

ALISS Showcase Key Resources for Social Scientists: Oral History Archives: Hidden Voices Online

Hello everyone and thanks to Heather for inviting me to talk about our work today.

My name is Stephanie, I am the archivist for disability charity Leonard Cheshire based in Netherseal, South Derbyshire. Leonard Cheshire is an international disability charity based in the UK.

Today I will be talking to you about the work that we have been doing to save and provide access to our historic sound collections, and our work running an inclusive oral history programme through externally funded projects. This presentation will include me playing a couple of films about our project work, and a quick demonstration of how to navigate the Rewind website. I provide a few links and am happy to share the slides afterwards so you don't have to take too many notes.

Slide 2 - Founder

Our work was started in 1948 by our founder, Group Captain Lord Leonard Cheshire VC OM. This slide shows Leonard Cheshire sat centre with his crew between 1941-1942, whilst serving with RAF No. 35 Squadron at Linton-on-Ouse, Yorkshire. By 1948, Leonard was a 30-year-old retired RAF Group Captain, known for being awarded the Victoria Cross for his role in Bomber Command during the Second World war. Post war he struggled to adjust to peace time and through a series of events ended up running a self-help community in his own home, Le Court in Hampshire.

Slide 3 – Le Court

This slide shows our founder, in a black suit, back centre left, posing for a photograph with residents of Le Court, around 1955.

The initial form of the self-help community failed, but one of the members, a disabled man called Arthur, came back to live with Leonard and soon he was living with a group of people with complex health needs and disabilities, who had nowhere else to go – even with the beginnings of the new NHS. Leonard was hospitalised for 2 years after catching TB in 1952 and soon became aware of young disabled people who were living on geriatric wards in hospitals because there was nowhere else for them to go. Leonard started his work by inspiring communities to build homes and provide facilities for local disabled people, and this idea spread from the UK first to India and then all over the world.

Slide 4 – The charity today

This slide shows TV presenter and gardener Mark Lane with some of our Can Do volunteers on a rooftop garden.

Today, Leonard Cheshire is a UK based charity that supports disabled people to live, learn and work as independently as they choose - whatever their ability. Our work has global and national impact for individuals and organisations. Through our aims and actions, we believe a fair and inclusive world for everyone is possible.

For more than 70 years, the charity has been supporting disabled people in the UK and around the world, through social care services, and employment, education and volunteering programmes. Leonard Cheshire also campaigns to break down barriers that deny disabled people their basic rights. You can find out more at www.leonardcheshire.org.

Slide 5 – The Leonard Cheshire Archive

This photo shows the front of the Leonard Cheshire Archive building, in the grounds of one of our care homes in Netherseal, South Derbyshire.

It was purpose built by our trustees in 2005, but the archive was founded by Group Captain Cheshire in the 1980s at a different location - Staunton Harold Hall in Leicestershire. The building in the photograph is where I am speaking to you from today. Usually there is one Archivist, (me) and we have a small team of volunteers. As part of our work, we collect the history of the charity Leonard Cheshire and founder, and also that of Leonard Cheshire's wife Lady Sue Ryder and their joint work under the charity Ryder-Cheshire, which now operates mainly in Australia. The collection includes sound, film, photography as well as the personal archive collections of our founder and his work.

Slide 6 – Sound collection

In this photograph I am stood by the sound collection in the archive strongroom. The sound collections are based on the Cheshire Sound Library that was set up at Le Court Cheshire Home in 1973 by the founder and managed by two residents (and radio journalists) Peter Courchee and Nigel Mackenzie. This library was primarily made up of recordings of the speeches of Leonard Cheshire and Sue Ryder, taken on various engagements around the world, talking about their work, drumming up support and opening homes. It also includes Leonard Cheshire's speeches on his wartime career, namely his thoughts on the morality of war and the use of nuclear weapons, from a Christian viewpoint. Leonard Cheshire was very interested in film, helped by his friend the Hollywood film director David Lean, and set up the Ryder-Cheshire film unit to produce films about his work, and some of the soundtracks made their way to the Sound library.

Peter and Nigel were involved with others in the Cheshire Voice – a sound magazine counterpart to The Cheshire Smile, a disability magazine from the Cheshire Homes. Both the Cheshire Smile and the Cheshire Voice were written, edited, published and distributed by residents of the Cheshire Homes, and episodes of the Cheshire Voice were added to the sound library.

In addition to this core collection, there are separate series containing recordings from two oral history programmes, one in the 1990s post Leonard Cheshire's death and another in the late 2010s from a National Lottery funded programme 'Rewind'. These interviews are with staff, trustees, volunteers and residents – all of which includes disabled people.

Finally, recordings from the work of charity Leonard Cheshire have been added to the collection, including training videos and sound recordings of presentations, meetings and Annual General Meetings.

The recordings in the sound collection date from the early 1950s to present day and are on a variety of formats. Those on magnetic tape, reel to reel and cassette are at the most risk of loss due to degradation and to save their contents we were awarded another lottery grant in 2019 to have them digitised.

Slide 7 – Sound projects

I shall now go into more detail about our sound projects, starting with our Rewind project, which began in 2014 and ran until 2017 and was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Foyle foundation.

Rewind was an oral history programme with the intention of recording oral history interviews and history workshops in 6 care home services in the South-East of England. The aim was to encourage and help residents who were interested to

explore their personal histories and the history of the care homes in which they lived – some of which have been operating for nearly 70 years and have a rich history spanning a significant period of change for disabled people and social care.

A lot of consultation with residents went into designing this programme, and we continued to experiment and adapt throughout, influenced by what the residents wanted to explore. This also informed the questions we asked in oral history interviews, with questions around how technological changes had benefited, or not, people's lives.

We recorded a mixture of sound and video oral histories; for people with communication impairments video is often an easier medium for them to communicate and be understood.

A selection of the older archive material and edited extracts from the oral history interviews are available online: <https://rewind.leonardcheshire.org/object/?object-type=oralhistory>

I will now play the project film, which will give you a better idea of what was achieved.

Slide 8 – Resonate project

In 2019, we were awarded a grant to digitise our historic sound collection by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Foyle Foundation. As part of the project we decided to provide a digital volunteering opportunity. This would provide transcription training to a team of 10 volunteers, who would listen to each tape remotely and write a transcript in Word. We also decided to create a three-episode podcast about the project and provide podcasting training using the software Audacity. We included budget to pay for a podcasting trainer to provide this. We had already tested digital

volunteering in a much smaller way with a previous Lottery funded project, so we knew that it would work and that there were people out there who would be interested in volunteering with us.

The podcast was something new, and we planned to have one episode made up of volunteers contributing their own thoughts on a clip from one of the tapes they had transcribed. This worked quite well and we ended up having 3 volunteers contribute clips. You can listen to this episode of our podcast on the anchor and spotify apps and we also provided a copy on YouTube for accessibility reasons. I have put some links on the slides for you to find out more and I can share a copy of the slides as well. The links are (READ LINKS) .

Slide 9

I will now share my screen and do a quick guided tour of the rewind website to show where you can find our oral history and sound collections.

Slide 10

- As stated previously, we have been running a podcast, exploring more of our history and sound collections. You can find our podcast on Available on the Anchor app and most other podcast apps <https://anchor.fm/leonard-cheshire-archive>
- On YouTube as a captioned film, which can be found through our website <https://rewind.leonardcheshire.org/category/podcast/>

Topics include archival themes, such as how we set up and ran our project during a pandemic, and also snapshots from our past. Our most recent episode is on the Cheshire Smile editor, first Archivist and disability campaigner Frank Spath with Dr Laura Crawford from Northumbria University

Slide 11

Thanks for taking the time to listen to me talk about our work today – if you have any questions you can contact me by email stephanie.nield@leonardcheshire.org or you can follow us on twitter @archiveslc where new podcast episodes and content are regularly updated. Thank you.