



People began to squat not just publicly-owned buildings, but also privately-owned ones. Olive, twenty years old at the time, and her friend Liz Obi, who was just eighteen, were reportedly the first to squat a privately-owned flat in Lambeth over the winter of 1972-3. The flat was above a disused launderette at 121 Railton Road.

The story goes that Olive and Liz were inspired after meeting some women from 207 Railton Road. This property was squatted and used as a local women's centre from 1972 to 1975. "Squat-historians" credit 207 Railton Road with encouraging the unlicensed occupation of at least 300 empties in the Brixton area. Other reports suggest that the women's centre did such a good job housing people that it received something like thirty-forty referrals a week from Lambeth's own Social Services department. Coin-a-matic, the launderette's owners, were quoted as saying that they wanted the building back, not to reopen the launderette but to store spare parts for their washing machines. Olive and Liz suffered at least three attempted illegal evictions. For example, on 22 January 1973 Olive came home to find Liz had been arrested for "possession of an offensive weapon" during an attempt at illegal eviction. Whilst at Brixton police station, the police threatened Liz with the refusal of bail because of her "NFA" ("no fixed abode") status.

When Olive went back inside the flat, five cops followed her and showed no intention of leaving. Olive's response was to climb up the back wall onto the roof of the building, and there is a pretty iconic picture of her doing so, which made it onto the cover of a 1975 issue of Squatting News Bulletin and also appeared on later editions of the Squatters' Handbook. She sat there until the police fucked off, which they did, about three hours later. She then re-squatted the place and it remained a squat until August 1999, which made it one of the longest-running squats in the country.

When Olive and Liz moved out – to a new squat in 65 Railton Road – other people moved in and founded a black bookshop called Sabarr. As well as a meeting space, various groups also used the address as a mailing address. These included the Black Workers' Movement and a coalition of groups called Black People Against State Harassment (BASH), which formed in 1978 as a reaction to the growing problems of racist policing, stop and searching, and general hassling of black people. By 1981, Sabarr Books had also moved further into Brixton and 121 Railton Road became an anarchist centre.

All sorts of radical groups used the space during its anarchist era. These included: the Anarchist Black Cross and Taking Liberties; the European Counter Network (ECN) and Contraflow; the Poll Tax campaign and the Trafalgar Square defendants

