



Climate change protests: what are they like from the inside?

Protests by Extinction Rebellion (XR) activists have become a part of city life this year, most recently in October when a number of London locations were occupied. Augusta Hall is a receptionist at Muswell Health Centre and volunteered as an XR steward in Trafalgar Square. Here's her diary of the event.

Stewards are responsible for keeping rebels and the public safe. We observe, listen and answer many questions. On site we familiarise ourselves with where everything is: for example, all exits, toilets, welcome and wellbeing tents, and where to access working groups such as de-escalation, police liaison and arrestee support. We help keep cycle lanes open, and always assist emergency vehicles through an action or site.

Safety is paramount. On the Extinction March we spaced ourselves all along between traffic and people. Wearing high vis, we are often the first point of contact for the public, and are ready to explain the protest, as well as showing understanding for the frustration of people's journeys being disrupted.

We encouraged a sombre tone to the march. After all, it was about the extinction of all creatures and nature. This isn't always adopted by the marchers, as people like to be loud, singing and chanting.

Trafalgar Square

On Monday 7 October my day began at 7.30am. Because we didn't know how things would play out, we stationed ourselves in twos about the square at different roads.

I was on the junction with the Strand. The Mall was blocked, due to building work, but cars, buses, lorries and pedestrians were rolling through the rest of the Square. When the action happened, it was so fast.

My junction was taken by five or more rebels running into the middle of the road with a wheeled, free standing scaffold. They clambered up to the top

while police tried but failed to stop them. Rebels moved all around the scaffold. Two sat in the road alongside, each with an arm locked into a long tube between them, soon decorated with XR stickers. The rebels at the top, were chanting and waving XR flags. A banner was unrolled across the junction.

I was reminded of the tremendous power of non-violent direct action. Over the next 12 days and a night, I joined the Rebellion daily.

Stewards spend a lot of time dealing with lost property, and this wet October the property was sodden. Every piece is recorded, and crossed off when reunited with its owner. With long hours on site, in the rain, it might have been miserable but it wasn't at all. It was inspir-



Massed ranks: Protesters in Trafalgar Square in October.

ing, due to the togetherness of people around. People were kind, and took care of each other.

...and what it's like to be arrested as a Rebel

By Daphne Chamberlain

East Finchley's Hazel Mason was also in Trafalgar Square, where she was arrested on the first day. It was a difficult personal journey for Hazel, a retired actor, making her realise that she is essentially a law-abiding person.

She told *The Archer*: "I didn't want to dissipate police resources or to hamper people's movements, but sometimes civil disobedience is the only way to make an impact. I saw younger people facing arrest, even though that could damage their careers or their immigration status."

Together with an elderly friend with mobility problems, she lay down on the road alongside fellow-members who had glued themselves to the ground or to scaffolding. She says: "They were brave. I wasn't prepared to do that."

Police lifted her up, and drove her and her friend away from the Square. They found the police very pleasant, and they were not charged.

There is still a common belief that Rebels are "just kids", but Hazel told us that there is a huge group of professional people in their 30s, 40s and 50s in the membership. Plans are already afoot to contact schools, particularly in the science field.

Last month, Hazel herself made headlines by launching a Facebook group for XR Grandparents outside Buckingham Palace.

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Pray for a power cut

Well, it's that time of year again: time for the turkey, booze, tantrums and overspending. And when it comes to turkeys I'm not just talking about the bird. Christmas is worse than that, especially when you're talking music and movies.

Once upon a time music meant carols and tuneless singing, until the wonderful world of pop music got in on the act and made it worse. Back in 1964 Elvis gave you a *Blue Christmas* and all Dora Bryan wanted for Christmas was a Beatle, though who knows what she was going to do with him. But once you hit the 70s John Lennon got all sanctimonious and Mud showed how naff you could get in 1974 with *Lonely this Christmas*, leaving everyone hoping for a power cut.

From there it went downhill all the way, particularly when Cliff was involved with such dross as *Mistletoe and Wine* and the awful *Millennium Prayer*. The Darkness gave a heavy metal experience and, in 2004, Morrissey released *I Have Forgiven Jesus*. I wonder if Jesus has forgiven Morrissey. I haven't. And I still haven't mentioned Band Aid...

So let's hit the popcorn and go to the Christmas movies. You've got the classics like *It's a Wonderful Life* and *Scrooge*, the modern greats like *Trading Places* and *Carol*, but they're a few pearls scattered amongst the swine.

We've had *Love Actually*, with Hugh Grant doing his mutant cross between Tony Blair and David Cameron and Kate Winslet going rom com in *The Holiday*. And this year we don't so much hit the bottom of the barrel as come out through the other side. Yes, folks, *Last Christmas*, a movie that combines 80s pop and sentimentality, is here.

For some reason George Michael's sentimental 80s pop song has been bolted onto a film with the most sentimentally contrived plot twist in decades. It's got the dragon mother from *Game of Thrones*, the bloke from *Crazy Rich Asians* and Emma Thompson proving she can cook up a turkey with the worst of them. Time to bring back the great British TV tradition of back-to-back Bond films and *The Great Escape* or, failing that, give me a proper 70s' power cut. That will switch everything off.

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Sunday 22nd 6:30pm. Carols by Candlelight

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For more information please contact the Church Office

Email: office@eastfinchleybc.org.uk

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(Minister: John Lowrie)

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