than Julian Richer (of Richer Sounds). Turns out Mr. Richer has a property arm called JR Properties and he is intending to build 6 luxury apartments on the site of Le Stretch. And did he have planning permission for this? No he did not. We saw a chink of possibility. As you might know, millionaire Mr Richer has handed his company over to the employees and has written a book about being an

“Ethical Capitalist”. We of course tried to negotiate with him and he of course acted like a patronising prick. He then petulantly broke off all communications when we beat him in court (pricks gotta serve their papers correctly if they wanna shift us). Despite being a knob Richer does try to be a good person, so he sent out feelers to find a worthwhile group wanting to use his warehouse space before he builds his filthy yuppy pile. These feelers naturally came straight back to us and we dropped a line to Sussex Homeless Support, a local grassroots group who are now happily installed in the back half of the building.

THIS WOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED WITHOUT US SQUATTING THE BUILDING.

Sadly we lost in court second time round, so we never got to meet Mr Richer in person. The gentrification of London Road continues, yet all is not lost, Poundstretcher moved across the street to the former Co-op and became Bargain Buys. We then briefly moved to Pizza Pop **[16]** on Baker Street, where the owners were right dickheads!

I've never heard of a lawyer trying to kick a door in before but these guys must be losing money hand over fist on that building after having to evict the previous tenants and I guess they wanted to take it out on us. We would have been willing to pay rent but their eyes glazed over. When we beat them in court I was actually a bit worried they would try to beat me up, they were so pissed off LOL but then the judge took pity on them and evicted us two days

later on dubious legal grounds. The shelter moved to Trafalgar Street and later down to the seafront. And how it all went with Kodak is another story for another time. As for the Pizza Pop twats, well it's still empty six months later with a smashed window and I guess that's karma.



Pizza Pop, still empty in September 2020

Apologies for the digression and losing the directions slightly, it just seemed easier somehow to do all the Kodaks together, but now we are back on track. So if you are still standing outside the first Kodak building and looked right across Preston Circus, then you can see the old Barclays Bank building on Preston Circus.

That got squatted in 2015 and briefly turned into the Radical Bank.[17] Supporting it from afar since I wasn't around, it seemed like Sabotaj down at the Old Steine in that it generated lots of energy but sadly didn't last long.

Now it's a Barclays Eagle Lab wotever that means...



Radical Bank in 2015

BONUS SECTION

Let's carry on, why not! So if you continue round the corner at the beginning of New England Road and the hill, past the Lloyds Bank on the left, then you'll see a little square with a redeveloped block of flats at Circus Parade, with a hipster brewery

behind. Back in the early 2010s, Tesco (through their property owning wing) had a plan to demolish everything and build a Tesco Metro, because you know they really care about local community shops. Luckily the Lloyds bank refused to shift because they had a bank vault and that meant there wasn't enough space for the supermarket (or so the story went). So then the flats eventually became empty and were squatted and the bit behind, Elder Place, was the second location for the Autonomous Homeless Shelter (AHS). **[AHS2 Boogaloo 18]** As with the first building we were there for about six months, which on Brighton squat time is an eternity. Things didn't go to shit at all since the running of the place was already set up and by the time of the eviction, which we knew was coming, everyone was either housed or moving away, so I don't think anyone ended up on the street. The courtcase was funny, we didn't offer any defence but a resident did stand up and thank the owner for letting us stay there?!

Just up from AHS, there's a tower block with shops at the bottom, like a bike place and so on. The one furthest left was Gamer Heaven and was a short-lived social centre around 2009. **[19]** I really liked the statement on the website which said "We are a collective of individuals against the banal injustice of landlordship and capitalism ... we believe people should be able to see art, live music, eat food and express themselves without having to pay for it!"

CONCLUSION

What an amazing amount of squat history for such a small area! The Kodak homeless shelter has been an inspiring recent example of how squatting can still work as a tactic to achieve specific aims, although the days of longterm residential squats housing people without the need to pay rent seem to be pretty much gone now. That's a shame because if people have cheap relatively secure housing it frees up a lot of time for other things, like working for social justice and burning down copshops.

Will there be more squats? There needs to be, in early 2020, there are more empty shops than I can ever remember along the road. These include Maplins [edit gonna be the new Co-op], the ex-Kodak squats [one demolished, two empty], the demolished Co-op and Boots, Cumming Up (the Jamaican veg shop), Natwest bank (which appears to have been squatted), Abbey National (still!) and loads more. It's a shame. Probably the area is getting run down as part of some masterplan to redevelop it and make some people a load of money, after all that's how it normally goes.

THE END ... OR IS IT?

Corrections welcomed via facecrack@riseup.net

USING SPACE is a zine about squats, social centres and alternative ways of living. This is issue 15, you can find previous issues at all good infoshops and online at squat.net and cobblebooks.wordpress.com



One (2006) - Visiting social centres.

Two (2007) - A squatted street

Three (2007) - Various articles, including "The future of squatting"

Four (2009) - Various articles, including "Kraakverbod fotoreport"

Five (2011) - A short and incomplete history of squatting in Brighton

Six (2012) - Various articles, including "Facing up to Mike Weatherley's fearsome gauntlet"

Seven (2012) - Various articles, including "Interview with a Seattle Squatter"

Eight (2013) - Learning from the divide between anarchist and artists squats in Paris

Nine (2016) - The housing crisis in the Netherlands

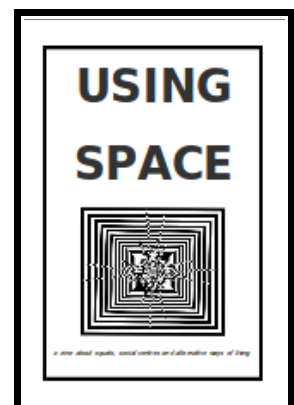
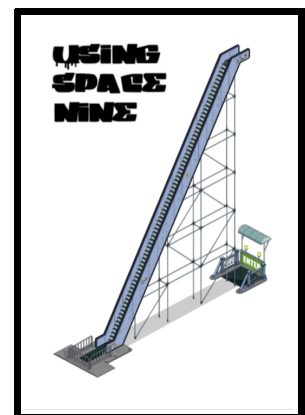
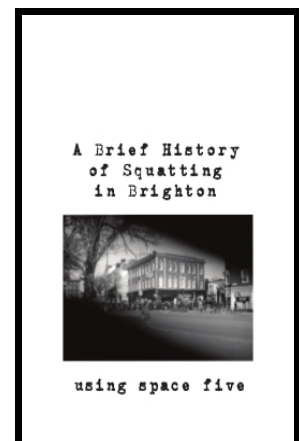
Ten (2016) - A short history of the Poortgebouw in Rotterdam

Eleven (2017) - An interview with someone squatting in Rotterdam

Twelve (2018) - Nazis get fucked

Thirteen (2018) - SqEK is dead: Notes on the decline of an academic collective

Fourteen (2019) One day in London



DUKE OF YORKS
FIRE STATION

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LONDON ROAD

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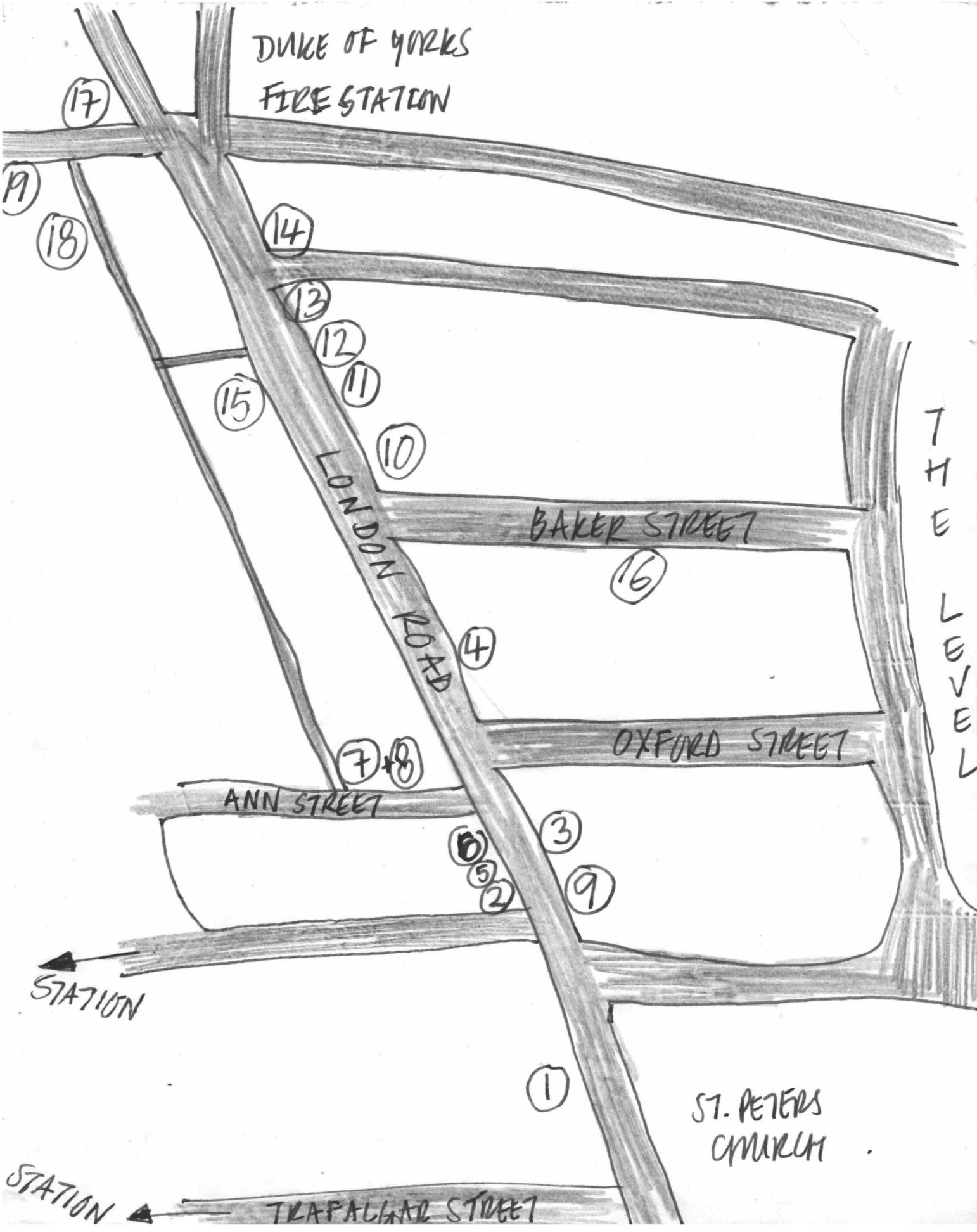
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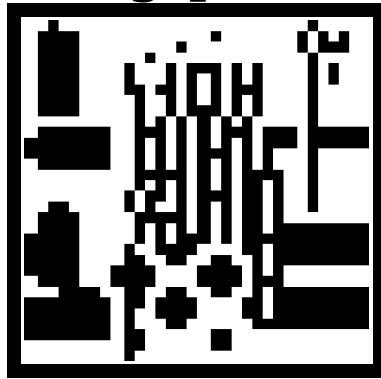
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TRAPALGAR STREET

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usingspace15



november2020