

TITLE: MK Skate Transcript

Name: Lindsay Knight

Date of Birth: 1976

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Interviewed by: Nathan Lindsell

Duration: 00:49:18

... We were on the same skate team, so we've already got a rapport going.

This is Nathan Lindsell. It's 10th July, 2019. Can I ask your name and date of birth, please?

My name's Lindsay Knight. 1976.

Can you tell me how you got into skateboarding? What specifically... how did first encounter skateboarding?

I lived in Milton Keynes, when I was very young. My brother encountered skateboarding and BMXing at the local school. It was Great Linford County Combined School and he saw BMXers and skateboarders there and then we moved to Newbury in Berkshire, this is in 1985. My brother was so kind of enamoured by that... what he saw ... it was breakdancing, BMXing, skateboarding, that when we got to Newbury he kind of kept finding out about it. Got into skateboarding, he got everybody else into skateboarding so we had... eventually it felt like half the town was into skateboarding. That was in... I started skateboarding in 1986.

What was your first experience of skateboarding? When did you get your first board and that sort of...?

My first board was a... it was bought for me in Newbury. It was Christmas, 1986 and it was a Pacer Maniac, which was like a budget board that they sold in a toyshop and I got that for Christmas. I didn't really skate it much for the first sort of year but then, my brother had a lot of influence over my parents in buying it for me because he wanted to get me into skateboarding but, about a year later, I started skating all the time.

Do you want to elaborate on that? Or shall we go back to when you moved back to Milton Keynes?

Yes, it's a tricky one because I don't want to make the story too long and complicated and boring and not have to do with Milton Keynes but, essentially, the short story is that I lived in Milton Keynes when I was very

young and there was a sort of certain creative influence here that had to do with, like, offbeat, creative street things, like skateboarding, BMXing and breakdancing. People were doing that here. We were very young. I was, like, ten or eleven and it influenced us... me and my elder brother, James.

We moved away to this very conservative, boring town and my brother was the most urban... if you can believe that... person in the town. It felt like we moved there... and he took that and it almost became his persona and so he was always... whatever it was... skateboarding, BMXing, breakdancing. We got into it heavily. We lived there for about five years and I moved back to Milton Keynes in 1991.

My parents, basically, just announced one day, 'We're moving back.' I was really worried about it because in Newbury we'd created a whole skateboarding scene for ourselves. We had a shop. Someone's dad had started a shop. We had a ramp, we had two ramps... four ramps actually, some we'd built ourselves, some the council... we had a whole scene going.

At the time... 1990-1991... everything was mini ramps, a bit of street skating, a bit of the... everyone was a bit of an all-rounder. Milton Keynes wasn't in the magazines. I remembered it from being younger but I was really worried. It was like, 'There's nothing there. There's nothing to skate.' Some friends of mine had encountered some Milton Keynes skateboarders at a place called South Rock, which is like a barn in Oxfordshire and they were pretty intense people. They were very good at skateboarding the street and they were Dean Jasper, Simon Dodson and Ian Warner.

They really blew my friends away because they'd never heard of them before and they were kind of horrible. These kind of scary, horrible blokes and they were really good at skateboarding. They said to me, "Milton Keynes has skateboarders and they're good but they're not very nice."

When I moved back to Milton Keynes I was fifteen and I was, sort of, terrified because skateboarding was my life. It felt like it was my whole identity. And then I got here, I saw a skateboarder in Milton Keynes Shopping Centre. It was Ben Etheridge with Richard Stocker. Two people who are still seen together now in the Shopping Centre. And they said, "Everyone skates at the bus station." And that night I went down to the bus station. I had my friend, Alex from Newbury, staying with me and, honestly, we got down there and it was this heaving skate scene. It was the middle of the summer and I was just absolutely blown away.

It was like this hidden, amazing, underground street skateboarding world that was just mind-blowing and completely hidden. It felt really like... there were hints of it in magazines but it felt like, 'Oh, my God! This is amazing.' People that I'd never heard of that were amazing. Yeah, it was incredible.

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I'll elaborate on the next question. What was... I'll make a question off the bat here. Obviously, you were blown away when you first saw Milton Keynes skateboarding. Was it going to something like ... was it the architecture and that sort of thing? Was it ... what were you first thoughts from where you came from... when you were skating in Newbury to here? What was the change and how you interpreted the...?

Ok. That's a good question actually. When I... that period, skateboarding changed like on a weekly basis. It felt like every week or month, every magazine that came out, clothes were different, tricks were different or new tricks. And that was the thing that really hooked me. It was really subcultural. I did it to get away from the mainstream because I didn't fit in in the mainstream.

Milton Keynes was like that. Felt like that on steroids. You had this city that... it didn't really know who it was. It was filled with these really... it was like ecstasy time. So it was filled with a lot of kind of quite clean cut, raving-type people or very clean cut... a lot of white, wealthy, middleclass people, it felt like. And it had all this kind of... it had this underground of skateboarding and all this new, clean architecture that was kind of faceless... was being used in this kind of unusual way.

I just remember that being like glue. It was like... I describe it as almost being like what I had in Newbury but on steroids. It was like this is the most exciting... it's like all the things that I liked about skateboarding in Newbury... it was anti-society or whatever it felt... anarchic and against what? People didn't understand it. In Milton Keynes that was heightened because the city... it didn't seem to suit the city then. You know, you see people... you see salesmen in cars, everyone in nice, newly-bought clothes and then you see all these skateboarders grinding things and skateboarding and it just felt, yeah ... like really... naughty's a terrible word because it's got weird connotations but it just felt like this is really forbidden. This is really exciting.

And the architecture. I think it was just so clean and new and, as the tricks developed, they were developing in the direction of the architecture. So we used to skate kerbs, like people do now, but then slowly through the nineties people started getting higher and higher ledges and, of course, Milton Keynes mainly only had high ledges. So it got to this point, by about '92/'93, where we... it became one of the only places in the country where you could skate like Americans' skate street.

With some of the handrails and things that they had here there was that as well. People skated here like we saw Americans skateboarding in videos. They skated handrails. We didn't have any handrails to skate so, yeah, the architecture was like nothing anywhere else.

Could you elaborate on that sort of area? Again with the technical area of skateboarding, the evolution of tricks? You must have seen, like... as you say the kerbs and the high ledges. You must have stories like that. Rob Selley coming up and things like that.

Yeah, in terms of people coming through. Rob's a really good case study of Milton Keynes. Because Milton Keynes has this unusual architecture, it seemed to create, in Rob, quite an unusual figure for skateboarding in Britain. He was very influenced by American skateboarders in particular, like Pepe Martinez in Philadelphia. I think it's Philadelphia he's from... or Washington. They were the Washington guys I think. So this kind of Washington... in Washington in the United States they have this plaza there that's kind of like the bus station. I don't know whether that was the link but, yeah... it really influenced Rob to kind of emulate a lot of these American skateboarders... skating architecture they didn't have in Britain.

So it created a kind of... he skated like Americans skated but he seemed... because he was separated from Americans because he never really went there back then. He was only watching videos, which influenced a lot of stuff he was doing. I think it created a slightly different... I don't know, like a different take on that. Not quite as radical as other British skateboarders like Tom Penny - who were very different from Americans. Maybe a bit more similar but definitely created an oddball in terms of being... really standing out in the UK, as being just having a certain vocabulary of tricks that related to blocks in particular that no one else could do.

An example is I filmed him doing a Switch Kick Flip 5-0 on the end of the train station block but it was in the summer of 1994 and that's a good trick now, right? If you were to do it on the small [unclear] pad at the bus station and that block's higher... on rough surface, he had forty millimetre wheels and he did it, like, just out... I was just... I wasn't filming him for hours. He did it in, like, five minutes and it was just... I hadn't even seen that in American skate videos yet.

0:10:06

So, he started to get to this point where... I don't think he was ahead of America, I think that's a mistake to say that. I've heard people say that about him, but whether he knew it or not, in that direction... skating blocks... he was where the Americans were in a funny way and we saw glimpses of it in the Radlands competitions in Northampton. He'd go up there, he would never enter but you'd see him on the practice days and it was his home park so he had an advantage, but he was as good as anyone else. You could see the Americans going, "Who the hell is that local kid?" Like, they'd never heard of and I think at that ... the first time he skated he wasn't even sponsored. It wasn't even on STM. He was just a dude from the local town.

So, I think, there's a connection between the unusual architecture and the types of skaters that were developed here, if that's a roundabout way of answering that question.

Can you think of any other skateboarders that have a unique style from Milton Keynes or have that sort of same heritage of style?

Yeah, like there are so many good skaters that come out of Milton Keynes and, also for my generation, skateboarding got better and better and better and the generation that came after me, everyone was better than us. Everyone! Like, even the bog standard dudes were like better than the best of us but the people that stand out, the kind of Sean Smith's and James Bush's and the Rob Selley's, they have something in common and I can't... I don't know what it is.

I feel like James Bush is a new, like... I think James Bush is a new interpretation of that but there is a uniqueness and it might just be the terrain. It might just be the fact that Milton Keynes isn't like anywhere else in the UK that does it but there's a connection between this city and the unusualness of this city and then a specific... sort of a uniqueness of these skateboarders... these really talented skateboarders that come through. They have a uniqueness that I can't describe but is definitely...

It would be best if we repeat just that little bit that... of the uniqueness... we just got a little bit of a click on the mike.

No problem. I think I tapped it...

Because you were right there.

Ok, so I'll carry on that thought then. I think there's a connection, somehow, between the architecture of the city, the uniqueness of it and the uniqueness of the skateboarders. I think that in some way it developed skateboarders that, like the very talented ones that come through, they just have this... they have something about them that just blows me away. It's hard to define.

Every generation seems to interpret it slightly different. There's definitely... it seems like there's definitely a connection between Sean and Rob but I feel like there's a connection between all those skaters really and it has just to do with the architecture.

So you say the city... the terrain... makes the skateboarder?

Yeah, I would say that. I'll repeat that if you don't mind.

[Unclear] threes... seems to fit like blocks because there's so many blocks.

Yeah.

The way they skate things is...

That's true. I mean, let me... I'll try and put together a thought about that if I can. Yeah, so it's definitely something that I've noticed is that the city seems to... you know, it seems to be reflected in the skateboarding. There's a connection between, sometimes, the shape of the city... it's been mentioned that the grid-like nature of the city and the linearity of the blocks creates a sort of similar linearity in the way that people skate.

There's definitely a connection between the shape of the city and the shape of the skateboarding. It's a difficult thing for me to describe but it's something that you're really aware of and I think skateboarders... there is a connection between skateboarders and architecture. They start skateboarding in... they start a relationship with the architecture of a place when they start skateboarding. It's the best way I can describe it. And that relationship... you know, the way that skateboarders are obsessed with urban design, everything they see of surfaces and shapes and things. There's definitely a reflection of a place in the activity of skateboarders, the way that skateboarders look, the way that they dress and talk. It's hard to define but it's definitely something that's been overlooked I think.

What do we want to go for next?

We want to get to filmmaking eventually but I think there's other...

I'll try not to ramble too much.

We're trying to get some specific tricks and things as well because you've talked about the Switch...

Oh, [unclear]...

Switch Ollie and one of those...

Switch exactly... that's the sort of...

And you told us about Selley's trick... was it a Switch 5-0?

Yeah.

Is there any other skaters or any other particular tricks at the spots we've sort of been talking about, like [unclear] really like that, that you have a memory of? Maybe going to the other [unclear] names.

0:15:12

That's really good. So I have [unclear] quite succinct as well. There was a day in 1994 that was, like, etched in most people's memories who skated. There weren't that many of us then. I think there was only actually between eight and ten of us in 1994. But it's almost like an episode in skate history... in British skate history.

A skateboarder from Wales called Matthew Pritchard came to Milton Keynes. He'd been before, made a bit of an impression but he visited Sovereign Court, which is... we call the 'Beige', in the centre of the business district. It was... there'd be a long running dispute between skateboarders and the people who owned the place. They were adamant that, because the place had been featured on local news, it had attracted skateboarders from everywhere to skate there. So they put in loads of these skate stoppers. They didn't realise

that what they were doing was making... in some ways, enhancing the spot, making it better, making it more of a challenge.

Matt Pritchard came in 1994 and there was one... let me start that again. There was one thing... ok, let me start again. With Sovereign Court, what they did is... it started in about 1993, they started putting stones down. People started putting stones down to stop skateboarding. Then they put in some bars to stop skateboarding. Every time they added something it, kind of, made it better for the skateboarding because what would happen is they'd make everything more of a challenge and, obviously, they didn't know what they were doing as well.

So they put a bar in thinking it would stop skateboarding but what actually they did was add an extra obstacle and the skateboarders would skate the bars. I've heard it said before that skateboarders don't skate terrain, they skate rules. They break rules. It's all about rule breaking so if you put rules in you're actually making it worse. It's a kind of... a bit of a strange phenomenon.

We had this kind of on-going dispute with them where they were putting things in and we were skating them and more and more people were coming. It ended up with them putting this cobbled area at the bottom of the three steps there. I think they may have even started it not very... just at the bottom of the steps and, of course, everyone just skated over that. It made the steps a little bit longer. Who cares? We just skated that.

And then they moved it back. I think that's what happened. They moved it back and made it wider and it got to the point where it was so far back that no one could Ollie it. So they felt like they'd won. But in the middle of 1994, in the summer, a skateboarder from Wales, who's an up and coming skateboarder really. He'd been in magazines but we hadn't really heard of him. People had seen him and we'd heard rumours about him... Matt Pritchard... just came on this one day and went to the Beige and he just destroyed it. He did... I think all that had been done down the steps already was a Kick Flip... sorry. All that had been done down the gap already was an Ollie and he Kick Flipped it... Backside Kick Flipped it and 360 Flipped it.

Now, I think it might have happened over two separate weekends so I might be mixing my stories up and it might have been a few weeks apart but, essentially, over the course of a few weeks he came a couple of times and just, basically... what people say is he shut the spot down. He did every trick down it already.

I got a video of him doing a trick down the Beige... the six steps... to get the speed to do the gap, which no one had ever done before. You used to see people lining up at the bottom of the six steps, pushing like hell. I mean, I tried it myself and trying to get the speed to do it... no one could do it. And he did this thing where he would just Kick Flip the first set of steps like it was nothing and then push out of that and he was like an Olympic athlete and then just bang!

I didn't film it. I actually gave my camera to a friend so I'm in the shot of him doing the 360 Flip he did over that gap and you just see me kind of start laughing and almost collapse, like faint. It was just ridiculous. And then, after that, on that day... the second, I think, of the days he came, we went to the Trust House, which has a double set of five and five steps. It's a really long gap. A lot of people have tried to Ollie it, my brother being one of them, and people had never made it down the second set. They'd never made it over the steps, over the middle bit and down the second steps. It was too far. My brother could Ollie anything. He was like a huge, strong bloke, really good at Ollieing. Couldn't do it.

But Matt Pritchard... I think in only about four or five tries Ollied the whole thing and got down the second set. So he kind of proved to everyone that it was possible and then got back up. I don't know how many tries it was overall because I videoed it so I have got it on video but it was probably ten or twelve tries and, eventually, he just committed to every...

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I think he landed at the bottom, maybe twice, before he actually made it but he was committing on it and he's going as fast as he could go to get the speed. I mean, it was a different type of skateboarding. It was like pushing it to this almost like athletic level where you're only limited by your strength not by your skill. It's like its strength and skill together. So that was like a real... almost like a 'Red Letter Day' really.

After that the Beige Gap got renamed the 'Pritch Gap', which I believe it's probably still called today. Is that right? Which is amazing. So that's twenty-five years ago. I visited the Beige with Richard Ferrington, Landscape Architect for Milton Keynes, in 2003, to talk to the solicitors that were... had half of the building. They were the tenants for half of the building, because we wanted to discuss with them the idea of having a timeshare option for skateboarding. "We'll work with you to create skate stoppers that can be removed and replaced and then you let us skate at... when you're not here and you put these skate stoppers in when they are and it's like an agreement." And they had none of it. They were actually really angry with us, because we were representing the skateboarders obviously.

We were telling them how important the Beige was. We were trying to explain to them how significant it was, that people were coming from all over the world, at this point, to skate the Beige and all the skate stoppers that they'd put in but they just didn't believe us. They just... they seemed to think it was because it was on the local news in 1989 or something and, as a result, the skateboarders found out about it but they didn't realise that...

I mean, they came out one time... this is a story I heard. I think it was Wig involved, it might have been Leo... but they said they came out one time and there was a photographer there with two line rigs and a skate team, skating the steps and they just didn't have a peg to hang it on. They were like, "Who

are these ... why are the Americans in Milton Keynes skateboarding in our office..."

So, yeah. It was kind of an interesting ... the Beige was an interesting case study in Milton Keynes really in this battle between skateboarders and landlords and office workers.

Could you perhaps go into... now tell Richard how you got onto the... is it too early to come to the skating case stuff and that yet?

We're twenty minutes in now.

Yeah, I think you're right. The Pritch thing is what I got to talk about in the nineties. Maybe Rob Selley, I've talked about him because I've talked about the... I don't know how well I've done the elaborating with the skateboarding/architecture thing but Buszy's probably... if we get on to the Buszy, yeah?

What's quite interesting about the Beige... sorry to butt in... is that it's that constant changing architecture within Milton Keynes. That has happened in other places other than the Beige, has it not?

Yeah, yeah... like the... South Bank's an example, isn't it?

And how things have moved through the years. I mean, you have talked about that a bit so, maybe, that's not relevant but...

Yeah. No, to me, that's really important.

[Unclear]... the constant change, it's being specifically skate stopping or just evolution of the time generally?

Evolution of buildings. I know, today it's been proved that that... loads of high block has gone. You know, the marble block in front of that funny, wavy-front building but that's gone now.

Which one's that?

Which building is this, sorry?

I know the one. Is that the one Selley had a few photos of...

Where is it?

Did it have a Front Tail on it or something? I think he's...

Wavy building? Oh, yeah, yeah. That's gone? What, the white block? White block's gone?

[Unclear] photo the other day.

Not the [unclear] near...

I know the one. I know the one you mean.

By Chiquito's and Wetherspoon's...

Yeah, yeah. White block.

That's the one.

Near that. So that's gone?

Non-existent.

That was a big spot that. Yeah.

So that kind of constant battle between skateboarding and the city almost rejecting it and then, maybe, perhaps...

Didn't you get onto a thing about the bus station?

Yeah, because it does connect. Yeah, I'll start the bus station there then. That's good, that's very good. I'll try...

[Unclear] the council...

Yeah, but the thing that really... like, skateboarding was very subcultural and [unclear] and the thing I mentioned... I mention to people all the time about it... is what really pulled me in was the idea of reinterpreting things, making them your own. Architecture was a big one for that. And what you found was this kind of constant battle between skateboarders and the city, like, Milton Keynes, where skateboarders would skate the city and annoy people. People didn't understand it and we used to love that they didn't understand it. It's like that scene in 'Quadrophenia', where the main character's watching The Stranglers or something and his dad's complaining about how terrible they are and every time his dad complains about how bad they are, he smiles. Because he loves the fact that his dad doesn't understand it. He loves the fact that it's his thing and no one gets it but him. And I think we felt like that with skateboarding. It used to almost turn us on, this idea that, at the Beige, every time they did something, every time they added a skate stopper, they made it better and they didn't know it.

0:25:01

And that happened all over the city. There was this constant... architects would redevelop areas. They'd add skate stoppers, things to stop skateboarding, based on their early interpretation of what skateboarding was, which were often flawed or wrong and then new architecture that came along altogether... new buildings were even adapted to stop skateboarding.

And what we saw is that skateboarding would just adapt around it. It was a mechanism for creativity. It was like a... it was almost like the fuel really... it's almost like you're trying to... it's like one of those monsters that grows every time you zap it with a laser beam. You know, it absorbs the energy. And skateboarding was like that.

And it's very much something that we knew that people didn't understand. We liked that people didn't understand it. It was almost the point of it so there was definitely a disconnect between skateboarders and everybody else and that was, if not deliberate, then, you know, almost inevitable because it kept us going. You know, it almost fuelled it, like I mentioned.

But that caused problems because when we got into the late-nineties there was a boom from PlayStation. You know, that kind of created this new boom and as we went into that new century, what happened was skateboarding got bigger. Milton Keynes got almost more suited to the zeitgeist of skateboarding, more people were skating block steps, handrails and more people, every weekend, were coming. And it reached this tipping point where you... people had had enough basically.

The people who worked in the offices, who didn't understand skateboarding... they were very upset with the noise mainly. That's what we found out and there was a lot of talk, at that time, about banning skateboarding. And the police were trying to criminalise skateboarding or they were... I think they were exploring the idea that they could prosecute people for skateboarding-related damage, which was never tested and I don't think they would have got very far with.

But there was definitely this kind of break that happened in the city where people... they were talking about a byelaw in the main, central business district. You know, the City Centre. They were gonna ban skateboarding but the council... I don't know whether that was gonna happen or whether it was just suggested but the council intervened, I think around ... it was in the middle of 2002, towards the end of 2002 and they started a public consultation on skateboarding and street sports.

At that time a lot of the spots had already been shut down. So you had this weird thing where there were lots of, sort of, skateboarders defying all these spots. There was this kind of growing resentment and anger. A lot of skateboarders wanted to get involved with it. It started off with a big public consultation event, which I think was held at the Snowdome, which I went to with Neil Bowen. And I remember being really scared at this event because I knew... I felt like I understood what was going on. I understood that there's a problem here that they don't understand. They're gonna try and stop it and they're gonna make it worse. They're gonna feed it, they're gonna make skaters... more skateboarders come and they're gonna hate it more. It's gonna be worse and worse and no one's gonna be happy as a result.

There was a lot of talk, especially from older skateboarders, that had come out of the woodwork at the time... some local and some, I don't think, so local... that started talking about building a skate park. And they were talking about building a bowl and a concrete bowl. Sort of stuff that hadn't really been built since the seventies. I remember just being terrified that I was one voice, in this whole group of voices, that... it felt like... it wasn't true because, actually, there were other voices as well, that understood that, actually, this approach... banning and then replacing street skating with a facility that has nothing to do with street skating, i.e. a bowl or a half pipe, is not going to solve their problem.

So I sort of committed a year... I basically committed a year of my life to... I was living at home, because I left ... I'd just finished my Masters' degree. I thought I'm gonna stay here and do what I can to fix this. So I kind of got involved. I volunteered. I got involved with the 'Skate MK Project', which was what it was called. And got involved with the Youth Service and then volunteered ... and then, for about six months, I worked at the council. I was actually... officially I was there making a video for them about the whole process, to try and educate, I think, the Chamber of Commerce, to try and get them to understand what skateboarding was.

That ended up taking, like, six months to make. That's probably another story, that one in itself. It definitely strained my relationship with Andrew Armes at the time. But the other thing I was doing was a lot of... I was chairing the Skate MK group and we were working with a lot of young people that were about between fourteen and eighteen years old, that were involved.

0:30:02

We were trying to put together a consensus to try and create skateable street. That was basically... I had that idea myself but so did, thankfully, people like Iain Borden, who was an architect, who came in and he was talking about that. There were people like Wig Worland around, who ... advising, you know... advising the council and then there were people like Andrew Armes and Richard Farrington in the council that had a really open mind. They could see what skateboarding was and they knew about adaptability in architecture. They knew about how people use architecture and they also, I think, were hungry for some kind of cultural heritage in Milton Keynes.

So they were kind of terrified that, I think, themselves... that people would overlook this. You know, I grew up with people endlessly talking about there being no culture in Milton Keynes and they were endlessly bringing artists to build public art, that no one understood, from outside and I felt like... and I think, maybe, the council realised that we've got this thing growing. It's really important globally. It's creative. It looks bad but it's actually really amazing. We need to publicise this and John Best, who was the CEO of the council, he really got on board with it. He really understood it and that was the key driver... driving force... behind pushing it, because if you've got that support at the top, someone who really understands what skateboarding can do for the city... I think he understood that this is... this can be bad or it can be really

good.

He saw this, kind of, glimpse of it and he understood that it was counter-cultural but that didn't scare him. He thought that was good because he thought Milton Keynes could... I interviewed him and he said to me that he thought that Milton Keynes could do with some conflict. If conflict's not bad, it's good.

So, yeah, it set up this whole exciting process. We didn't know what it was going to lead to because no one had ever... well, that we were aware of ... no one had ever done it before. When skateboarding towns had problems they usually just built ramps and skate parks and bowls because, generally, skateboarding was considered... and this is an idea that came from the seventies and into the eighties... it was considered to be skateboarding ramps and anything else was just a poor substitute for skateboarding a ramp or a transition or a bank because skateboarding came from emulating surfing.

But street skating in the late-eighties and nineties became its own thing and Milton Keynes, because it was only a place you could skate street, there were no other facilities. It had this kind of intensity to the street skating here that, I think, if you were to harness that, you know, it could be really powerful obviously but it was something that you... I'm losing my train of thought... I've lost my train of thought. I'm just talking and talking.

Yeah, so I'm talking about the intensity of skateboarding and ... my brain's gone totally blank. How embarrassing. Yeah, ok... so the intensity of skateboarding and the reason why you can't ban it because if you ban it the intensity will just pour in.

I know what you mean. It's like saying the conflict... like you say, the conflict aspect of it's good because it's...

Yes.

Skateboarding is... it might appear to be damaging or what's the word? Antisocial is good... that's the counter-culture aspect... its rebellious nature.

Yes.

It's like an untamed force of nature in a way that's sort of ... you can ... I don't know how to word it.

(Unclear) the wrong way, it'll go...

Yeah. You lose... if you try and contain it, it's not gonna be the same as if it runs free and does its own thing.

Yeah, it always leads me round in this kind of circle and I always find it hard to talk about because I end up going over here and then coming over here because you talk about... and you always seem to contradict yourself. It's

really hard to explain because you start talking about it being antisocial. You are saying I was trying to be antisocial but then you're also saying, 'No, it's good and it's cultural.'

What they seemed to understand in the council was that that intensity that people had here for street skating and stuff, that that itself was what people wanted. People didn't come to Milton Keynes to skate a ramp, to skate a bowl, to skate a substitute for street. They came here to skate the street. So the substitute for skateboarding... if they wanted to move people away from problem areas (let's call it)... non-negotiable areas, where we can't have people skateboarding for different reasons and there are those, they needed to look at providing something that the skaters would accept and skate somewhere else.

0:34:55

You always get... you get into this whole subject of authenticity. You know, skateboarders skate real street. They want to skate something that hasn't been designed for them to skate. They want to adapt things. That's part of what it is. The council understood that and then the Milton Keynes... the Skate MK process, kind of led to this understanding that we need to provide real street that's been, kind of, designed with skateboarders in mind but not exclusively for them. So it's not a skate park and that kind of philosophy, if you can call it that... I don't know if anyone's ever come up with a term for it, like Iain Borden or anyone like that... but there's definitely a sense of... they understood this kind of mercurial idea, which was "We need to create street but the skaters... it can't just be for the skateboarders. It has to be for real people as well. It has to be authentic otherwise the skateboarders... they won't like it. They'll just skate the authentic street instead because that's the challenge but we also need them to use that and we need to decide where it is, to a degree, so we can move the people away from the dangerous areas."

They had this really difficult dilemma. Anyway the answer to all of this dilemma was the bus station... the Buszy. The bus station was a place that we always skated. It wasn't being used and it could be easily adapted for not much money, enhanced and made even better than it was originally. Yeah, and the result was what we call the Buszy or the Bus Station Plaza, which is, kind of, maybe not as real street as maybe we thought initially but passes as an area of real street and city, that is so good that it... the idea is that it pulls people away from areas that are troubled, that aren't actually quite as good.

That's a good point.

I redirect you to my film that I spent seven years making about this subject, that's why it took me so long. I'm sweating!

The point about the Bus Station Plaza is that it is made in the vernacular architecture of the city.

Yeah.

Swampy doesn't agree its real street spot and I have this...

He's right, I think.

Someone drove by once...

But it's enough. They tested the line...

I don't want to put words in your mouth but had you heard of this process going on in other places or, like you say, a non-ramped park, like a plaza. Like is this... was that a new phenomenon at the time?

I think this is and I think you've got to find a way of saying this is... I don't know whether you'll put this on camera... but I think it's the first street plaza in the world.

I think so. We hadn't heard of anything.

So if you can put that in a way that, from your perspective at the time, maybe?

Certainly in Britain. If you can go for that, I don't know.

Yeah. I mean, at the time, nothing like it had ever been done. It was unprecedented. It was very difficult to even find the language to describe it to people. Most of my time, during those six months that I was at... like, inside the council offices... I spent... was spent almost arguing with people about this because it's full of contradictions. It's hard to understand what we're trying to do.

The only thing we had to go on was that DC had built a skate plaza, I think... or they were building ... there were plans, which was more like a real street area than any other skate parks you'd ever seen in the past but no one... certainly that I'd ever seen, especially not in this country, had done anything that tried to create real street areas that were sort of designed with skateboarders in mind.

And that was very difficult to explain, very difficult to convince people to back it because they just felt, 'Well, you're encouraging it.' Whereas, what John Best said to me in the interview... the CEO of the council ... he said, "No, we're trying... we're managing. This is about managing. It's about not being afraid of conflicts. It's about embracing them the way the best, most vibrant cities in the world embrace conflict." That's how you get places like New Orleans. You get forced... you get people in conflict and having to come to terms with those conflicts and then, forging out of that, are these kind of art forms that are unprecedented.

We really felt that that's what we were doing. I think Richard and I both felt like we were on to something that was really exciting. And the other thing I think we were both aware of... I don't know whether Richard would say it... but was that it could fail, that we... but I don't know whether... yeah, we could build the

Buszy or wherever it was. I mean, the bus station, we hadn't come up with the idea yet. It was Rob Selley who designed it... but we could build something and it could go dramatically wrong.

0:40:01

We could end up with thousands of extra skateboarders, then it wouldn't manage them. It would result in a ban. So there was definitely a clear concern that we were in uncharted territory. But it's a funny thing because you're talking about Milton Keynes doing something that no one's ever done before, that doesn't look very impressive... you know, you can drive past the bus station and think that it's just a bus station. It just looks like a stage and a block to wait for your bus. I've spoken to three or four people that have been, you know, busted from the bus station by people who walked past and said "What are you doing skating? Get out of the way."

And the other thing that was interesting is at the end of the process... when the Buszy was opened... the original 'No Skateboarding' signs that were at the bus station, that they used to put up for us, the council left them there and the point was to leave the authenticity, which is kind of quite an interesting touch.

I'll tell you what. The most interesting that happened was, during the process, trying to think of something that was street, we were... it was so hard to think up that we ended up just trying to buy German skateboard components... skate park components because we didn't know what else to do. So we started looking at German skate park builders, building concrete components that were like street components. We got about halfway through it and we went to Germany and looked at these things and we were just like, 'Why are we doing this?' It's because we lost faith halfway through.

We got so worried it wasn't going to work or we wanted to compromise or we didn't know how to do it. We lacked imagination and we started going down this route of just being corralled back to building a skate park. We couldn't find anybody to really hammer home this idea that we needed street and so we got... I ended up getting Rob Selley involved, which was probably the biggest thing that I did in the whole process because Rob had... Rob was a professional skateboarder at the time and he had the clout to convince people that this was a good idea.

I don't know whether he actively went out and convinced people but I think his presence did more than just some unnamed skateboarders around, telling the council they needed to do these things. That was a big influence on it. And he designed the plaza that is there now. He actually came in... I got him to come into the bus station... sorry. I got him to come into the council offices. He met Richard Ferrington, the drove down to the bus station and he chalked out the Buszy that day and the bus station... and the Buszy Skate Plaza that's there now is virtually what he chalked out on that day, at the end of 2003. He just did it in an afternoon.

A couple of questions. There was... how successful do you think the bus station has been considering its innovation and then what influence do you think that's had on other plazas being built in the UK?

Ok. So, in terms of its influence on other places, I think it has been very...

Sorry, could you mention the Buszy in that so it flows in again? Sorry.

No, it's alright. Ok. So I think the bus station has been really influential, especially in the UK because I think that it showed people. It had what we didn't have for a start. It showed people that you can do this. And I think, when you see it and you see people using it, it makes sense and I think, eventually, we developed the vocabulary. Like I made a film as part of the process to develop... and, as part of that, we were developing vocabulary to talk about this to people and show them what skateboarding in Milton Keynes was. What the significance of street skating was.

That vocabulary, I think, was then... it's also being used afterwards so people that are involved were probably also involved in spreading the word about the Buszy once it had been built. I know that Wig Worland was influential in the way that the magazine covered the Plaza. There was a very good article in 'Sidewalk' magazine about the Buszy that just really explained it in a way that the skateboarding fraternity... the skateboarders in Britain... would understand and accept it because there was also a danger that skateboarders could reject it as well. The idea that the council's providing them with street or... and I think that that was influential.

And then we saw other plazas being built. And the people that were involved here, like Richard Ferrington, the landscape architect at Milton Keynes council, and Rob Selley, the professional skateboarder, who basically put together the Buszy... together they ended up designing, I think, the Stoke Plaza, which is similar. I've never been there but it's a similar sort of idea and then other places.

0:44:55

At the same time that the Buszy was developed I don't know ... I think we were halfway through or we'd thought up... and the South Bank had skateable art... what they were calling skateable art... and that was... felt like a kind of parallel idea, a very good idea and we were talking about that as an idea ourselves. The idea that you can put a block down and call it art and then say 'Skate it,' and that's art. And you get round all of the safety issues from RoSPA, because we had all these issues with 'Is this a skate park or is this a street area?' If it's a skate park or a play area it has to adhere to certain Health and Safety aspects.

The council was very careful at getting round those by designing it in such a way that they could pass it off as a real street area that just so happens to be a really good place to go skateboarding as well and so it meant... that added to the authenticity. Sorry, I'm really rambling. (Sorry editor).

That did answer both my questions so that's fine.

I think I talked so much I probably answered most questions there are.

That reminds me of a story of authenticity. I remember when the Buszy first opened there was some lady with her little, young boy skateboarding. She goes, 'I heard there's a new skate par ...'

... Park around here...

"Where is it?" And she couldn't get her head around the fact that there's no ramps, there's nothing. We had to try and explain to her.

We interviewed you at some point. I remember that one.

Yeah, Well, Nathan was massively involved with one of our main guys on that thing. The other thing I would say about that is those German... so as part of the process of trying to develop the Buszy, we went to Germany and looked at concrete components for skate parks that they were developing over there for skate parks. And there were these very ... flea circus-style street courses. They're nothing like street. They're like pyramids and core pipes and blocks and some handrails.

We went there, they smoozed us because they were hoping to sell Milton Keynes lots of their components and we'd even looked at a plan. That was when I got Rob Selley involved because I was terrified that this was going the wrong way. We're going to end up with a regular skate park at the bus station. I mean, there was a wall with a transition. It was a... I don't know how we got there but I felt like I just don't have the clout to keep this on-line so we got Rob Selley involved.

He came in and designed the Buszy and I think it was that extra clout, from him, as a professional skateboarder, added to all the work that had been done already and the vocabulary we had developed, that really pushed that idea through. A lot of visionary people at Milton Keynes council... Andrew Armes, John Best (the CEO), Richard Ferrington ... yeah, remind me of that question again.

Which was...

The last one.

How successful... you kind of answered that.

I gave myself a question in my head and I'm thinking...

I didn't hear it.

No, no. That's weird, I know. I know, it's terrible when that happens. I had one other thing I wanted to say. Oh, yeah. The German skateboard component manufacturers, they were a huge business in Germany and I don't know why but the council got them to come over here to look at the Buszy when it had been developed. I'm not sure but I think they may have done one or two of the components, maybe the curved radius block or something. But, apparently, when they saw it the main guy, the CEO or the head guy, looked at it and said, "That's not a skate park. We don't..." They didn't understand it. They didn't understand what they were looking at. There were no ramps, there were no transitions. It wasn't pink, it wasn't red. It didn't have a little hut next to it for someone to have a break. It just looked like a bus station. It looked like some blocks that people would sit on. It was dirty and it was made out of indigenous material that the city's made out of.

Richard was really careful to design the Buszy using all the materials. Like he researched the materials that Milton Keynes is made out of ... the granite, the different types of granite. We researched the types of granite that resisted street skating and didn't break, because that was one of the big issues. A lot of the city was being destroyed by skateboarding. So we were looking at putting in areas that were more resilient and yeah... so the bus station was this really indigenous feeling... piece of real street that was strong and amazing to skate.

That's a lovely end to it... unless you have other particular...

I have talked myself hoarse.

I think we have covered quite a lot.

I think that was amazing. It was really good.

Sorry, editor. There's a lot in there.

0:49:18

End of Interview

Transcribed by Stephen Flinn (July, 2019)