

# A Brief History of Squatting in Brighton

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[network23.org/snob](http://network23.org/snob)  
[snobaha@gmail.com](mailto:snobaha@gmail.com)



using space five

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# USEFUL LINKS

ASS  
<http://squatter.org.uk>

Local heroes  
<http://brighton.squat.net>

April2008  
<http://april2008.squat.net>

The Argus  
<http://www.theargus.co.uk/>

The Mound (RIP)  
<http://brighton-mound.org.uk/>

TAA  
<http://www.randomartists.org/>

SNOB(AHA)  
<https://network23.org/snob/>

Squatworld  
<http://squatworld.blogspot.de>

SQUASH  
<http://www.squashcampaign.org/>

No More Supermarkets in Kemptown  
<http://kemptown.wordpress.com>

Lewes Road Community Garden (RIP)  
<http://www.lewesroadcommunitygarden.org/>

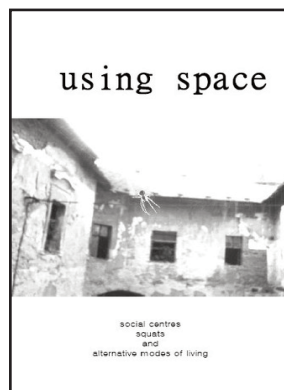
Anarchist Teapot  
<http://www.eco-action.org/teapot/index.html>

Safe space policy (example)  
<http://brighton-mound.org.uk/who-we-are/safe-space-policy/>



## BACK ISSUES OF USING SPACE

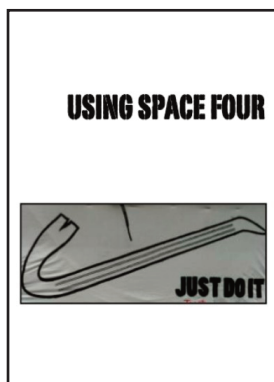
using space one introduces a zine about social centres, squats and alternative modes of living .. you get a long rant about various social centres i have visited or lived in around europe, as well as a profile of the poortgebouw in rotterdam, the netherlands.



using space two focuses on a squatted street in rotterdam. two long articles and some fotos from the now-evicted project are included. the second article is in dutch, the first in english.



- thoughts about the future of squatting
- report on the progress of the now defunct Maelstrom social centre in Leeds
- a personal history of the ELF squat in Amsterdam



- visit to a squatted land project in central Amsterdam
- the UK national squat meet in Bristol
- rumination on social centres
- large squatting action in Sweden
- fotoreport from the Dutch national squatting day
- recycled newspaper reports



## INTRODUCTION

Squatting has occurred throughout human history, of this we can be certain. Ever since some person decided to enclose land, other more enlightened types will have been liberating it again. This edition of Using Space has been rushed out slightly faster than planned and with a slightly different focus to form part of the debate around the current (2011) and misguided plans to criminalise squatting.

Squatting in Brighton has a long and illustrious history, some of which is captured here. If you want to add or correct something, please email.

The contemporary squatting situation is quite good, there is a small but vibrant scene. However, there is not much to be said about that in the public sphere.

Previous editions of Using Space are available to download via <http://mujinga.net/squatting> OR <http://zinelibrary.info> (you can see information about their contents on page 26) You can also find paper versions in squats and at the Cowley Club and Punker Bunker (Brighton), 56A Infoshop (London), Erode (Hanover), Sticky (Sydney), ABC No Rio and Bluestockings (New York).

This history is an ongoing project and may surface again in other forms.

Respect to all squatters.  
Housing is a right, not a privilege.

### STOP PRESS

We are going to make a pamphlet or book to celebrate positive stories about UK squatting. Feel free to participate! For the callout, check the details on the SNOB website (<https://network23.org/snob/>) or email [snobaha@gmail.com](mailto:snobaha@gmail.com). We need fotos, fiction, analysis, rants, doodlings and diagrams.

# THE 1940S

In recent times, squatting became an issue in the late 1940s, following World War II. Servicemen returned to the UK with nothing and with nowhere to live, since their houses had been destroyed. Let down by the Government's empty promises amidst the chaos of postwar reconstruction, they took direct action and occupied various unused army bases and empty buildings. The Mass Observation Archive at the University of Sussex has some fascinating first hand reports. Down in Brighton, Harry Cowley and the Vigilantes were squatting empties for families.

Harry is the suave centrepiece, with the hat



police regularly intimidate squatters with spurious charges (eg criminal damage for taking off a lock) which never end up in court.

What a waste of taxpayers' money!

The flipside of the coin here is munterism, by which I mean squatters being vague and uninformed. The cops have also got used to being able to blag or kick their way into buildings. If people were more on it and knew their rights the police would not be able to do this (or at least it would happen less).

Brighton has changed a lot in the last 15 years. It's now a place where the centre is patrolled by private security (SASS), you have to pay for parking pretty much everywhere in the centre, traveller vehicles are hassled out of town and (most outrageous of all) the cops are planning to put a police station on the Level ('for the community'!?).

Squats in the Laines might now be hard to pull off, but then having said that, 325 and ABC did a squat party on London Road in the old Sainsburys (now Aldi) in 2007. Nowadays it is hard to squat here, not impossible but difficult. Sussex Street, Shaftesbury Place, Rugby Place, Southdown Road, College Terrace and Albion Road have all seen squats which lasted at the most a few months, sometimes just days. There are other squats, better off anonymous, which have existed for years, but these are certainly the exceptions rather than the rule.

However, things do seem to be on the up, as proven by the recent Taj occupation. It was amazing that a building in central Brighton could be held until eviction through the court process without descending into a mess.

The main reason for that was presumably the safer spaces policy which ensured that no-one in the building was using alcohol or other drugs. Enough people are fed up of projects descending into chaos that now good things are sprouting up again. In its brief lifetime the Sabotaj project attracted a lot of people and energy. Despite squatting being legal (for now!) and despite there being plenty of positive stories about squatting if you care to look for them, it seems that mainstream opinion is massively against squatting. This is in some degree shaped by (and indeed shapes) the appalling coverage given to the comparatively few instances of bad squatting stories.

The Government has now (May 2011) begun a three month consultation period which may result in the criminalisation of squatting. SQUASH (Squatters Action for Secure Homes) has reformed.

And whatever happens, squatting will continue.

Don't believe the hype! Squat the world!

VERSION TWO

Corrections / Additions - [snobaha@gmail.com](mailto:snobaha@gmail.com)



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27 February 2011 Last updated at 16:50

### Hove MP calls for end to 'squatter rights'

A Brighton and Hove MP wants squatting in empty buildings to be a criminal offence.

Mike Weatherley, who represents Hove and Portslade, said squatters caused damage and disruption and should be held to account for their actions.

Currently landlords have to go through the civil courts to get squatters or problem tenants evicted.

The Conservative MP has written to the government calling for the law to be changed.

Brighton and Hove has 3,655 empty homes, the highest number in Sussex.



There are 3,655 empty homes in Brighton and Hove, the highest figure in Sussex

Related Stories

'Mad Mike' Weatherley, the MP for Hove, is currently proposing in Parliament that squatting should be made a criminal offence. This is quite ironic seeing as Brighton and Hove police routinely evicts squats illegally on flimsy grounds such as suspected criminal damage or abstraction of electricity which they think allows them to over-ride the Section 6 and kick the door in. Let's get this straight - the

# THE 1970S

After what seems like a lull, in the 1970s, the movement grew and became more political. This issue again was housing. Steve Platt records in his chapter for the excellent book 'Squatting: The Real Story' that "in November 1971 the Cyrenians, a charity for the single homeless which had become exasperated with Brighton Council, squatted three houses".

The Brighton Rents project was squatting buildings with widespread support, (Dennis Hobden, Labour MP for Kemptown, gave his backing). However, the Council refused to bow to community pressure and in July 1969, things came to a head. Houses in Queens Square and Wykeham Terrace were squatted. Platt records:

The army, which owned the properties, had been intending to sell them with vacant possession, but the presence of squatters meant that this had to be postponed. The squatters dug in to fight and called for support. In the months up to the eviction (on 28 November) the local press pilloried the Rents Project and its helpers, warning of 'private armies' and 'terrible weapons' waiting at Wykeham Terrace. The dire warnings seemed to be validated when three people from the squat were arrested for firebombing a local army recruitment office.

two views of Wykeham Terrace



The petrol bombs had been made at the squat and several squatters were later sent to prison.

These events were widely publicised with disastrous consequences. In Brighton for instance, squatting abruptly came to an end and the Brighton Rents Project disintegrated, torn apart by external hostility and internal divisions.

Another source claims that the bombs were planted by Special Branch. As ever, it is a mystery as to what really happened but we can certainly take this as an example of a time when the dominant discourse triumphed. Squatters were painted as the bad guys, using violence, even though the state always maintains the monopoly on violence, whether threatened or implemented. Certainly, in terms of the movement, the public had up to that point been quite sympathetic towards squatters who resisted eviction by any means necessary (for example in Redbridge and Fulham).

This event have signalled a downturn in squatting for a few years, but by 1975 there were estimated to be 150 squats in Brighton. Amazingly, even way back then the Argus newspaper was a blinkered rightwing piece of shit, saying "squatting is a social disease which breaks out at intervals" in 1973. Evictions were frequently both violent and illegal, so a Brighton Squatters Union was set up. Two people involved in this went on to become well known in Brighton: Tony Greenstein, who is now secretary of Brighton & Hove TUC Unemployed Workers Centre, a member of the trade union Unison and also a founding member of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign; Steve Bassam, who led Brighton and Hove Council from 1987 to 1999 and is now Lord Bassam of Brighton, a Labour peer!

In the introduction to a pamphlet which he wrote on the sayings of 'Lord Brown-nose', Greenstein observes that Bassam is "an example of the corruption at the heart of New Labour. It is a corruption that isn't merely financial, although there is plenty of that but a corruption of the political process itself, which hides behind the soundbite and verbal chaff". However, "those who live by spin and the soundbite will also die by them".

Also active in the Brighton Squatters Union was Bruno Crosby, called 'king of the squatters' by the Argus in his 2002 obituary. By all accounts a charmer, 'Big Bruno' even managed to get the Tory Council Leader round to his Argyle Road squat for tea. This house had been empty for five years and was completely renovated by Crosby.

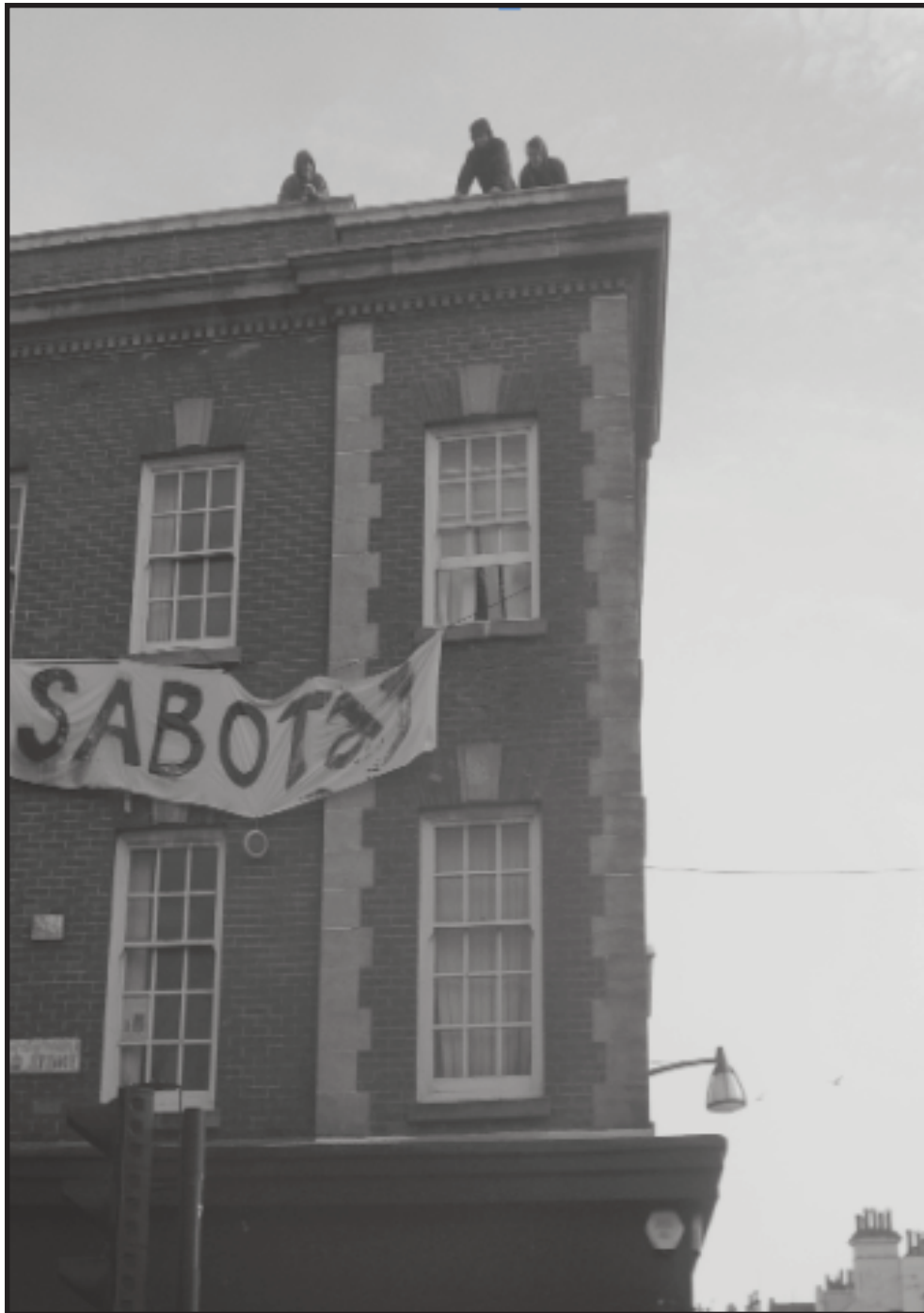
# THE MEDIA

In the media, we tend to have both left wing and right wing views on squatting. The former tends to be liberal and tolerant, the latter is outraged and bays for blood. Recently there has been a campaign emanating from the Telegraph and the Evening Standard to criminalise squatting. The Housing Minister Grant Schapps has been saying some really stupid things like how home-owners are entitled to use sledgehammers to break the door to regain possession of their houses, since it is 'only' property damage.

According to Councillor Maria Caulfield (Cabinet Member for Housing, Brighton and Hove City Council) who wrote a letter to the Argus: "Unfortunately, the romantic notion of the squatter who inhabits a property that would otherwise stand around empty, even makes improvements to the property and leaves for the next empty home without costing anyone anything, has long since disappeared". In Caulfield's world, "squatters cost local taxpayers thousands of pounds" because of all the damage they do to Council properties. She seems to sidestep all too neatly the question of why these properties are empty and why the Council does not have plans for them. She even claims that having to repair buildings damaged by squatters leads to "unwelcome delays" for families who are desperate to move into these properties.

You just have ask WHY there are 3,600 empty homes in Brighton.

Squatting can be seen anti-capitalist direct action and thus attracts a lot of repression. Squats are often illegally harrassed by FIT [Forward Intelligence Team] units or even raided before demonstrations. This occurred in 2004 with the illegal eviction of a squat in the leadup to the Labour Party Conference. In another case, the night before a SmashEDO demo in 2010, a squat was raided on a flimsy pretext, leaving the front door completely destroyed.



# The Noble Sayings of Lord Bassam



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# THE 1980S

The 1980s presumably saw some squatting, but data is hard to come by. Feel free to email any info. Throughout the 1990s, which was quite an active time for alternative culture in the UK generally and thus Brighton in particular, there were many squatted projects. This can be seen against the backdrop of the increasing gentrification of Brighton. As many yuppies moved in who commuted to London for work, the centre became standardised, lots of independent shops and traders got priced out and the mood switched. Residential squatting was forced out of the centre.

That bastion of truth the Argus recorded in 2007 that "The former Astoria Bingo Hall in Gloucester Place, the old court house and register office in Princes Street and the Madeira Café in Kemp Town were all wrecked as squatters descended on the city in the late Nineties".



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Home | 4th August 1995 | Issue 34

*Justice? Brighton's Campaign in Defiance of the Criminal Injustice Act*

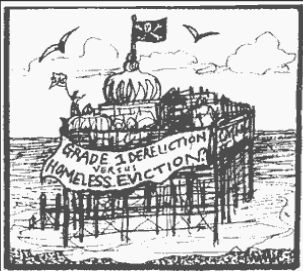
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**CJA ARRESTOMETER**  
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 Environmentalists 43  
 No Live Exports\* 38  
 Travellers# 11  
 Tree Defenders 11  
 Ravers 3  
 Illegal Gatherers 3  
 Peace Campaigners 2  
 Druids 1  
 \* 1000+ animal rights activists nicked this year  
 # not including grief and harassment

**PIER PRESSURE!**

**SQUATTERS TAKE OVER BRIGHTON'S DERELICT WEST PIER**

"IT'LL TAKE THE S.A.S. TO GET US OFF!"



Recently there have been more positive stories for example the Taj occupation, the Lewes Road Community Garden (sadly evicted, photos on previous page, Schmovies made a great film about it), the InItOnIt parties and the School on Old Shoreham Road. The latter had widespread local support since everyone is united in their outrage at developers who leave buildings to rot - see the newspaper clipping in the centrefold.

Taj was a Brighton institution, a fruit and veg shop with two branches, one on Old Steine, one on Western Road (with a 'secret' third one just round the corner from Western Road). Unfortunately, the parent company defaulted on a loan and as a result went into administration, with the result that the Old Steine branch was closed. This was a talking point in the local community which only become more outraged when it emerged that Sainsburys were planning to move in. A grassroots campaign was set up opposing the Sainsburys plan in December and in February the former Taj building was squatted. This gave a huge boost to the campaign and people flooded in, with over 100 people at the initial planning meeting. Unfortunately the building was quickly evicted, but lots of new connections were made. The campaign to keep Sainsburys out of Kemptown continues (it would be their eighth supermarket in the city!)

## Court evicts Brighton Taj squatters

10:18am Thursday 24th February 2011

Print Email Share Comments(85)

By Alex Ariel

A judge has ordered squatters occupying a Kemp Town supermarket to leave within 24 hours or face prosecution.

Members of the group have been sleeping on the floor of the closed down Taj greengrocer store in St James's Street since February 12 in protest at plans to put a Sainsbury's store there.

Taj's parent company went into administration last year after running up debts of millions of pounds.

The St James's Street store was closed after administrator BDO was appointed.

Yesterday the campaigners, who call themselves SaboTaj, appeared at Brighton County Court where they were served with an Immediate Possession Order (IPO) by District Judge Elaine Thompson.

And this morning, it appeared they were abiding by the order when photographer Kevin Meredith snapped them moving their possessions out of the store.



ON THE WAY OUT? A squatter starts moving his possessions out of the empty Taj building. Picture by Kevin Meredith.



lewes road community garden



# THE 1990S

From 1993-5 some abandoned beach chalets were squatted near the West Pier. You can get a picture of just how much Brighton has changed when you go down the seafront and stop to observe that now these chalets are all now occupied by nightclubs, artists shops and tourist emporia. Amusingly, when the squatters were evicted in 1996, half of them moved on to the abandoned West Pier, a wreck which could only be reached over water. You can find a local news clip on youtube called 'West Pier Squatters' (with Bassam popping up but scrupulously ignoring his squatter past).

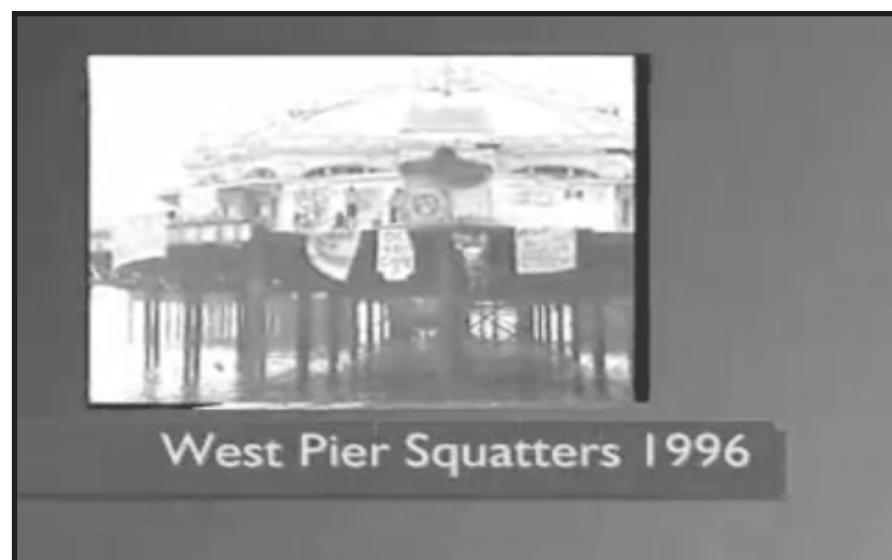
In 1994, the group Justice? was formed out of opposition to the Criminal Justice Bill, which amongst other things criminalised raves. The old court house was squatted. And Schnews was born!

In 1996, Justice? set up a squatters Estate Agency to publicise the large amount of empty properties remaining in Brighton. You can also find a local news report about that on youtube if you look for 'Squatters Estate Agency'.

Other groups active in Brighton were SPOR and Anarchist Teapot. Both deserve a quick mention. From 1996-9 the Anarchist Teapot collective squatted a variety of shops and organised vegan cafes in Brighton and Worthing in something like eight locations. There was always free tea apparently.







**BRIGHTON NEWS** [SEND YOUR NEWS](#)

### Squatters stage warehouse cabaret

9:47am Monday 7th April 2008

Print Email Share

By Rachael Evans »

Squatters broke into an engineering firm to hold a Moulin Rouge-style cabaret.

Members of the Subterranean Art Group, Brighton, entered THS Precision Engineering's premises in Wellington Road, Portslade, on Wednesday.

They were holding shows featuring a male cancan troupe, burlesque dancers and "saucy" cake fighting over the weekend.

Design student Maizie Henderson in the THS warehouse

Unfortunately, the 2009 version went quite badly, with a warehouse venue in Moulsecoomb being squatted since it was felt that a more central venue was too risky. This meant that the event catered to friends and friends of friends rather than the public. The much-vaunted clash with the Brighton Fringe didn't happen since no-one attending the Fringe events would slog it out to the event. The 2010 version ended before it began, with the venue getting illegally evicted on the Thursday.

## .....Brighton FreeSpace.....

On the flipside a positive project occurred in 2009, the Freespace collective occupied the former Gamer Heaven, a shop under a block of offices near to Preston Circus. They organised some cafes and gigs.

Perhaps smaller less high profile things work better in Brighton.

2008 also saw people squatting Fife House, an opulent property on Lewes Crescent, adjacent to Sussex Square. This got quite a lot of press and formed part of a whole string of stories (mainly London based) of so-called 'millionaire squats'. Interestingly, the media (until recently at least) have been quite sympathetic to these occupations, presumably since it involves the ultrarich being punished for leaving expensive properties empty (as second or even third or even tenth houses!).



And Temporary Autonomous Art took place in Brighton for the first time, in a squatted warehouse in Portslade. TAAs (inspired by Hakim Bey's notion of the Temporary Autonomous Zone) have been taking place all over the country recently - in Manchester, London, Sheffield and Bristol. What began as a tactic to release creativity from the underground free party movement in London has evolved slowly into an art exhibition taking place in a squatted warehouse environment. Sadly this means that most of the interesting elements have been lost, since the events have retreated into the industrial areas of towns rather than being in confrontational yet accessible venues, such as the early London TAAs in Farringdon, Hackney and Stoke Newington.

At one stage a Burger King was squatted on the London Road. The collective then shifted towards being a mobile soup kitchen, catering at activist events.



From 2000, a building on London Road was purchased which would later become the Cowley Club, a self-organised social centre. Around this time there was a huge debate over whether legal spaces where a good alternative to squatted projects. In this particular case, it seems the move to a space which plays the legal game yet remains oppositional was extremely wise since squatted social centres tend to last months at most and the Cowley has been open now for eight years.

SPOR were a loose grouping of artists and musicians who put on a couple of high profile art events. In 1999, they opened up some buildings at York Place, near to St Peter's church, for a month long art exhibition which culminated in a party.

In Jan/Feb 2001, SPOR took the disused Co-operative Bank, on Ship Street. When the time came to evict, confused bailiffs met sock puppets talking to them through the letterbox and then broke in to find an empty building. The squatters had barricaded the building and then escaped from the roof.

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**call for decentralized days of action  
 for squats and autonomous spaces  
 11th and 12th of April 2008**



Now, Medina House stands empty and lonely, closed by a Fire Order after the Fire Brigade blocked up all the entrances, meaning it is a hazardous building and no-one is allowed to enter. The owner continues to press for planning permission for an obscene eight-storey block of flats.

To take some other events which happened through the 2000s, in 2003, there's a report of the Terra Audio social centre at the ex-Territorial Army barracks, on Lewes Road. According to Schneeps, events were as follows: *Punk Bands on Friday night (13th) at 10.30pm; Sunday (15th) - Evian report back and footage, riot flicks and practical positive stuff, doors open 6pm*. The barracks are STILL standing empty today.

In 2006, Home Farmhouse in Stanmer Park was squatted. It was squatted again for a blissful few weeks in the summer of 2010.



In April 2008, to tie in with the days of action in support of squats and autonomous spaces across Europe (see flyer on the next page), a church was squatted on London Road.

It lasted a few months and resisted eviction before being forcibly taken.

It features in a film called *Takeover* and was briefly resquatted as a SmashEDO convergence space in 2009.

The front of the church has now been converted into living space and the rest (ie the hall and a large back room) are presumably still standing empty.

# THE 2000S

As we move into the 2000s, we can see that squatting continues, following the same pattern of ebbs and flows. Sometimes up, sometimes down. Not so organised, no squatters unions, but still happening.

Medina House is a lovely building on the seafront in Hove, next to the King Alfred's Leisure Centre.



It was first squatted in 2002, but in what seems to have been a common pattern for Brighton squats at the time, it got over-run by party people, who by exploring their 'freedom' to take drugs and make noise, angered the neighbours and got evicted. Despite all that for some reason (presumably an unfussed owner, or one that used squatters as part of his demonic plans to antagonise planners) Medina House remained occupied for years and was finally evicted in 2006. Only then to be resquatted and quickly evicted again!

# In defence of squatting

Posted by [Laurie Penny](#) - 20 February 2011 19:36

The occupation of private property is brave and necessary.

## Squatters set up home in listed Brighton farmhouse

3:34pm Wednesday 13th October 2010

[Print](#) [Email](#) [Share](#) [Comments\(8\)](#)

By [Naomi Loomes](#)

A group of squatters have set up home in a Grade II listed farmhouse.

The 18th century Home Farmhouse in Stanmer Park, believed to be worth more than £1 million, has been taken over by a group describing themselves as "professional squatters".

The house is set in sprawling gardens with its own orchard.

Brighton and Hove Estates Trust, the preservation charity which owns the property, has now been forced to go to court to have the group removed from the home so tenants can move in.

The group of five staying in the home say they do not fit the stereotype of squatters and say they should be recognised for the good they do.

## Brighton and Hove councillors blame Government for squatters

9:10pm Tuesday 19th October 2010

[Print](#) [Email](#) [Share](#) [Comments\(5\)](#)

By [Naomi Loomes](#)

Council officials say they cannot afford to do up hundreds of empty houses because the money they receive in rent goes straight to central government.

As squatters moved into yet another listed property in the area, [Brighton and Hove City Council](#) said it was being prevented from redeveloping the empty buildings by Government rules.

Last week 50 Kensington Place was occupied for the third time by squatters.

The local authority said it was in an impossible situation because the rent it received from its properties currently has to go to the Treasury rather than being spent by the council - meaning there was no money available for the necessary work in Brighton and Hove.

There are currently 216 council properties standing empty in the city.

The government has said it plans to reform the housing system to allow councils to keep the rent paid on their properties.

## Hove residents kept squatters in school secret

2:30pm Tuesday 25th January 2011

[Print](#) [Email](#) [Share](#) [Comments\(29\)](#)

By [Tim Ridgway](#)

Residents kept quiet about squatters taking over a former school because they preferred them to the idea of developers moving in.

A group of about a dozen people are believed to have moved into a section of the vacant Park House in Old Shoreham Road, Hove, in November.

But neighbours have remained tight lipped, saying they preferred the building to be used for shelter than left derelict.

Others said the first they heard of the squatters was when more than 100 people attended an all-night "leaving" party on Friday.

It comes as landowners Hyde, who were knocked back in plans to build flats on the site in April, revealed they would shortly be submitting a third application to develop the plot.

former Bellerbys College site has been vacant since 2007.

This time Hyde has been twice unsuccessful to build dozens of flats on the land, which is Hove Park.

lewes road community garden

