



3. EAMONN BURGESS: Argyle St Squatters

On Friday 7th December 1979, we moved in *en masse* as a result of these meetings for people in housing need with Anarchist tendencies. Something like twenty of us met in the Ferryboat pub and, one by one, we crossed over the road, and one by one, we took it in turns to borrow the tools from each other to get through the doors into some of the houses that, at that time, had been empty for...a year or two...There were something like 60 houses in total, something like 30 of them were still occupied by council tenants when we decided to take over the rest of them.

We were more male than female; we were certainly more young than old; we had no children, though we did an awful lot about that in the ensuing years!

We had a house that had nothing but teenage children in it. All of their parents lived in separate houses down the road. The point was, you know, everyone's on the dole, there's mass unemployment, so Mum (or mostly Mum, but occasionally Dad) would be claiming benefits, part of that would be for their children. They would hand the money over to the children on a weekly basis: "You buy your food, You pay your gas and electricity, You come back to me if you can't handle the other kids", but it was a Kids' House.

The Department of Environment...awarded us a million pound grant to buy the Street off the Council and to do up the houses on

the strength of the bid that we submitted as a corporate body, that was The Street Housing Coop. We got the million pounds. Unfortunately Michael Heseltine was Secretary of State for the Environment at the time. He had said because his plans to implement the compulsory sale of council housing had been delayed by Norwich City Council, it was personal...He said: "Find a way to stop it".

I suppose the watershed would have been the removal of the £1 million grant...The people that would most want to get out would probably already have been a bit sick of the kind of levels of noise, conflict, substance misuse, mental illness...

That's when the rot set in. That's when the Street lost its social cohesion. That's when the people who had reproduced needed to take steps to plan for security for their families. That's when they had to atomise. It's down to Number 1, it's down to the unit...we gotta get outta here.

I was pleased to get out. I was surrounded. I needed to do something as cathartic as that to acknowledge that my world, my dream and my reality, were all so alien to one another that they were never gonna be held together as long as I held on to the dreams that I had in 1979.