

# Storming the Palace

## Park Life in South London



Rising from flat suburban S. London and crowned with a huge 160ft television transmission tower, Crystal Palace Park boasts the tallest hill in the capital's south. In one of London's more surreal green spaces ornamental gardens, a football stadium, and geese covered lakes mix with grand stone staircases that go nowhere and 30ft hollow 19th Century metal dinosaurs.

This was the second site of the great exhibition in the last century, a celebratory extravaganza glorifying the power of the British Empire and its global reach. The vast glass palace which had held displays and artifacts from every corner of the world burnt down in the 1930s, ironically just as the Empire was beginning to face a re-emerging opposition in the Third World. All that remains now are piles of rubble, the odd column and the dinosaurs. Nineteenth century scientists misunderstood the bones they discovered so the monsters are hopelessly mis-shapen. Used in the Second World War as bomb shelters their main function now seems to be to create a bizarre backdrop for local kids to take drugs by moonlight. Already well established as a place of drama and weirdness, Crystal Palace seemed ideally suited for the direct action to come.

For three years locals had fought the local Councils plan to build a multiplex cinema but their legal campaign had got them nowhere. The multiplex will

destroy the highest part of the park including the now wooded and wilded Palace foundation site. Following hot on the heels of the defence and eviction of a tree site in Kingston Park (p. 148), it was almost by natural selection that the action site at Crystal Palace was established. So just after midnight on April Fools Day '98 a crew of eighteen people (and two dogs) quietly reclaimed the site of the Palace.

### The Rise of 'Crystal Pallets'

By dawn we had tents, nets and squatting notices up, quickly followed by the first visit from the enemy who were politely told they were trespassing and could they fuck off and knock next time. It wasn't long before the media circus arrived, fresh, alert and looking for Swampy. From day one the press and TV crews were invasive, seeking to dominate and exploit us while remaining aloof about their aims. With a degree of wisdom gained from our experiences maybe we can learn to control the media feed-



ing frenzy by simply issuing statements whilst hand picking selective interviews.

Support from the local residents came quickly. For about three years their protest had failed, suddenly there was a new focus for their energies. People from all around this ancient hill top site arrived with food, clothes, shelter, tools, and mountains of pallets. If you haven't been to a direct action site you won't understand the sheer possibilities that lie in pallets. Nearly every structure, every treehouse, barricade and bender is made from them. The site was thus nicknamed 'Crystal Pallets'.

Being a Sports Council site, no lottery cash could be thrown at the Palace, so the Tory council cooked up the old recipe of 'regeneration'. Alarm bells woke up a dedicated band of local residents, who having exhausted their 'democratic' rights, accepted what they knew in their hearts was the only course of action left—the direct one.

Within six weeks a comfortable, if toxic, home for dozens was built. Toxic because after the Palace had burned down, the site was used to dump blitz rubble, resulting in an unusual concentration of lead in the soil. To add to this, the council had allowed flytipping including lots of asbestos! Anyway, back to the story. The support, both moral and material, continued to flood in. Surveys showing 85% local opposition to the development were the norm, and thousands were adding their names to petitions. Therefore it was no surprise to learn that Bromley Council were obstinately digging their heels in. They wanted these 'filthy illegal squatters' off their land or...erm, they'd evict (surprise). Full moons came and went and with them, new direction, new impetus.

## Mid-Summer Madness

Over the summer swathes of the Palace posse travelled, marched and danced to various parties/protests. The tour started from home on Beltane (May 1st), where spaced out goats played with the animals resident and visiting. Come the G8

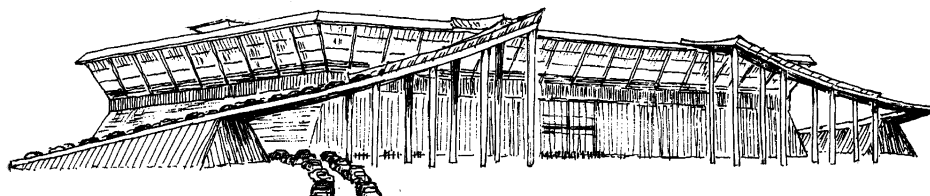
Global street party on May 16th we put on our gladrags, tarted it up to the hilt and 'ad it with them in Birmingham. The atmosphere in and around the sound system was fucking wild, fucking wicked, yet anyone near the upturned car won't need reminding of the eerie intense few seconds as some lunatic attempted to set it on fire. A word of advice: Get the car near the pigs, not your family before you light the blue touch paper and retire. All day and night Birmingham had a electric air, resonant with the vibration of creative unified resistance.

With summer came the usual problems on site. Consumption of drugs increased and a mainly lunched out recycling program led to communal areas being spaces to avoid. In amongst the rats, flies, filth and beer cans, alcoholics flourish. Fighting authority takes sobriety.

Other things flowering and fruiting that summer were our fruit, veg, herbs and flowers. Attempting to work with a permaculture ethic, we harvested beans, tomatoes, courgettes, potatoes, nasturtiums, onions, blackberries and more I forgot. Establishing productive gardens can be as important as climbing up trees. Not everyone can live in trees but we can all look after plants. Rediscovering old skills for a brighter future.

Whilst the festivities all around were going on security was breached at the Palace three times or more. Firstly by the Police Forward Intelligence Team (FIT) who took the piss by storming onto site and filming this and demanding that. More vigilance was needed if the community was to keep the state off and be a true temporary autonomous zone.

Coupled with an influx of Babylon's waifs and strays who took advantage of the welcoming atmosphere, site life took on a more strenuous and stressful atmosphere. During July thefts from site were happening, and regularly. Tools, money, even Tasmanian passports were going missing from under our noses. We have but ourselves to blame for not being a tight-knit crew.



*According to the multiplex's architect Ian Ritchie, 'Building is an act of economic and cultural virility'*



These lapses, with ensuing witch hunts fuelled by paranoia, combined with the constant bombardment of microwaves from the TV mast meant focus and momentum was lost, and the days were noticeably getting shorter... and all the while Bromley Council were shuffling and squirming, issuing writs and threats. The camp decided to take the fight to them (you gotta raise the stakes). Having ignored three years of protest and the voices of all who lived there we decided a big fuck off party might change the perspective slightly.

The full moon on August 8th 1998 saw sound systems, over 500 people and as much stimulation as a person can shove up their nose hit the top ridge adjacent to the site.

The sun rose to a fantastic vibe, new friends, and a spotlessly clean aftermath heralded what was to be a noise-filled early Autumn. There was a 'village fair' which it must be said we lunched out, punk nights, more sound systems interwoven with regular candlelit vigils.

We knew as we entered into September the game had taken a new twist. The legal challenge by the liberal Crystal Palace Campaign was faltering- and badly. No surprise there (see *Never Trust the Middle Classes* box). The pagan festival of Samhain approached and the merry big band from Palace started to look inwards with thoughts of evictions.

Defenses that looked all Summer like they would remain fantasies took shape as we poured tonne after tonne of concrete on to madly unstable land.

The earth we walked for nearly a year was as it turned out perfect ground for our engineers of sketchy construction. As holes appeared and got deeper (digging spurred on by rumours of existing tunnel networks), from the surface rose Faulty Towers of scaffolding.

With more spikes than a punx picnic, more wired than any amphetamin assassin, the original damaged leaning tower of piss 'eds increasingly dominated the landscape. Come eviction it was over forty foot high and well over 400 cans of Strongbow Super old. Memories of it still fresh bring smiles to faces.

With winter fast approaching, the debris on site both animate and inanimate was piling up. For some it was time to move off site and recuperate, for those living on site the need to party was never far away.

What do you do when the local redneck pub just up the road gets boarded up? Get sound systems and your mates and rock it that's what. A posse quickly reclaimed it (obviously feeling very at home there), and caused the Council yet more headaches.



*The long arm of the law plucks a defender out of his tree.*

During those dark, dark nights around Winter Solstice actions were planned and carried out against the partnerships who wanted to develop the top ridge. Hitting multinationals is easy—they are everywhere, but faceless property developers like London and Regional Properties are more tricky. Owned by a Dutch company and based in an off-shore Guernsey bank account, these bastard wide boys were almost unreachable, suffice to say we knew where the directors lived.

## **Eviction Paranoia & Eviction Reality**

With Yule came the first major eviction paranoia. The fear was based around unfinished defenses, oh, and the small matter of Bromley being granted an order to evict, at their leisure, with pleasure. We got our minds on the job in hand. Amazing dedication to the cause saw towers appear in all directions and as we entered the final year of the millennium rumours and counter-rumours did the rounds. Again!!

It seemed, paranoia aside, that it was possible and plausible that the Forces of Darkness would strike quickly after the New Year. With this in mind local residents dug deep for the umpteenth time to supply the crew with brew, and vegans with... whatever those funny people eat and drink.

It came to pass that definitely, for certain, 100% they were coming in on the 4th of January. Warnings were issued countrywide and a posse of around 70 people climbed up trees, went down tunnels or locked on and a vigil of around 40 locals anxiously waited from 6am to welcome the state.

Meanwhile at the Epsom site (see articles end) around 300 police with double that number of security laid siege to the Silver Birches. They met fierce



resistance from the sole occupier who moaned about being woken up. Game Over Epsom. Sigh of relief for Palace.

Gypsies paid us £20 per load so that they could dump tires on our site—which we used for defenses. Business flourished as did the barricades—shame about the wildlife. More Swampification by the corporate media, intent on highlighting tedious trivialities. When will we learn?

Storm clouds gathered over the hilltop as the daylight hours grew longer. Many nights and days were spent in various states of mind watching the natural light shows. We had it all there, from temperatures above 100f to downpours, lightning and double rain-bows. Ain't nature wonderful?

After Imbok (yet another pagan date for your diary), the eviction wind up got into gear with the barricading and trial runs happening at the 121 Squat centre just down the road in Brixton (see p. 132). Judging by appearances in February, many on site were starting to wish the eviction on themselves and who can blame them?

At the full moon on the third of March the state moved in to restore their order and repossess this most toxic of squats. People and defenses were readyish for the battle to commence. All through the night before people rushed about sorting out where the last minute drinks were being had. With dawn, there was the arrival of various substances and again lots of media. Whose fuckin' eviction is this anyway!?

Up in the Faulty Tower our vantage point wasn't great. Bloody trees were obscuring all the action but it was good enough to see over 350 cops storm in quickly, most in riot gear. Within ten minutes or so a lot of ground support was gone, people failing to get into lock-on positions in the chaos.

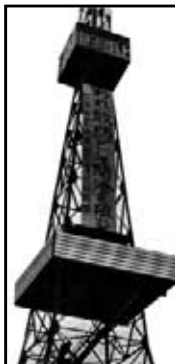
The massive operation brought all traffic to a grinding halt. Pensioners and school kids were unwittingly caught up in a military manoeuvre. A half hour into the eviction and the scale of it all was vividly apparent. Fearing a take over of the TV mast masses of pigs had gathered around it getting microwaved to fuck. I mean as if we would...

Fencing contractors ordered by Bromley to break the law duly obliged, fencing off a right of way, flouting the instructions of two High Court judges. Come nightfall that first day, one could only imagine what everyone else was feeling. Underground, up trees, locked on in holes or on your own up a 25 foot tower that had no shelter, no bedding and no food. Dedication to duty does not sum up feelings of admiration for the women and men, girls and boys, who time and time again put their arses on the line. Altruistic beautiful people every single one of 'em.

Evictions are to be enjoyed (if possible) and frankly we were having a giggle constantly baiting baby-faced coppers who couldn't resist stroking saplings. By day two of the eviction twice as many security had either been arrested for shoplifting, stealing videos or for fighting as had been arrested on our side.

Most of the trees were cut down before nightfall and as we curled up that night, our thoughts were on our brothers and sitters in much more perilous positions than us. Up on the Faulty Tower we went to sleep knowing they were coming to get us—and soon. One of our lot, freezing cold and starving and without brew for two days was still refusing to get off what was a hugely significant strategic tower on top of a bunker. Babylon was duly unimpressed.

Things were getting very surreal. Police were giving us Mexican waves at sunrise. On day three they asked us to sing Happy Birthday to one of their



### Power to the People's Towers!

Right: During the eviction the Faulty Tower stood firm for two days. Building towers can be a very effective defence tactic in fighting developments. Left: In 1975 as part of the vast resistance to the building of the Toyko Airport at Narita, Japanese peasants built two 62 metre high towers. Standing at the end of the first runway the towers prevented the take off or landing of any planes. Tens of thousands defended the towers, masked up, wearing helmets and wielding pikes. *'Surrounded by fields, gleaming emerald that day in the rain, the tower exuded strength. Its steel girders, meshing and intermeshing like the joined arms of its defenders. As if the secret forces of the earth had come together to replenish the struggle of those pledged to defend it, against those who would spread the pall of death.'*—from *Libero No.3* (Japanese Anarchist mag) 1976





mates. "Is that before you smash our skulls in and spray CS gas in our eyes - or after?" We didn't bother.

After deliberating for some time they took out the tower quite swiftly. About five hours elapsed before it was finally cleared. This turned into a blessing for it enabled us up there to be re-united with the posse on the terraces just in time for us to witness a pissed chief druid/biker who thinks he's King Arthur wobble then fall backwards tumbling down the bank. Monarchy—HA!

Typical post-eviction celebrations ensued, fully in the knowledge that three of our mates were still underground. Drinks were drunk for them, repeatedly! Unless having worked and lived underground it is difficult to comprehend the changes in your awareness. Days turned to weeks. On the eighth our Lancashire comrade emerged from his bunker after a butane bottle leaked underground.

Words aplenty have been spoken about the two naughty kids staying underground in their ten by six ft bunker for 19 days. By staying down they massively increased the cost of the eviction. They refused to speak either to the media, police or tunnel teams (see box to the right). This admirable show of no compromise, either with the state or spectacle should be found at evictions more often. Many of us could do a lot worse than following their good example.

The last bunker dwellers were taken off site nearly three weeks after the eviction had started, making Crystal Palace the longest eviction in British history. However, the fight wasn't over, for a few faced prison on unrelated charges, one of whom after spending 19 days underground was banged up for a month using a 25 year old anti-union law. It just shows the extent of Babylon's annoyance. I'm sure the £2 million eviction bill must have upset them a bit. Still, they bleeding started it.

So the complex Bromley have about the complex they want has not vanished. As we go to press Babylon is tied up in red tape of its own making. Many of us went back to our homes outside South London while other Palaceites have remained, living as a community squatting in Streatham. Whether still in the area or not we all valued the time and experiences our great Mother produced there. As did loads of residents who changed and adapted to the new climate (of resistance).

The zeitgeist seems to force more and more into taking action, and with each week new people join the hoards.

## Two Statements From The Bunker

1) For years politicians have been selling our future to multinational companies. Ordinary people are constantly excluded from decisions about their own environment. The only way for us to resist this is by direct action. Every day we remain, we cost them money, which makes the scheme less viable.

As anarchists we hope that by resisting this development, we will not only protect this historic site, but will move one step closer to a future in which neither politicians, nor business, but people themselves control every aspect of their own lives.

2) Contrary to some opinions, our action was not a media stunt but direct action. Our aim was to protect the site and hinder those who seek to profit from its destruction.

As anarchists we understand direct action to be the only way people are empowered, and real change achieved. There is no spectacle that the capitalist media could create that would do justice to the reality of the campaign, or the community that has grown from it. The collective action of this community is more important than any personality or individual efforts. As capitalist media cannot be expected to fairly represent any action that undermines the capitalist system, we will not be saying any more.

## A Surreal Day In Epsom

It was the first working day of 1999. The headquarters of Shell had been occupied (see page 125) and the London Underground offices had been invaded in solidarity with tube strikers. At the same time around 70 of us had responded to an eviction scare at the Crystal Palace action camp.

Although the eviction alert turned out to be false alarm, we soon found out that whilst we had been waiting for the bailiffs to arrive the eviction at the Epsom anti-road/car park camp elsewhere in South London had begun. Energy and enthusiasm at the Crystal Palace camp was low and many people were reluctant to leave the site. However one vehicle left immediately hoping that security at Epsom would still be minimal and that they'd be able to get on site. Later, I jumped into a car with a few others. During the journey we received a call from the first van who warned us of the scale of the police presence and that the only person to have been at the camp when the eviction began had already been arrested and taken to court. We decided to continue but to go straight to



the court to support the person who had been arrested. Arriving at one of the police road blocks stopping all 'suspicious' looking vehicles going into the town, we quickly became aware of the size of the police operation. After a brief delay we drove to the court building. It was from this point on that the day became increasingly bizzare.

The camp at Epsom was small with very few people living there and serious resistance to the eviction was unlikely. Despite this being obvious to the local police, whose headquarters were located directly opposite the camp, the scale of the security measures taken was phenomenal. Several hundred police and security surrounded the site whilst bailiffs and climbers cleared the trees and structures that had been built by those resisting the development. Their operation, however, stretched much further than the boundaries of the camp.

Shortly after being refused entry to the court building by five cops, an unmarked white van drew up, the side door opened and several members of the Metropolitan Police FIT team jumped out. They approached us immediately, addressing the person I was with by her first name. Slightly shocked our natural response was to get up and leg it. As we turned the first corner I noticed a person not in police uniform speak into their coat. He also began to chase us along with the two cops from FIT. They were all fairly unfit, so we managed to lose them quite easily. After hiding for a while behind a public toilet we ventured back out onto the High Street. There were cops on almost every street corner. We began walk-

ing back to the Court where, along with the person who'd been arrested, we bumped in to a few other's who had been involved in the campaign.

Keen to find somewhere to get tea and chill out we left the court together. A van full of police in black boiler suits followed us slowly as a group of police photographers took pictures whilst some members of FIT attempted to strike up conversations. Keen not to lead a police convoy to the house of the friendly person who had offered us a room to relax we split up. A couple of people went back to the car we had arrived in, only to be followed by a police van, whilst others of us went into tourist shops to avoid the photographers. Undeterred FIT continued their harassment. Each of us was being tailed by two or three cops, one of whom had either a stills or video camera. Trying to minimise the number of pictures they could get of us we tried to use paper bags from a gift shop as make-shift masks.

It was clear that the cops following us were under instructions not to let us go anywhere without keeping us under observation. Perhaps the local police were expecting either a much larger response to the eviction alert, or for the few people who turned up at the site to attempt to re-occupy the camp or damage the machinery being used to clear the trees. Unfortunately there was no possibility of our being able to achieve either of these things. We called the person driving the car we had arrived in, arranged a meeting point and travelled back to Crystal Palace— followed, of course, by a van full of cops and several members of the FIT team. A truly bizzare day!

### Never Trust the Middle Classes

"The treehouses are built, the tunnels dug and the small community is already on eviction alert. A world away, in the rarefied atmosphere of QC Anthony Scrivener's Gray's Inn chambers, barrister and Bromley resident Philip Kolvin [far right!] is leading his campaign of 'professional resistance' against the council." (from the Trade magazine *Estates Gazette*, 20th February 1999.)

Kolvin's Campaign (nicknamed Babylon's Protest) purposefully set itself apart from the site, groups and locals involved in direct action, while simultaneously reaping the financial reward of the televised resistance. Mistakenly thinking they were giving money to the site many donated to the 'campaign' which instead went on countless fruitless legal manouvres. Money flooded in to the campaign coffers (£30,000+) while those on site often went without food or basic action supplies—relying often on what they could skip and steal.

