**Leonard Cheshire Resonate Podcast – Episode 2 Transcript**

**Start of Transcript**

**[Michael Ruddy]** Hi, and welcome back to the Resonate Podcast, I’m Michael

**[Stephanie Nield]** And I’m Stephanie.

**[Michael]** Thanks for tuning into the second episode for this Podcast. Before we begin, I strongly recommend you listen to Episode 1. In that Episode we gave an overall background for the project, such as how we recruited volunteers, trained volunteers, and the actual content of the archive.

**[Stephanie]** The Resonate project is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Foyle Foundation. We are digitising and transcribing our historic sound collections for the very first time. The transcription is being done by a team of volunteers and they are also contributing to a podcast – this podcast. At this point in time we are just over halfway done with getting the tapes transcribed, so things have been very busy.

**[Michael]** To ensure that our volunteers have the opportunity and provision to be to contribute to the Podcast, we provided them with training. The training was focused on providing them skills in the audio software Audacity as well as how to use microphones and how to make content interesting. We also recruited the help of a ‘Podcast Trainer’ who helped both design the training and answer any enquiries from our volunteers.

**[Stephanie]** For Episode 2 we have asked our volunteers to record clips talking about certain parts of the tape recordings that have really resonated with them. They are able to make the clips themselves at home, and we’ve encouraged them to talk about anything they’ve learned or heard in the tapes and how it made them feel.

**[Stephanie]** Before these recordings are played, it is important to state that because of the age of the tapes in our archive, some clips may contain language we wouldn't use today. This is not an endorsement and is present for the purposes of historical study and reminiscence

**[Michael]** This first clip has been created by our volunteer Lily. While transcribing the recordings, Lily discovered the link between Group Captain Cheshire and the bombing of Nagasaki in 1945. Lily’s interest in this recording inspired her to create a snippet for the podcast, particularly how she felt about Leonard Cheshire’s views on the use of Nuclear Weapons. Before I play this clip, I’ll let Stephanie provide some historical context.

**[Stephanie]** In July 1944 Group Captain Leonard Cheshire was retired from flying and awarded the Victoria Cross. He had flown over 100 operations for RAF Bomber Command. He was posted to Washington DC to help plan the invasion of Japan.

By this point in the War, Japan was fighting a bloody war of attrition in Asia. They estimated a further 4 million lives would be lost in the time it took for the Allies to win. On July 26th, 1945, the US, UK and China issued the Potsdam Declaration calling on Japan to surrender, which was ignored. Leonard Cheshire was told in strict secrecy about the Manhattan project and the creation of the atomic bomb. He was also told that he had been selected by the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to witness the weapon in action.

Leonard travelled to the US air base on Tinian Island in the Marianas. On the 6th August 1945 the Americans dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Leonard had attempted to get on the observation plane but had been blocked by the Americans. On the 9th August he managed to get on board the B29 observation plane Bockscar to witness the dropping of the ‘fat man’ bomb over Nagasaki. He was with another British observer Sir William Penney, a scientist. He witnessed Nagasaki from over 50 miles away.

**[Michael]** Using extracts from a Leonard Cheshire radio interview, Lily created this clip.

**[Lily]** The first ever transcriptionI did was titled ‘Leonard Cheshire’s Speaks on the Nuclear Deterrent and his experience being an observer at Nagasaki’. Now up until this point, I had no idea about the contents of the recordings in the Archive, let alone that I would be listening to a frank retelling of the moment an Atom Bomb was dropped. So, you could say I was fascinated by the Project from day one.

From what I understood of Leonard, he was a very generous and moral man. So I have to say when I was given this transcription, and saw he was very much in the argument for nuclear arms, I was preparing myself to come away listening to this not really liking the man, as it just seemed so obvious to me that nuclear war is wrong. But actually, once I’d finished, I didn’t necessarily agree with his theory, but I could completely understand why he had the opinions he had. This is why I’d like to share this particular extract with you.

In August 1945, American Forces dropped the second of two atomic bombs on Japan. It exploded over the city of Nagasaki. In what would be his final mission as a member of RAF Bomber Command, Group Captain Leonard Cheshire was one of the official British observers of the detonation of that bomb. Nearly forty years later, we hear his recollections and reflections in an interview with Paul McDowell for the radio show ‘Good Morning Sunday’ aired on BBC 2 in 1983.

**[Group Captain Leonard Cheshire]** My role at that time was part of the planning team for the frontal assault – the invasion of Japan. That meant 5 million men across the Pacific into Japan. It was estimated that it would take another year of fighting and they thought another 3 million deaths. By that time, the whole business of war was so terrible, that the dominant thought in my mind was ‘what do we do to stop a third world war?’. I think that once I got over the terrible shock of being told what an atom bomb was and knowing that I was going to sit in the sky and actually watch one go over, once I got over - if one can - that shock, my hope was ‘would it bring the War to a sudden end? Would it stop this awful business of a frontal assault on Japan?’.

There was a terrible shock. I think the chief impact on me was a feeling of power, I’d never seen anything that had that degree of power. It was so sort of symmetrical, so silent, it overwhelmed you with it’s power, that was my main impression. Of course, I had to struggle with myself to keep my mind on what I was supposed to do, that required quite a mental effort. Through it all came the thought – two thoughts – ‘what’s happening to the people on the ground? And is this going to save the lives of those however many who are going to have to die otherwise?’.

**[Lily]** Leonard came away from this experience convinced that atomic energy was the key to peace, because it’s effects were so devastating that no one would ever want to use it again. This is a concept which would have never crossed my mind until listening to this extract. What struck me most about this interview was the picture Leonard painted of that day, from a perspective that so few people would have experienced or could even imagine. This is another extract which particularly resonated with me.

**[GLC]** At the time that I saw that go off, I felt convinced that nations that held an atom bomb would never be attacked by another major nation. That the Bomb is just so terrible, it makes no sense, it’s just unimaginable to make war against another nuclear power. But of course, in the intervening years, I realised that war is not made by the weapon, that war and peace depend upon what’s in man’s heart. And it’s a question of whether we’re willing to make the sacrifice to build peace, to build justice, to eradicate the – for instance the injustice of gross poverty, to do what we can to help people that are suffering under a unjust regime whilst at the same time, keeping up our defences so that nobody is able to use force to impose their will upon another nation. I just am convinced that weapons stop you fighting and if we’re never going to see another world war, that’s to me an unimaginable blessing.

Let’s use that in two ways. A warning to us that we should be less materialistic, that our minds should be set more on the things on God and less on the things of this World. And secondly that we identify ourselves more with the struggle of the poor and those who are living under injustice. That’s my view.

**[Lily]** I wanted to highlight these clips from this recording because I’d never heard someone speak so passionately against the action of war, yet so in favour of nuclear deterrents. I thought it was important to pull these from the Archive to share with others, as I think that through his recollection of his war time experiences, that we get an insight into Leonard’s motivations for building his Foundation. That for the sake of those who did not survive, he wanted to make the post war world a better place.

**[Michael]** We were really pleased that Lily had chosen this clip. The recording gives a rare eyewitness perspective of power and destruction of a nuclear weapon.

**[Michael]** The second clip we want to show you was created by our volunteer Maddie. Whilst Maddie was transcribing recordings, she found a recording that she felt explain to her, clearly, why Group Captain Cheshire embarked upon his mission of helping others after the war. In the clip, Maddie’s interest involves the impact of the War on those who fought it, while some wanted to return to their normal lives, others like Leonard decided to dedicate all his effort to ensuring future peace.

Again, before I play this clip, Stephanie will provide some context of Leonard Cheshire’s post-war activism.

**[Stephanie]** When the war ended, Leonard Cheshire was discharged from the RAF with a diagnosis of psychoneurosis to a London psychiatric hospital for Officers. He was completely worn out by fighting. He didn’t stay there for very long – he was bored and restless. He set up home in Kensington and started looking for something to do, with a vague idea of recapturing the spirit of wartime collaboration that he was missing.

He became a journalist and through his newspaper column started to contact fellow minded people looking for a cause. He set up a self-help community in Leicestershire and then at his house in Hampshire - Le Court - which failed, but a member, Arthur, came back due to having cancer and nowhere else to live. Leonard nursed him. The NHS had just started, and it became clear that people like this man had nowhere to go.

Leonard was intent on selling Le Court after Arthur died, but the man had convinced him there were more like him. By the end of 1948 Leonard’s house was full of people with complex needs, impairments and health issues and he had found his cause. As a result, though, Leonard caught TB and lived in a TB hospital for two years. In fact, he almost died. When he came out in 1954, he left for India. He had received letters whilst in hospital saying that India was the country that needed him most and this marked the expansion of his work across the globe.

By 1978, the first American Cheshire Home opened in Gulfport, Mississippi. This was followed in 1981 by another in New Jersey. Leonard was helped by the American actor Robert Montgomery, and he knew people like comedian Jerry Lewis who was well known for his fundraising for Muscular Dystrophy. But also, there were people he has met whilst in the RAF which made up a lot of his early helpers.

**[Michael]** Using a Leonard Cheshire speech from 1979, Maddie created this clip.

**[Maddie]** Whilst volunteering with Leonard Cheshire, I have been tasked with transcribing audio tapes related to sermons, seminars, lectures and talks that Group Captain Leonard Cheshire and Lady Sue Ryder gave throughout the year of 1979. The topics of these tapes are varied, with some relating to the promotion of their charitable work and others being of a more religious and theological variety. During my transcription of these recordings, one particular clip stood out for me.

This specific clip is an address given by Group Captain Leonard Cheshire in May 1979, at the opening of a Home at Gulfport, Mississippi. In this clip, Leonard Cheshire begins by touching on the watershed moment of his involvement in the Second World War, where his whole perspective on life and humanity was completely transformed.

**[Group Captain Leonard Cheshire]** And just for a moment, I think I do have to touch on the War, because for me that was the starting point. And though war is a terrible thing, nonetheless, you find many great human qualities in it. You learnt in the War what people can do when they are united in a common purpose, towards a common goal, which they know that at all costs, they have to achieve. I think that’s a supreme example of what we human beings can do.

**[Maddie]** I found Leonard Cheshire’s interpretation of his involvement in the War fascinating, in terms of his belief in the many great human qualities that the War laid bare. Although he does stipulate that the War was arguably a terrible thing, his account of his experience as one in which revealed the true essence of humanity, whilst engaging the fight towards the common goal, is a rare yet refreshing insight.

Continuing on the theme of the Second World War, what was further interesting about this clip was the first-hand insight it gave into how Leonard Cheshire’s work first began. Having began my volunteering with not a lot of knowledge about the origins of Leonard Cheshire’s work, this particular clip quickly changed that. But what was really interesting about this clip, was the revelation that Leonard Cheshire’s work began as a direct consequence of his experience in the War and his subsequent new perspective on life and humanity.

**[GLC]** Well the old man, dying of cancer, whom I came across in hospital in 1948 and whom I accepted into my own house and remained there under my care until he died, that man – Arthur Dykes – opened for me a door into the world of disabled people. And so our work, the work that bares my name, in it’s small way, is trying to provide for those who are too handicapped to go out and live on their own, not an institution, a home for life.

**[Maddie]** The example of Arthur Dykes offers a fascinating insight into the origins of Leonard Cheshire’s charitable work, which came to bear his name and uphold his humanitarian principles. Later on, in the clip, while reflecting on the lives of those with disabilities, Leonard Cheshire offers the inspiring example of the late Hilary Pole, who in her late-teens developed a degenerative disease which consequently left her paralysed. This clip subsequently captures Leonard Cheshire’s unwavering belief in removing the barrier of disability.

**[GLC]** One particular disabled person - who comes first to my mind when I think of this aspect of the desire of a disabled person to put his life to good use – a girl called Hilary Pole. Hilary was absolutely determined to live and not only to live but to make something out of her life. She turned to using her typewriter, to launching appeals to collect equipment for other disabled people, to give them back a measure of independence. And that was Hilary’s life. Now I see in all that a great beauty, a beauty of personality, a beauty of how the human spirit can triumph over adversity and in fact is the nobler and the greater when faced with a challenge, with a danger, with difficulty.

**[Maddie]** I found this clip to be particularly interesting and inspiring in terms of Leonard Cheshire’s championing of the beauty of Hilary’s determination and human spirit in a direct reproach to those who fail to find such within the lives of those with disabilities. This clip as a whole therefore captures the ethos of Leonard Cheshire and both his and the Charity’s unwavering commitment to life and humanity.

**[Michael]** Overall, Stephanie and I really enjoyed discussing Maddie’s clip. We felt that the theme so was important to touch upon when discussing the history of the charity.

**[Michael]** The final snippet we’d like to play has been created by our volunteer Lianne. She resonated with a sound recording which featured Leonard Cheshire dismantling the view that disabled people cannot contribute toward society, which unfortunately still is a view espoused by some today. As Lianne will highlight in this clip, if provided the opportunity and provision, disabled people can easily be perceived as givers rather than takers. Thankfully, as picked up by Lianne, Leonard Cheshire had one great example to prove this. The story of Hilary Pole.

Again, I’m going to ask Stephanie to provide some historical context.

**[Stephanie]** Hilary Pole was a disability activist from Yorkshire. With the help of the POSM communication system she wrote her life story and her writing appeared in the press, including the Cheshire Smile. Leonard Cheshire knew Hilary and was working with her on a film around the time she died. We don’t know if the film was ever made. The Cheshire Smile ran from 1954 to 1999 as the Magazine of the Leonard Cheshire Foundation. Up until the 1980s it was written, edited and distributed by disabled people living in Leonard Cheshire services and had worldwide distribution. You can read the Cheshire smile on our website.

**[Michael]** So here is Lianne’s clip.

**[Lianne]** This clip, is taken from a speech given in 1980 by Group Captain Leonard Cheshire, to the Auckland Branch of Rotary International – a humanitarian service organisation whose members unite to take action and create lasting change throughout the world. I’ve chosen this extract, partly because it conveys Leonard Cheshire’s own views about the social barriers faced by disabled people and the importance of removing those barriers.

Before I began volunteering with Leonard Cheshire, I wasn’t familiar with the Charity’s founder, or his particular beliefs about the inclusion of disabled people within society. Listening to this speech however, I was pleasantly surprised to find that he held such progressive views and that even 40 years ago, he was using his position to advocate for inclusivity. This extract also caught my attention as it highlight’s the work of Hilary Pole, a lesser known disability rights advocate who campaigned during the 1970s. Being introduced to Hilary’s story has made me more aware of the innovative ways in which technology has been used to help disabled people better communicate with others, even as far back as the 1970s, that I wasn’t aware of before.

At the age of 23, Hilary Pole contracted a disease which affected her body’s ability to send and receive nerve impulses. With the aid of technology, she was able to communicate her message to others, as Group Captain Cheshire explains.

**[Group Captain Leonard Cheshire]** Once it is done, if that person is put in the environment that he or she wants and that conforms to their particular need, is given the supportive care, aids and gadgets, and so on, then - I think it is no exaggeration to say - that nobody, no matter how disabled they may be, is unable to lead a meaningful life.

You could quote the case of a girl who died a few years ago who was completely paralysed by a disease - very quickly - having been an athlete and she was a physical trainer training instructor, or she was learning to be one. She was totally paralysed to the extent that she could only move the big toe on her right foot. She couldn’t eat, she couldn’t breathe, she couldn’t see, and she couldn’t talk, and she could move no part of her body. She couldn’t ask for anything she wanted, but the doctors had managed to retain this little movement in her big toe, and an electronics engineer adapted an electronic POSSUM to be activated by a little microswitch on a board that was strapped to her foot, and by operating that switch, she could turn on her hi-fi and her radio, she was very musical and she could hear. But in addition to that, she could type, she learnt to type. You’d talk to her and she’d answer you on the typewriter. She then moved on to using her typewriter to send out appeals to people to give money to buy equipment for other people disabled. So that was the way Hilary put the little movement she had to good use, and if anybody says, ‘Well perhaps if that was her disability it would’ve been kinder just to let her slip away’, one can only answer that Hilary was determined to live and make something out of her life.

And our work - my wife’s and my own, with hers in her field and mine in mine - our work is designed to try and provide the opportunity -and the facilities in which the disabled person can live the life that they want. And I feel that the objective that we should all have when we work for or with disabled people is to give them the maximum range of choice of what kind of life they want.

**[Lianne]** In 1973, Hilary Pole was awarded an MBE for her services to disabled people, she passed away just a few years later in 1975 and a tribute to her life and achievements appeared in the Cheshire Smile, a magazine published by the residents of Cheshire Homes.

**[Michael]** Thank you to Lianne for highlighting this really interesting recording and the story of Hilary Pole.

**[Stephanie]** Thank you to the volunteers who made the snippets. It’s been interesting to see how they all interacted with the archival material and the different themes they picked up.

**[Michael]** As you can tell, myself and Stephanie were really impressed at the content our volunteers were able to create. Looking back at our first episode, we aimed to provide an opportunity for our volunteers to engage and have their say on the archival content, rather than us two selecting them ourselves as we already know and are familiar with the content. Thanks to the great input from our volunteers, we reached this aim. Our volunteers were able to show what interested them the most, how the recording made them feel and whether the came away with more knowledge generally about the founder, the charity or the disability movement. Looking at the larger context of archives, it shows the potential of collections to create both learning and emotional experiences.

**[Stephanie]** And here’s the social media bit. Our podcast is available on YouTube and the Anchor and Spotify apps. You can download a transcription from our website [www.rewind.leonardcheshire.org](http://www.rewind.leonardcheshire.org/). Look for our news page. Please do keep up to date with our project progress on Twitter @archiveslc and if you are on Pinterest, why not give us a follow? Look for archiveslc and stay tuned for an exciting new project development later in the year.

**[Michael]** We are currently in a state of flux regarding our next episode for the Resonate Podcast. We are still following our planned format for the 3rd Episode being an ‘Evaluation’, where we will look at the impact of the project, what we have achieved and what we have learned. However, if we have more volunteer interest for creating more snippets, we will of course add another episode in a similar format to this one.

Thank you so much for listening, for now it’s goodbye from Stephanie and Myself.

**End of Transcript**