

## One & Other Project

*My name is Verusca Calabria and I'm here today to interview Mike Richards on 30<sup>th</sup> of July 2010 on behalf of the Wellcome Trust for the One & Other oral history collection. So Mike, thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this follow-up interview.*

It's a pleasure, thank you very much for asking me, it's ... I'm flattered.

*Great, so just to bring you back to the experience of when you were on the plinth, you dressed as a British gent, as you called it, and wanted to portray what, in your eyes, it means to be a British gentleman.*

Yes.

*And I watched your hour on the plinth this morning and I was very amused as you also had a character on the plinth right?*

Yes, Captain Teapot, yes. Captain Teapot, came to me earlier in the year, around about February/March time. I didn't know where he was going to go precisely, I didn't know I was going to end up on the plinth and it was a complete surprise when I when I did, when I got the invitation it was quite amazing. The Captain Teapot came about partly through the result of something I was going through at the time and partly as a result of a lunch conversation I had with two friends. I'd left the company I had been working for because I needed to take some time off and I went to meet two friends for lunch and we started to talk about art and whether art was paintings, was it Gainsborough, was it Tracey Emin's bed, was it Damien Hirst's shark? And it was just a fairly typical conversation about art and modern art and after the lunch was over I caught the train back from Bristol to Bath and, as I was wondering, I was struck by the urge to do something artistic but I didn't know what I was going to do because I can't paint and I can't draw and I can't sculpt and I enjoyed art at school but I hadn't done anything artistic really since I'd left. So I thought for a day or two ... I think I was in a state of mind where I wanted to express something and it struck me that British people, men in particular, are very restrained all the time, they're very well know for keeping their emotions inside and being controlled and stiff upper lipped and I wanted to show a typical Englishman being unrestrained and doing something crazy and wild and emotional. So I thought I could use typical British clichés like a man in a pin-striped suit and a cricket bat and bowler hat and teapots and I would smash the teapot, which was my symbol for restraint, which would show me that I was going to express my emotions and kind of letting go and going a bit crazy. So I initially, well, just had the idea of smashing a teapot and I spoke to a couple of friends and I mulled some ideas over in my head and I pretty much immediately went and set up a website called [smashateapot.com](http://smashateapot.com) but it had nothing to go on it at all, it was just ... I was running on adrenaline and I guess the idea was just taking me and a couple of days later I thought, "Well, if I'm going to do this smashing teapot, I want to do this somewhere classically British." And I live in Bath, which is a fairly classically British town, and, by chance, my neighbour and friend Neil, he is a part-time photographer ... so I went to see him on an afternoon and said, "Can I hire you for the afternoon?" And he said, "Oh, do you want a portrait?" And I said, "No, not a portrait exactly, but I want you to come and take some photographs of me doing, of

## One & Other Project

smashing teapots in the park.” So he looked at me a bit strangely but he didn’t call for a doctor or anything. He said, “Yes, okay, we’ll give it a go.”

So a few days later, a Friday afternoon, we drove down to Victoria Park in Bath and started taking some photographs and the first ones we did I’d been round to lots of charity shops in the previous week and bought lots and lots of old teapots for like a pound or a pound fifty each and I had this idea that the teapots have a life of their own and I formed them into a group, like a herd, and I was sneaking up from behind a tree with my cricket bat, sneaking up on them like a hunter and I was going to smash them and then there were photos of me just sitting having cups of tea and then eventually we went up to the front of the Royal Crescent and I had this image in my mind almost immediately. I had the idea that I wanted to be jumping in the air outside of the Royal Crescent to smash a teapot and a little table so we practised and we ended up taking some shots and people came over to find out what we were doing and a couple of art students, who were very enthusiastic about the whole thing, and a little lady who was horrified at the thought I was smashing teapots. It was almost like it was a living thing that she ... if I’d said I was smashing a dog, you know, I would have expected her reaction but we spent a couple of hours doing that and then went home and then looked at the photographs and that’s where Captain Teapot came from really, because when we sat down and had a look at the images they were quite striking, particularly the one jumping by the Royal Crescent and it went from there.

I had met, a couple of weeks previously, somebody who ran a new art gallery in Bath and decided I would take the pictures in to show them and they quite liked them so exhibited a couple of photographs in the gallery for a little while. Then I ended up helping out at the gallery, part-time volunteering, because I was unemployed and didn’t have anything else to do. I had started looking for another job by then the job market was very quiet and I couldn’t find anything, so rather than stay at home I thought I would go out and do some unusual things and then, around about the same kind of time as I was helping out at the art gallery, I saw a news item about the One & Other project which happened to be actually ... I think the news item was on the same day as my birthday which is the 21<sup>st</sup> of April. So I thought, “Well that sounds fantastic.” I grew up in London, walked through Trafalgar Square hundreds or thousands of times and think it’s fabulous place, and I never thought anyone would have the opportunity to be on the plinth but I thought I’ll have to have a go, if there’s a chance I’ll sign up but on the day the website was so busy that I couldn’t register, but I tried again about a month later and then just didn’t really think much more about it [?] continued to help out at the gallery and just do my normal kinds of things, did a few more photo-shoots of Captain Teapot fishing for teapots in my local river with my umbrella and catching teapots and teapots sneaking up on me while I was reading the paper and things like that and then suddenly I got an email one day saying, “You’ve got your place on the plinth.” And I thought, “Wow, that’s amazing” and I rang quite a few people that I knew, told them all about it, and they said, “What is it?” And they were all really chuffed and my friend Adrian particularly thought it was fantastic. They were very supportive and enthusiastic and there’s quite a few of them that came to watch me when I had my hour and I sat about thinking what I would do on the plinth and I knew it had to be Captain Teapot because he seemed to be taking over so much of my life but I didn’t have enough physical things to actually fill up an

## One & Other Project

hour and so I started thinking about what I was going to do and I thought I'd quite like to read some poetry or something classically British and I started to look on the website for John Betjeman poems and Alan Bennett readings and things like that and nothing seemed to be quite right and then around this time last year, about the 1<sup>st</sup> of August e I went to a village fete with a friend of mine and I later that day we went and did some sort of typically British things like having cups of tea and thought I'd write some things about myself, I'd write some poetry, just I'd never written poetry before, ever and not since English lessons at school. But suddenly all these poems started to come out of me and drinking tea in a village fete and a cricket dream and things just suddenly came out of nowhere and I was going to bed at in the evening and suddenly I'd be lying there and a line would appear [?]. I wrote this down, so I started jotting things down and keeping a notepad and pen by the side of my bed and I thought after I'd written about seven in the space of two weeks I thought, "Actually I've probably got enough now to sort of narrate while I'm on the plinth."

And they're all classically British, they're about village fetes going wrong and why you should drink tea and my playing a game of cricket with some classic British cricket players from the past and then I started to have other ideas about what I should do like the teabag cricket and driving my Mini on the plinth, because the Mini is a classic British kind of symbol so it, you know, it just all seemed to flow together quite nicely. I did a little bit of rehearsal but probably not as much as I should of, but I think it was a perfect time for me to be on the plinth, five in the morning was wonderful, I'm not sure how I would have handled a huge crowd. If there had been thousands of people walking through the square it might have been a bit more intimidating but as there were only a few people and some of those were my friends it was quite nice and I liked seeing the sun rise above St. Martin's. It was quite spectacular and it was peaceful, I mean it was very, very peaceful. I mean it was almost like meditating, I guess, having that kind of peace flow through you and the time just whizzed by I think I mentioned more than once how quickly the time seemed to g but yes, I had a wonderful experience and my friends Adrian and a few others were there to watch me and Neil taking some photographs and some film clips. Then we, afterwards, we went for a lovely big breakfast in Borough market and then spent the morning wandering around to other places in London taking some more pictures outside Buckingham Palace and Parliament Square and on the Millennium Bridge so it was great fun, I really had a good time and I wouldn't have done any of these things if it wasn't for the One & Other project. I would never have written poetry, I would never have had a need to, it just wouldn't have occurred to me, I would never have had that kind of calm, wonderful experience on top of the plinth and I guess it inspired me in a way to go ahead and do more artistic things and since then, around about the time of my space on the plinth, I'd had the idea for an artist's exhibition initially to help promote the gallery that I was working at but that didn't work out, they couldn't commit to dates and things so I ended up deciding that I either had to cancel the exhibition by which time I'd actually spoken to about half-a-dozen schools and teachers and a number of students so I didn't really want to do that or I had to try and find a space myself.

So I started to make some phone-calls and ... talking to people and there's an old chapel, an octagonal shaped chapel in the middle of Bath called The Octagon and

## One & Other Project

it's been empty for a few years, but it used to be the home of the Royal Photographic Society but now inside, it still looks fabulous outside but inside it's very rundown and ... I managed to allow the people who manage it allowed me to rent it for two weeks, once I got the space I could start going to more schools, I ended up with just over sixty pieces of artwork from all the sixth-form school in Bath for two weeks, the end of November and the first week in December and I was able to persuade lots of businesses locally to give me things for free so a local restaurant gave me some free wine for an opening night, local furniture company lent me some sofas for two weeks so I had something to sit on a local design company helped me design a poster and a printers helped me print the posters and lots of people chipped in with little things and we managed to get everything done, at six o'clock at night I was about twelve feet up a ladder hanging the advertisement in the main sort of shopping street, Milson Street, in Bath, hanging a banner and the big poster up outside, we were due to open at six o'clock so everything was just done, just in time and it was wonderful, we had lots of fabulous art we had about fifteen hundred people come to look at over the course of a couple of weeks. I was freezing cold every day because there was no heating so I was sat in there on one of the sofas in about three jackets and a big coat and a scarf and gloves and everything because it was freezing cold but I had a great time, met lots of people, and lots of people were saying how wonderful it was to use the space for something artistic and there's been quite a few exhibitions since I held mine in the Octagon, there have been probably at least one every month since and various people got the idea of doing there exhibitions there on the back of me doing mine so it's quite nice to see that generated as well, so again if I hadn't had that time on the plinth I probably wouldn't have pursued it because I would have thought, "I can't do this; I've never done it before, but if I can do it I think anybody can." And it's just a matter of persisting and following that kind of dream, that idea.

*Thank you, there's quite a lot I'd like to ask you about.*

Okay.

*First, what if we just stay with the moment on the plinth when you were up there, you talked about what it was like when you went on the plinth, do you remember how you felt like when you got off the plinth and if anyone came and spoke to you?*

Yes, I was initially my friends were all there sort of waiting for me to come off and they were all saying, 'Congratulations.' I remember the man coming out of the Porta cabin who'd been kind of controlling the cameras and telling the people I'd done really well and that was really quite nice because he must of seen hundreds of people by then so everybody in the cabin was very supportive and friendly and easy to chat to and they were all quite keen on what I'd done and later on in the day we actually, after we'd gone to the other places and had breakfast and we came back to the plinth and by then it was about ten o'clock, so I watched a lady who was on the plinth for a little while and people were coming up to me because I still had my outfit on. I still had my bowler hat and my pinstripe suit and I had a bag with a Union Jack on the side and my cricket bat under my arm, so people were telling me that I should go on the plinth and I said, "Well, I have been already." And they said, "Oh look, you're just the kind of person to be there." And also when I got home as well later that day, I'd set up an account on Twitter and lots of people had been twittering about

## One & Other Project

what I'd been doing and that was quite nice to see comments from other parts of the world who have, you know, they'd obviously become quite a big thing in America and Canada and Japan and people had been commenting on what I'd been doing and saying, how I'd you know was entertaining and perfect British eccentric and things like that. That was quite lovely, quite encouraging as well, sort of I guess the worst thing to do for me would have been to go on there and not and nobody say anything at all and just be ignored you know I guess I guess people go on there wanting to say something and I guess yes.

*Were there comments on your profile and/or on the project Twitter account?*

Yes, I think some of the comments are from the Twitter account as well.

*Did you get to know anyone as a result of the plinth project in terms of this online interactivity?*

No, I had a few conversations with people online exchanged a few emails and that kind of thing, but I haven't got to know anybody well. I think most of the people who were watching at 5 o'clock in the morning were actually in other countries, so I haven't actually spoken to anybody but we exchanged a few emails and I still put updates on Twitter every once in a while about other things that Captain Teapot's been doing, as I say I took part in an art trail for a local charity, they're trying to raise money for projects in Africa and India and they wanted local artists and some celebrities to do a piece of artwork for them so I did some pieces last year and they were an art trail in Bath earlier this year and I appear on their website as well which is quite strange because they have a number of celebrities some work for them as well, so as I watch the website there's Mike Richards as Captain Teapot appears and then next picture appears and it's Sienna Miller and it's Kenneth Branagh and the Duchess of York, kind of it's seems really surreal to suddenly go from pretty much a lifetime in computers to suddenly being, people talking to you like you're an artist and I guess it took me a while to actually realise that I probably was, last year I was an artist and I guess I've still got a bit of an artist in me and there's more to come I think, but exactly what I couldn't tell you, but if you'd asked me a month before I started Captain Teapot, "Were you ever going to do anything artistic?" I'd have said, "No. It's not me." But obviously is there's a part of me that is.

*What do you think prompted you to do art?*

Well, partly it was that conversation but I think also partly it was an incident that occurred a few months before. It's kind of a strange experience I had or some experiences but I guess the first experience goes back about twelve years. My youngest brother Mark, he committed suicide in July 1998, and the shock of that was too much for my mother and she had a stroke and she died a few months later so within the space of four months I had two members of the family had gone and that was a big shock and it was painful. Probably two years or so after that until things came gradually back to normal. I had my dad was still alive, I had another brother Philip and a sister Gwen and we all obviously suffered greatly but I think my brother Philip suffered the most and he didn't really recover and his marriage broke up and

## One & Other Project

various other things happened and he actually committed suicide in October of 2008 just a few months before the Captain Teapot came along, I guess, and there's an element of ... I think the deaths of my brothers, because they kept themselves so much under control and kept their emotions inside and didn't express, and they didn't ask for help they just tried to handle things themselves and kept everything trapped inside. So after my brother Philip died I realised it was going to take me a while for things to come back to normal but I didn't want to be somebody who kept things under control, I wanted to be somebody who could talk and could express and I think I've always been fairly relaxed and fairly easily to communicate but I still think there are things that we all keep inside which we really never talk about, so Captain Teapot really was partly inspired by that, it's partly that British character expressing the emotion, frustration and anger I think in the first image although it's quite quirky and eccentric when I actually sat down to look at it a week or so after I'd done it there were other things which I saw in the photograph as well but I do believe that believe we should express our emotions and let things out and talk about things and that's part of what Captain Teapot is all about, but definitely there is, in the heritage, there is the experiences that my experiences ... that my two brothers Mark and Philip and also my mother, partly, I guess.

*I'm sorry to hear that.*

Thank you. It's a, you can get used to anything I guess. Time helps and I'm sad that they're all gone but I've had a life since they've gone that I wouldn't have had if they hadn't died and it has given me a lesson that, you know, life is short, and you've got to try and make the most of it and take opportunities when you can and I think most of the time I'm a better person now than I was probably before they died, I appreciate things more and if I get up in the morning and it's a sunny day it's a great day if I'm with friends or if I'm walking through the street and see a couple in love or you know it those kind of things make me smile and it's you can appreciate life you know even if terrible things have happened to you, so.

*So you said that this happened back in the late '90s*

Yes, yes.

*And the plinth was in 2009 so I assume you've been thinking about this issue of repressing emotions for a number of years.*

Yes, yes, I did after my brother and mother died. I did have some counselling through my local GPs and I did actually also study counselling and psychotherapy for about a year or so in evening classes. I was toying with the idea at one stage of actually becoming a counsellor and psychotherapist because of the experiences I'd had partly and partly just to try and make use of them in some way. I didn't pursue a career professionally but I did help out from time to time with an organisation that tries to support people who have been who have lost people to suicide they're called SOBS Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide and they've little groups, one not too far from here, just off the Tottenham Court Road, another in Gloucester that I've been to a few times in the last couple of years since I moved back to Bath and they're just groups of people who get together and share their experiences really and it had been

## One & Other Project

a number of years I had been about five years since my youngest brother Mark had died so round about 2003 I discovered SOBS, I'd never heard of them before. And for five years the only people I knew who'd lost somebody to suicide were my dad and my brother and my sister and me because people don't generally talk about it but I went along to a SOBS day at Morley College and suddenly I was in a room with 150 people who'd also lost either brothers or sisters or partners or parents or children so we sat down and a lot of the people had only lost people in recent weeks or months and for me it had been five years and the first couple of years afterwards had been very difficult but I got to a point where things were relatively okay and for a lot of them it was good to see somebody that in five years, you know, you could see that the way they were feeling wasn't going to last forever. There was going to come a time where things were relatively normal, every day you still do think about it at some point and it's still a sad thing to have happened but you can manage it, and for a lot of people they can work their way through it and it might take them a couple of years but they can overcome and still have a life that's full of fun and energy and love which is good.

*How's your father and your sister?*

My father and sister they live in a town not too far from Oxford not very far from each other my father I don't think will ever completely recover really. The shock was much worse for him when my second brother died in October 2008, my brother was staying with my father at the time and my father came out of his bedroom door one Sunday morning to find that my brother had hanged himself from the loft and was just dangling in the hallway two feet in front of him so a very terrible thing to experience and he's very, very deaf so he can't use a telephone, so he had to get dressed and then drive to see my sister who fortunately only lives a few minutes away and tell her and then she went back and she works for the ambulance service now so she pretty much knew that there was no chance of resuscitating so my father will never get over that I think. He's never been one to express his emotions either, he's very quiet, he comes from a small village in Wales and he grew up at a time when you didn't talk about emotions at all and we've never really had a proper conversation or hadn't until a couple of days after my mum died we went to a local pub and that's the first time we'd ever been out together, just the two of us and we had a bit of a conversation and we talked about general things, about the weather and you know who my you know whether I'm dating somebody or that kind of stuff but we don't have in-depth conversations about emotions and things, he just kind of clams up, my sister does ok, she was helped through by her children I think to a great extent, she's got two sons and a daughter and they both helped her because she had something else to focus on and a new life and, you know, she's done okay. She was she divorced a year or two after my mother and first brother Mark died but she's met somebody else now, she's married again she's very, very happy.

*What happened to your other brother's wife?*

His widow, Sue, she's still part of the family. In fact we get together every once in a while. She also lives in the same town with my sister and my dad and I see them a few times I guess. We got together in the beginning of May, bank holiday, and went up to Wales which was the village where my father grew up. It was one of my brother

## One & Other Project

Philip's favourite places, so we went up there and stood on a hill by the sea and scattered his ashes and she was sad, the two of them had separated for about two, about eighteen months before he actually died so the marriage was over but she still didn't expect him to do what he did. But she seems to have handled things very well and is taking the children to a group where you know there are other children who have lost their fathers that way and they seem to be okay and she's got a bit joint 40<sup>th</sup> birthday party with her daughter who's thirteen on the same day at the end of August. So I'm going to that, so we get together and give each other a hug and you know things are okay, I think, but it's always something that will be there at some point during the day and, you know, you never completely escape it but you can still cope.

*Were they married for a long time?*

They were married for about ten years. They got married in '90 / '95, separated sort of shortly after 2005 and then were separated for a couple of years before he actually died but they had been together for several years before they got married as well and it was slightly ... he got slightly obsessed with death and spiritualism after my mother and brother died and I think that created a bit of a barrier between them, he began to believe that he could see spirits and I think his wife found that very difficult to cope with so it ultimately was one of the reasons that they separated.

*Were you close to him?*

I wouldn't say terribly close, I was closest to Mark the youngest brother, he and I were, he's was the youngest, I'm oldest so there's a thirteen year age gap. Mark followed me in many ways, he had a lot of the same hobbies, he liked reading, he liked science-fiction. When he was growing up, when he was about five, Star Wars was on at the cinema and I was old enough to take him to see Star Wars and Superman and as we grew up we would still go to the cinema usually once or twice a month and we're very ... we looked a lot alike as well and he ... my first job was with the Home Office and his first job was with the Home Office and we had a lot of similar musical tastes and things and he and I were close. My brother Philip, who died in 2008, he and I weren't very close ... he's more typical of the place we grew up really. He had a shaved head and lots of tattoos and was very violent and aggressive, he worked as a bouncer for a while, he was in the army for a while, he was kind of constantly in a battle with himself in a way, I guess, and trying to prove himself to other people. We grew up in a fairly run down part of London, I guess, when we first grew sort of ... I can remember growing up in Battersea in the '60s. We lived in a flat above a transport café on the York Road in Battersea and there was no indoor plumbing, there was no bath or toilet or anything, the toilet in the yard out the back and the bath was a big tin bath which we filled up with water from the kettle and the whole area we lived in was condemned and demolished and we got relocated because of that and we ended up in a place just south of Croydon called New Addington but it's known to the police of London as Animal Farm. It's quite rough and my brother was fairly typical of the people that were up there really, very aggressive. I remember going out with him for a drink one evening to one of my local pubs and it was quite a nice place, I was living in Putney at the time and we went there and had a drink, you know, he's helping me to paint my flat so was staying over with me for a couple of days so we had sporadic periods of closeness and then something would



## One & Other Project

happen where we wouldn't talk for five years but we were in this pub that evening and he said it was nice in here, and I said, "Yes, it's not bad. It's just a normal pub" and he said "Nobody's looking at me" and I said, "Well, you know what, why would you think that people would look at you?" And he said, "Well, I'm just used to it." Pubs that he goes into, he walks in, people look, he looks back and if they don't look away, it's a fight. It's kind of a very different way of, a different lifestyle to the one that I lived I guess. He pursued different things I guess I was influenced by different things, I don't know why that is, we weren't that far apart in age, he was only two years younger than me but I, for some reason, took my kind of rules for life, my reasons for life I guess, actually I was talking to somebody else about this a while ago and can remember a particular moment in a film that I watched when I was about twelve or thirteen. It was an old Western film called *The Big Country* with Gregory Peck and there's two characters, one is taunting the other one for a period of time and he wants to fight Gregory Peck, Charlton Heston, and eventually Gregory Peck succumbs at about three hours, at about three o'clock in the morning and he goes to see Charlton Heston and they have a big fight outside, but the director shoots the fight from a long way off so the figures are very, very tiny, a very small part of the screen and they're surrounded by open country and it just focuses the fact that, you know, what is the point? You know, what are they proving, they're just insignificant that what they're arguments, the physical violence ... it's not proving anything and just to for a reminder on that at the end of that scene Gregory Peck actually says to Charlton Heston, "Now, what did we prove?" They'd just spent fifteen minutes beating each other up and they're both beaten up and it hasn't proved anything at all, so that to was violence, not the way to go I guess, and I steered away from that but my brother didn't.

*How about your youngest brother, what happened to him?*

Mark he had some relationships which never really went anywhere and, not very serious relationships, but he had never had had a girlfriend and he was twenty-five and he'd met somebody and they went out on a few dates and then she cancelled their next date but said that she liked him but just as a friend and he went home that evening and he got very drunk and he drank a lot of Jack Daniels with Paracetamol but fortunately or unfortunately, depending on how you look at it, the next morning my father discovered him and he was still alive and he got taken to hospital and had his stomach pumped and seemed to be okay and then the whole family kind of gathered round back in London. I was living in Bath by then, my sister was living just near Oxford, so we all went back down to south London and he was very apologetic, Mark said, 'I'm very sorry, you know, I didn't know what I was doing, I had too much to drink, you know I.' We all believed that I guess but a week later he was obviously still feeling just as bad and hiding it incredibly well, one of the questions that you know is still I think about sometimes is, How can you know somebody so well but not know what's really going on in their mind because we'd spent the last day that he was alive it was my niece's christening so we had a family get together, bit of a party afterwards and he seemed to be in relatively good spirits and we'd arranged for him to come and stay with me in Bath for a few days, he was off work, he'd been signed off work for a little while but the following morning, Monday morning, he'd got up and had a brief conversation with my dad and had his breakfast and went to the nearby town Croydon and he went to a building there which is the Home Office Immigration

## One & Other Project

building and he jumped off the 18<sup>th</sup> floor. So he he'd planned to do it, he left a brief note which was pretty much ... remember it still off by heart which was the yes it was happy to see us all one last time, it's nobody's fault but my own and at my funeral please play three pieces of music. One was Clare de Lune, another was a song called Angels by a woman called Sarah McLachlan and another was called Uninvited by Alanis Morissette and he'd been very influenced, I think, by a film that was out at the time called City of Angels and there's a character who's an angel who falls in love with a woman that he can never touch her or feel her until he becomes human and the only way to become human you know is to fall from a high building and not stop himself, obviously as an angel he can stop but he doesn't he has to hit the ground and once he hits the ground he becomes human and he can feel. So I feel my brother was influenced by that, two pieces of music were from the film soundtrack and he had the film clip on his computer and he'd seen the film, so that obviously played a significant part in his decision to jump, but it was a big shock and the night afterwards my parents were completely shattered. I spent quite a few hours that night kneeling in front of them holding their hands while they just cried, well there's nothing you can say to people when they've lost a child, I guess, you just have to be there, and the following day having to go and identify his body was difficult. They had to go because they're the parents so I went with them and held one of them in each arm, you could just feel the life just drain out of them when they saw his face. He was still recognisable but he was bruised and we saw him and realised, you know, he was gone. Up until that point, in a little way, you'd think that it's not real, that it's a nightmare or, you know, he's away somewhere else and he's going to come back but when you see somebody lying on a slab in a coroner's kind of room you know that they're never coming back really so it was quite tough, for parent's particularly.

*Thank you for sharing that with me.*

That's okay.

*There was in fact something you said when you were on the plinth about the homicide of the English gentleman which I thought was unusual but it seems to perhaps link to this work that you've been doing personally to understand this repression of feelings. I don't know if you agree with me. What kind of work have you done around that then?*

Well I did a study of counselling, psychotherapy, and then once I'd found SOBS and gone to their first meeting, then I started to go to a few more meetings and just give little talks from time to time, about how it's possible to you know help, what had happened to me, my story and how it happened five years ago and how I was, you know, okay now and life does go on and you can still do things and enjoy things so I did that with groups here in London from time to time occasionally. I've had sort of one to one, not counselling sessions exactly, if somebody has felt the need to talk about something and wants to talk about it to just one person rather than the group I will meet up with them and just listen really and that people find it easier to talk to people about who can understand exactly what they're going through because very often if you're in a relationship, for instance, and your brother or father or whoever commits suicide, as much as your partner may sympathise, they can't really completely understand what it is like to lose somebody that's so close so people like

## One & Other Project

to have somebody to talk to who's been through the whole experience so I found that just sort of being with them and they know that what's happened and they find it easy to talk so I still do that occasionally. I stopped for a while after my second brother, after Philip died, I didn't think it was something I could ... to go through repeatedly because I needed some space and time to myself I guess but I'm going up to another meeting in Gloucester in two weeks so I think I'm pretty much back to normal and have been for a little while now but I still hope to put the experience to good use I guess.

*I'm interested really in understanding you perception of Britishness and this idea of not being able to express emotions, which I think you talked about at the beginning of the interview, which also fed, into your performance.*

Well, it's a bit of cliché but people still, when they come on holiday to London, expect men to be wandering around with bowler hats on and everybody to be drinking and certainly in the films when I was growing up and television when I was growing up English men didn't show emotion they were very controlled and strong and just held everything inside them really like a kind of shield around them and it is a bit of a cliché because even people who seem on the surface to be completely calm and serene and they've got kind of emotions and things going through them, I know that I've been told on a few occasions. I used to give presentations when I was working at Scotland Yard and two, sometimes a few dozen people and on the surface I could look very calm and controlled and like I knew exactly what I was talking about but inside I knew that I was nervous, didn't know whether I was coming over right, realised when I'd said the word wrong or where I'd got a fact or figure wrong or should've said something and didn't, you know. Missed something out so you know everybody is like that all the time you know that nobody is supremely confident and capable all the time, you can be a lot of the time but not all the time we still get nervous and we still mess things up and we still have bad days every once in a while ... but it's a classic English thing not to show it and it's hard to know when you're sitting on a train next to somebody or in an office with somebody what kind of experience they've really had, whether they've had a good day or a bad day, whether they've had a relationship break up the day before or whatever we still don't express those kind of things I guess I'd like us to express them more I think because if you repress them if you hold it inside it just builds up and you just go a little berserk, I guess I went a little berserk last year and started smashing teapots, it was I guess art therapy for me but all those things that I do in with Captain Teapot, they're all classic British things, they're all clichés in a way but clichés are often true I think, I still love tea though and I still like teapots I haven't smashed all my teapots, I've got a few saved, I've still got the one with the wheels on that I didn't ... I thought it was going to be tricky to do the wheels on the teapot but I managed to drill through the base of it without too much trouble and yes, it was it was good fun. I don't know where I'm going to go next with Captain Teapot. I've got some more ideas, I've wrote down hundreds of things when I was coming up with ideas last year but now I've gone back to work, I'm no longer a jobseeker, so I haven't got much spare time at the moment so ... but in a way I see my going back to work is a chance to get some more money together to do some more artistic things for the future.

## One & Other Project

Already I'm thinking about having some more prints and doing some more photographs and exhibiting in a restaurant in place called Bradford on Avon. I'm already exhibiting some work in a café in Bath called The Adventure Café, which is one of my favourite places, I've been going there for about ten or twelve years to have coffee and breakfast and I'd just gone in there one day to try and persuade somebody to do some work for the charity, raising money for the Africa and India and while I was in there showing what the photographs, the initial photographs of Captain Teapot to her, the owner of the café saw the pictures on my laptop and said, 'Oh I like those do you want to put some here?', so I did. So that's quite nice and people seemed to know me. A few weeks ago I went to an exhibition and there was somebody looking at me from, I kept seeing them the other side of the gallery and after about 10 minutes or so they came over and said, 'Are you an artist?', and I said, 'Well, kind of.' 'Are you Captain Teapot?' And so she knew about me and Captain Teapot and what he does and things without ever having met me or spoken to anybody that's met me, there have been a couple of photographs in some local papers and magazines, and the photos in restaurant help I think, but, I think I've met more people and made contact with more people in the last year than I probably had in the previous ten.

[00:50:45]

*You made reference to that in the pre-plinth interview, your notion of travelling for 20 years on trains in London ...*

Not really, no, no. That's right. You get on the train in London and you don't talk to anybody at all, you stare out of the window, you read your paper, you get to the office and maybe you'll talk to people at the office. But Scotland Yard, again, was a very macho kind of environment, certainly not much in the way of discussing emotions or showing emotions. It was a kind of hard drinking environment to go to the pub at the end of the day and drink 5 or 6 pints of beer and to just be incredibly hard, seemed to be the order of the day I again was slightly different to the typical guy at Scotland Yard because I was slightly more laid back, slightly more polite, I guess I was trying to emulate David Niven and Cary Grant in my in my adulthood doesn't always work but I tried and show people politeness and respect and I'd try and you know like to do old fashioned things.

*You mentioned it in your performance quite a bit and I know it's supposed to be a performance and you're not speaking like perhaps here in this oral history interview but I was very amused, you know with the things you said, I think you mentioned Mary Poppins at one point.*

Mary Poppins yes. I was having an image of jumping off and floating away with Mary Poppins and I ...

*That you had a dream while having a cream-tea?*

That's right yes [laughs]. Yes, one of the things I wanted to talk about more is how we should all pursue our dreams a little more and I was having a cup of tea in my half-time break and I actually opened the paper and I'd been talking about dreams

## One & Other Project

and whatever your dreams wanted to be whether you wanted climb a mountain or sail an ocean or whatever you should do it and I'd kept the Sunday Times from the week before to kind of read on the plinth and I opened the paper and there was a story about a man who'd built this aeroplane himself and I was about to start talking about somebody following their dream but I got slightly distracted by the Russian woman who came along and started chatting with me, she was very taken with seeing somebody in a bowler hat I guess on the plinth and my friend Neil actually took a little video clip of the conversation that I had with the Russian girl who I quite liked and she was very attractive and if I could of get off the plinth to pursue her I probably would have. It could have been romance from the plinth but I didn't find her afterward she'd wandered off, it was too late but Neil took some footage with his little video camera and we posted some stuff on YouTube the following day and a little while later I was doing a search on Google for Captain Teapot and suddenly it appears Captain Teapot talking to the Russian girl is on a website, Russian Brides Online, so it's surprising where you crop up you know.

*I'm interested in the idea of communication of people on the plinth with the crowd in the square and also via the web and whether that affected the ways in which you might have planned your performance, or what you might have left out.*

Having a couple of months also to watch other people on the plinth was quite useful I guess because my spot on the plinth wasn't until the end of August so I had July and August to sit and watch, which I did, and it seemed to me that people hadn't made the most of the space or the time that they had in ... really I mean it's a once in a lifetime opportunity isn't it? You're never going to have the chance to be on the plinth in Trafalgar Square ever again so whatever you do, you've got to make the most of it and some people sat there and just watched people going by which, I guess is fair enough if that's what they want to do or they rang their friends or did other things but I guess I wanted to say a little bit more and do a little bit more of kind of spontaneous kind of things that just occurred to me really. I guess ... so the poetry I'd written, some of the ideas I had just at the last minute, a day or two before, I think, the night before I actually was packing my bag to drive to London and I suddenly had the idea about putting my remote controlled Mini in my bag and driving the Mini on top and it was only a day or two before that I'd had the idea about the teabag cricket and I went to my village hall when there was a bit of a car parking space I tested out different teabags to see which ones worked best.

*Did you win the world record for ...*

I don't. No. The Guinness wouldn't look at it as a world record unfortunately so they responded to me about two weeks three weeks later so it's not going to be a world record, just my personal world record. I guess I'll have to go with that. But I was quite surprised at what an affect it had on other people who watched via the internet and who rang me up when they saw it, or they didn't know that I'd done it and then a couple of months later when it finished the end of October obviously the video was put together of the highlights, I guess, of the whole plinth project and somebody was watching the BBC News and they showed a clip and somebody I hadn't seen for about two years ... and they suddenly, my phone rang and, 'What are you doing?'

## One & Other Project

and I said, “What do you mean, what am I doing?”, he said, ‘I’ve just seen you on TV, you’re on the plinth, what were you doing?’ and they were just surprised because I guess to a lot of people who knew me when I was younger and maybe who knew me prior to the last seven or eight years wouldn’t have ever imagined me doing something like that, because the last thing I would normally do is try and call attention to myself. Normally I blend into the background. I don’t mind talking to people and chatting and things but I guess there’s an element of you know being kind of invisible I guess.

*So had you done any performance before?*

Not, well a little bit, back in 2003 I did some work with the BBC for a while, computer work, and on the back of that I got the idea I’d quite like to be in a television programme in some way. But the BBC couldn’t tell me, they couldn’t put me into a programme, but they at least were able to tell me that there were a couple of casting agencies in London who did extra kind of work, so I sent a photo and some details to a couple of these agencies and two of them signed me up and I just thought for initial experience it might be nice to have a go at something a bit different. However, my first two experiences weren’t that great, I did a piece where I was supposed to be a man at an international law enforcement conference and I’d been to a couple of conferences about law enforcement after my time at Scotland Yard so that wasn’t very unusual or exciting, just being somebody I could have done anyway, and then my next job was for a television series called *The Commander* and they wanted me to walk up and down outside Scotland Yard for a couple of hours on a Sunday morning, which again I’d done thousands of times over a long period of time, so it wasn’t very exciting so I was beginning to lose interest really in being an extra and I thought I’ve seen what it ... what happens, you know, and that for me was about to be enough but then I did one more job where I ended up one morning in a pub in Mayfair with Woody Allen and Scarlet Johansson doing a Woody Allan film called *Matchpoint* and I only had to walk in through a door and look around a pub and Scarlet Johansson was sitting at a table and chatting to Jonathan Rhys-Meyers. After that it was quite amazing to be in this room with Woody Allen who’s like a, you know, a genius of film I guess, who I’d never have never met in normal circumstances. I didn’t really get to meet him that day, he told me a couple of things that he wanted me to do, a chat to Scarlet Johansson very briefly between some takes but I thought it’s [?] ... that day was fun, it was kind of unusual, it was slightly surreal because I went back to work the following day. I was talking about rolling out a new version of Windows software and it was just really weird how you can go from being with Woody Allen one day to talking about software the next day, it’s quite weird.

But I did a little more extra work over the course of the next few months just part-time and then I got asked to do five days on a film called *The Girl in a Café*. I was given a small speaking part which never actually made it to the screen but I had some lines to learn and it was all about a man who meets a girl in a café and he’s a civil servant, a fairly repressed, almost Captain Teapot character, and he works for the government and they’re trying to get some funding for projects in Africa and world poverty and they go off to the G8 summit and he takes the girl that he’s met in a café with him and he falls for her and she for him and at the end of the piece she makes a speech to the world leaders about how we should be doing more for children

## One & Other Project

throughout the world. I was supposed to be a Canadian at the G8 summit, but it was done for the Making Poverty History campaign as part of Oxfam and the BBC kind of working together and I was quite proud to be part of that and I'd enjoyed kind of five days on it and having some lines was good fun and I decided to give up my IT work for a while and had just gone to concentrate on film work and see what happened, so I did give it a go for a year but I realised after a year or so Hollywood was never going to call, I was never going to get a BAFTA, I was probably ever going to do anything you know ground-breaking or anything, I'm not really an actor, I was doing a few lines here and there but I was always a man in a suit most of the time, so I gave up that and went back to IT so I have had a little experiment I guess in performing, I've been in front of a camera, I've never been on stage, but just in front of cameras so I did also at the time a course and again at the Morley College evening classes for twelve weeks introduction to acting which was a little bit of a kind of a how to give a performance I guess but I wouldn't by any stretch of the imagination say, 'Oh I was an actor really.' I was just had a little bit of practise but and it was just one of those things again that I thought would be fun to do, so I pursued it, which again probably fifteen years ago I probably wouldn't, fifteen years ago I was a sensible sober computer person at Scotland Yard who you know took his job seriously and worked nine to five and was a pillar of the community and all that so I have broken out of that to a certain extent.

*So just to go back to when you were a child, you finished school, what happened, did you go to university straight away?*

No, no, I did stay on at school for a year it was my intention to do A-levels but I hadn't really thought about university or college the place as I mentioned where we grew up was quite rough, very poor, in the seventies my dad worked for Ford Motor Company who were always on strike, my mother worked in a shop so we didn't have a huge amount of money and there were four children and half-way through my doing my A-levels I realised I guess I needed to get a job because we couldn't really afford for me to continue to study we didn't have enough money so I decided I was going to get a job I didn't know what exactly, but I looked into my dad's newspaper, he always reads The Sun, and there was an ad saying, 'Career with Computers with the Metropolitan Police'. So I'd just done a bit of a project at school about computers and I was into science anyway and did read a lot of science-fiction and watched a lot of science-fiction on television and film so I rang the number on the advert and got an interview and they offered me a job and so in the summer of '77 I finished my last exam on the 24<sup>th</sup> July and the following Monday, the 27<sup>th</sup> of July I started work and I was working out of a building on the south bank, opposite Millbank Tower as a trainee computer operator and computers were quite big then, you could barely fit a computer into a normal room and just progressed from there. And initially I worked for the Home Office and it was a few years later I transferred to the Met Police and went to work on a big project that they were doing at the time, so computers were still fairly rare back in the early '80s and Scotland Yard were running a, well they still run, something called The Information Room which is, if you dial 999, you ... I don't think it still happens but what used to happen is you would get put through to the Information Room at Scotland yard, where a policeman would take the details of what was happening and your address and phone-number and location, those kinds of things, and once he'd got all the details, he'd note them all down on a piece of

## One & Other Project

paper once he'd got all those, he'd hang up the phone, he would look in an A to Z and handwritten in Biro on these pages of each A to Z was each area car covered that part of London that you were calling from and he would write that area car down on that piece of paper then put that into a conveyor belt which went along to the other end of the room where somebody took that piece of paper off, put it into a pile and would read out over a radio to the local area car when he got to that particular sheet, it wasn't a terribly efficient way of doing things but it was the best that they had and it was state-of-the-art in the 1960s when they'd started doing it and now it was the 1980/82/83 so they decided to computerise everything and they ran a little pilot programme first of all in one part of London, it worked quite well so they decided to spread it out to every police-station and building in London and I was part of the project to do all that, still doing computer operating and once the project was over they needed people to stick around to help to run the thing and if it went wrong that someone would, at two o'clock in the morning ... they had to be around to get it working again. So I did that for about ten years and then a few other projects as well at Scotland Yard mainly, computer fixing. But it was it was interesting, I did get to spend a week out at my local police-station because the guy running the project when we were developing the 999 system thought we need to experience what our, the people using the system are experiencing, so there are people using our system are going to be out in cars of going on the beat, so I did that and walked around Clapham and Stockwell for a few nights and drove round in a police car around all sorts of areas of Clapham and Streatham and places like that I was in plain clothes sitting in the back supposed to be just observing but people often assumed that I was a detective because I was in plain clothes, I was just a boy, I mean I was twenty-two / twenty-three so I would just listen to them really, tell me what had happened, then relayed that story to the police officers that I was with, it was an interesting time.

*So how did your family perceive you then, once you began to work for the police?*

Well I think my mum was proud, impressed I think, my dad never really said anything but it was quite a dramatic change, going from where we were living in this sort of place on the outskirts of Croydon every day on the bus and then a train up to London and then was, yes, quite a dramatic change. I think my mum, like with mothers with all their children, they're very proud whatever they do. They were impressed but I think my mum most of all when, in the '80s, when I took her up to London and took her to lunch and then took her into Scotland Yard and showed her what I actually did because I had a small team of people working for me by then and she'd never been to Scotland Yard before and she was kind of, you know, didn't think her little boy could ever do that kind of thing ... it was a nice, I'm glad I took my mum there. It was one those things. I think back now and think, 'I'm glad I did that.' I mean, kind of little things like that can make a difference in a memory and stuff, I mean my brother Mark, just before he died, the week when he was in hospital, I kissed him for the first ... the first time I'd ever kissed a man, never kissed a man before, but after he died I was glad I kissed him but he was just looking so helpless and kind of lost in the hospital bed that, you know, I just reached across and did that, it's good to express those little things I think when you feel them.

*Yes, I agree with you. What prompted you to move to Bath?*



## One & Other Project

That was a job related move. Scotland yard in the '90s was starting to look to outsource all their IT and so I was going to end up working for a big IT company like IBM or somebody and I would have no decision on who that might be, so I thought if I'm going to have to stop working for Scotland Yard and work for somebody else I'd like to choose who that's going to be. So I started looking round for another job and there's a company based just outside Bath who design IT systems for police forces and I sent them my CV and got a job with them and initially it was working in Kent because they'd just sold a computer system to Kent and then after I'd been there for a few months, they offered me a promotion but it meant moving to Bath and my girlfriend at the time was very keen on the south west and when I said I've been offered this move, but I'm only going to take it if you come with me and she was over the moon about the whole thing so we decided we would move to Bath, it didn't quite work out because a few months later we actually broke up. So in December of '97 I was faced with a choice of moving to Bath on my own or finding another job in London somewhere, but we had broken up. but I did a couple of things, one was I went to London, I went to Bath on a day that it was snowing and it was freezing cold a week before Christmas but walking round by Pulteney Bridge and I don't know if you know Bath but it's a classic Georgian city, it hasn't changed very much since the late 1700s and everything is made out of similar coloured stone and nothing really is over about 4 or 5 storeys high and there's a classic bridge called Pulteney Bridge over the River Avon which has got a string of old shops on it, it's very classic tourist, but I walked round by the bridge for the first time and looked up at the hillside and it's all covered in snow and it just looked like something out of a fantasy postcard and I just decided then that I was ... that's where I was going to move to, I was going to live in Bath. So a few months later I found a flat and moved there in March of 1998 and it was a good move because it's a beautiful city, people there are a bit friendlier, I think that people in London are a little bit more repressed, and I guess a bit more guarded. In the south west people are slightly more relaxed. In fact the village I live in now is called Limply Stoke and it pretty much runs into another village called Freshford and there's a train station in Freshford and people go and get the trains in the morning and they talk to each other and there's a group of us who get together every once in a while for a drink and we've just met on the train just waiting for the train in the morning, now in 20 years of commuting in London I never ever talked to anybody on the platform and certainly never made friends with anybody on the train or went for a drink with them after the train journey was over but it's a very kind of cute place to work to live, Bath. In the mornings when I get up I open my curtains and I look out on a valley with sheep in fields and trees and in the valley below me. There's a river and a canal and it's a very scenic, very beautiful place to be.

*You mentioned in your pre-plinth interview that you weren't working at the time.*

No, that's right.

*Did you say you were unemployed for a year?*

Unemployed for just over a year, yes. In January 2009 I'd been working for an organisation in Bristol for about a year on a contract and I'd been contracting as an IT person for, on and off, for about ten years and I'd been out on a contract for a year and I could have stayed but my brother Philip's death had just meant that really had

## One & Other Project

... I'd realised I needed to take some time off. So I thought I would take three months off and then find another job and that was in January so I had most of January, February and March off and then I thought in April I'm feeling a little better now, I think I can go back to work. So I started to look for another job but I just couldn't find anything, the recession had impacted all areas of life really and jobs in the south west for me had just disappeared and every day I would spend several hours on the internet doing searches on various job sites [?] for an IT contract somewhere and usually there's nothing much in Bath itself, it doesn't have a huge IT industry. Normally I ended up in the past commuting to Bristol or Cardiff or some other places but even though my work area was quite large and I was quite willing to commute to maybe as far as Reading which is almost a hundred miles away there was nothing and it was quite disheartening really, every day to sit down and spend several hours and just come up with nothing, it would be more typical in the previous years where if I had a contract coming to an end, I would sit down and have a look on the internet and there would be half-a-dozen jobs every day that I could apply for but I was lucky if there were half-a-dozen jobs I could apply for in a month and my savings began to dwindle and I started to have to you know be very, very careful with money and I tried to avoid signing on, and becoming a, getting Jobseekers Allowance. I didn't really want to do that, but after a few months it got to the point where I didn't really know where I was going to get any more money from and if I didn't apply then I was probably going to end up thrown out of my house and yes, all sorts of other things.

So I went to the local Job Centre and signed on and every week went along and every week had to say that there were no jobs and they would search on their system and there were no jobs for me on their system either and there was really not very much they could do for me I guess. So I just had to survive, but luckily I've got some very good friends and they would keep me cheered up, take me out for a coffee, invite me round for dinner, take me out to the cinema, that kind of thing and it's been useful in other ways. I mean, apart from giving me more time to do Captain Teapot a close friend of mine Shirley, was diagnosed as having cancer so that allowed me to spend more time with her over the last sort of few months and she's recovered now, she had a mastectomy last year, but she had chemotherapy for quite a few months but she was off work and I was off work as well so it was, you know I could take her out, take her shopping or just go and sit with her for a few hours and chat or whatever, so I found it useful, I being unemployed it doesn't mean to have to have to mean that you don't that you stop living, you know your life does change but you can make the most of your time and do other things and you can go for walks and you can do lots of things free, and you can have conversations with people and you can help other people in different ways, it's an opportunity rather than you know rather than a bad thing it can be a good thing and I have just started working again in the last two months so I guess in all about 14 months of being unemployed.

*How do you find it now that you're working?*

I don't have enough time to do all the things that I would like to do and I, yes, it's coming home every evening, I've got a few hours and I have weekends, but the weekends pass in a blur, so by the time you've done your shopping and housework

## One & Other Project

and a few other things, half the time has gone, so your time is pretty limited and you know there are lots of different things that I'd like to do but ... and I keep my weekends full I think at the moment seeing friends and doing various different things, but I do appreciate the money. I appreciate the time more I think if I had to make a choice between kind of living okay and having lots of time or having lots of money and no time I think I'd go for the lots of time and no money but you can't you can't do that forever I guess, there became a point where it was becoming very, very difficult to juggle all sort of bills and things so you have to go back to work. If I could have found a job that would have paid me just enough to survive on but gave me a bit more free time that would have been okay. I applied for lots of jobs that didn't pay much money, things with the BBC or with charities and things like that but I guess my CV isn't quite right for that kind of job. I think they would look at somebody who's spent thirty years in IT who's fifty years of age isn't quite the sort of person they want running around at the BBC or kind of helping out at charities and things like that and somebody in a recruitment place said that basically they think you'd only do that for a limited period of time and get bored and go off and get some more money. I would have been quite happy earning a little bit of money and all that time but it's good, today, this morning actually on the way here I stopped off for a coffee and I was sitting by myself for a while and there were some people working for a kind of charity outside trying to get donations and I thought, 'Actually, now I'm working again it gives me a chance to give money away again.' Because when I had been working before I had been donating money to a few different charities every month but that all had to stop when I became unemployed so today I signed up with Amnesty International as I was on the way here, so I'm going to give them some money every week. I had a nice conversation with one of the cancer charity workers round the corner so I might end up doing something with them too, so having money gives you the ability to, you know, help other people as well in other ways even if it's remotely.

*I wanted to ask you why you decided to stop doing the psychotherapy training.*

The psychotherapy, ah, well the psychotherapy training was interesting, I liked it, but to become a fully trained counsellor/psychotherapist I would need to go back to school long term full time pretty much and as I'm single and I'm the only one who supports me financially I think it was going to be a very, very difficult thing for me to do that one time, when I did give up my IT and started to work as a kind of film extra I thought I might go back to the training but it's still financially I wasn't earning enough as an extra to actually fund a further education so it was a financial kind of aspect in a way also partly I'm not I think if you're doing it as a full-time job it can be very emotionally draining I can imagine, you know it's emotionally draining when you're talking to somebody for a few hours about experiences that they've had and things they want to talk about, doing it for seven or eight hours a day and some people have been more horrific experiences than I have I think it emotionally draining would have been to much of a taxing thing so I admire people who can do it. I don't think I'm one of them, I think I can do it as an amateur, as a as an almost helping people occasionally and I do then to get more than my fair share of friends crying on my shoulder I guess and it's good to be able to just listen and help just by listening because that's normally all you have to do. ...

[01:23:59]

## One & Other Project

*Thanks for that, just to bring you back to the experience of the plinth, I was wondering how do you think it affected your family and friends, if at all?*

I think they probably do look at me slightly differently now. When I first started going around talking about Captain Teapot and showing some picture to my friends and family I think they were all slightly bemused. I think they were, as I was when I got the space on the plinth ... my sister's very proud of me and she's said that on a few occasions which is quite nice. My friends think it's amazing, it's definitely had an effect on me as in kind of a almost like getting something out of my system, saying something about being unrestrained, and being a bit more emotional and talking about things and it's showing me that nothing's impossible and if I decide to you know do something else in the future as I probably will, I don't know what it is yet. I got the plinth to look back on, I've got the exhibition to look back on and those things that have you know just can brings a smile to my day, if I think, 'Ugh.' suddenly at some point it just occurs to me that I've been on the plinth or teabag cricket or smashing a teapot or anything like it just brings a smile to my day and it helps me as well to encourage other people to do other things, it may not be sitting on the plinth but it's a story I think that can inspire people when last year when I was going to the schools to try to persuade them to donate artwork lots of the students were saying, you know, they were amazed they thought they were talking to somebody amazing who because they'd seen the footage of me on the plinth, and I thought, 'That's kind of weird, because I'm only really a normal kind of person, I'm not kind of special, I'm not really extraordinary, I'm just fairly normal.' And I think most of the people on the plinth were pretty normal and that was one of the great things about it, it's was kind of the normal people being allowed to do whatever they want for an hour at a time and normal people are capable of doing some very extraordinary things at times so it was nice to see that, yes.

*I was also interested in this symbolic objects that you used like obviously you know I'm not from England so the teapot and then the flag, the British flag on the top sleeve of the notebook that you read you poems with, so why do you think these objects, obviously the flag, the teapot and the tea what do you think they symbolise?*

I think they do symbolise Britain to a lot of people around the world. I mean they're classic British symbols but I also think that there are symbols that can kind of ... show, well for me they were showing that I was proud of being British, I was being British, I was being kind of proud of it, not in a way to kind of deride any other cultures or anything like that, that's the last thing I would want to do, but I think often these days people are very apologetic about being British. I don't want to be jingoistic either we're not better than any other country in the world, we're not the best people, we're not you know the most extraordinary people or anything we're just people like people in America and Italy and Russia and Japan and all sorts of other places in the world, but there are things about our history that we can be proud of and some things we've done that are great, some things we've done not so great but we should just appreciate what we have, our culture and the objects around us that have helped make us who we are I guess. Another British person might take other things and somebody from Japan will take other things I guess, French people will take other things but for me it was all about being British, being proud of being British, but also

## One & Other Project

destroying that classic cliché about the British being so controlled I that's the one thing I'd like to get rid of so I think we can be proud of our heritage of bowler hats and drinking tea and cricket and things and all those things that sports that we're no longer good at and everybody else in the world beats us at but you know we're okay ... we're not the best in the world but we're not the worst in the world either and we're doing fine and we should be proud of that.

*What do you think the project was about?*

I think the project was about giving people ordinary people a voice and just I guess seeing what people had to say, places for people to say things are they're all, you can say things on the web I guess and you can say thing on blogs or you can go on reality TV I guess and say things but the plinth was kind of a moment in time. I guess in ten years time if you do it again or if somebody else does it in another country people will do entirely different things, it's a snapshot of culture of who we are and how we want to be perceived taken at a point a lot of things in the world are changing, I'm mean the world's becoming a smaller place, hopefully we're becoming more understanding, I'm sometimes I'm not sure whether we are becoming more understanding, I hope we are, but it's a snapshot of Britain at time in its history which is a fairly interesting time and also a chance for us to express ourselves and show us as you know people as individuals, you know, every day you had some people doing completely different things, I mean the guy with the huge Moon on his head, we had people taking their clothes off, you had some people who interacted with the crowds and some people who were just quiet, I know somebody else, a woman called Judith, Judy who was on the plinth about a month before I was and that struck me as being quite strange because I wonder how many people on the plinth knew other people that were there, but she just stood there and watched what was happening and related what she could what she could see and that was again interesting, I mean it was just an amazing experience, an amazing event, it will always be a very special time for me and always something that will make me smile when I remember that I was part of it.

*Thank you very much.*

Thank you.

*I hope you've enjoyed the interview.*

I did, I did, thank you very much, it's great to have an opportunity just to talk about it, it's great.

*Thanks.*