**Film Transcription**

**Rewind – Leonard Cheshire Disability, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.**

**Film Title:** Leonard Cheshire in Conversation:Predannack Moor

**Duration:** 11 Minutes 17 seconds

**Transcription date:** 10th July 2016

**Archive Number:** N-608047

**Summary of Main Points**

**00:15 –** Leonard Cheshire describes the first residents at Le Court

**02:10 –** Leonard Cheshire talks about the help he received in looking after patients

**02:39 –** Leonard Cheshire describes the difficulties of hospital referrals

**03:36 –** Leonard Cheshire describes the ‘togetherness’ of the home

**04:18 –** The Le Court committee was formed

**05:44 –** Predannack airfield described

**08:20 –** Leonard Cheshire makes the decision to focus his energies on the homes

**09:58 –** Leonard Cheshire describes his illness with tuberculosis

**Start of Transcription**

00:00 [No Speech] music to 0:15

0:15 **Leonard Cheshire:** I think I'd presumed that Arthur was just a very temporary interlude. I'd never imagined there'd ever be anything after Arthur, I'd go my own way and do whatever I had in mind. About two days before Arthur died, Granny came [Leonard Cheshire smiles]... and of course, granny and Arthur's death completely absorbed me. But not only that, I had a letter from ... a hospital, very err, I don’t quite know how it came about, about an ex TB, err Alf Wilmot. And so a few days later he came and this was a completely new situation, he could walk about and so on. He was a Londoner from Stoke Newington and in a completely different setting he wasn't used to.

0:57 Then err, throughout those months for the rest of the year all sorts of people came and err, they were so different that's my memory now. We had, err, dear Miss Permane, she was the most gentle, gentlewomanly woman I mean she'd been used to a quiet, nice life. So she was given the room to herself. She sort of had a little bit of...Victorianism in there, in her little room. We had Mrs Wilks, who'd been in service...and then unexpectedly we had errm, err, err a post office err, engineer who'd um, had an accident and he'd broken his arm, his arm was right up, stiff like this [raises right arm to the side as if in a plaster cast]...and he worked. He was the hardest worker I think I'd ever seen. He, he could, with his other hand, he could use err a little sickle and err cut the banks. And my memory of that summer is lawns, grass they were all growing up and an antiquated err... mower and I knew that if once the lawn [laughs] got above the capability of the mower we were finished! So there was no time to think, err, you know, erm it was just day to day and ... keeping going and not really knowing how to do it there was no time to think.

2:10 But by the next summer, err, I think we had 24 ... patients we called them then. Err I did have some help, we had errm one of the, errm TB patients was a nurse, she couldn't do anything. But she can tell me what to do ... and err she had very strong ideas about what should be done and err how I was doing it and how I was doing it wrong and obviously I was! And the more I look back the more I wonder how we got away with it.

2:39 I think we had 12 TB patients in all. And it was very disconcerting because the, the hospitals would write and say we've got a ... so and so and err he's just finished his treatment, he just needs two or three week’s convalescence, would you take him? And I'd say yes and when he came down I'd realise he was a terminal case. He was highly infective, in other words the hospital had err not really given me the full facts in order to get rid of him. Why, I'm sure that things must have changed nowadays, it wouldn't happen now, no doubt. Err hospitals were under great pressure then, they had to release their beds but I was left with errm ... at least 5 highly infective TB patients. The only means I had of err disposing their sputum was to boil it on a prima stove and err put it down the loo or, or bury it, that’s all that I could do ... so it was very unsatisfactory.

3:36  But at the same time there was a remarkable togetherness, if I can use that phrase, in the home. We were all absolutely involved, everybody had to help. And when we got a err a request for err take in somebody else, I'd get everybody together ... and say "well we haven't got any any room errm so and so and we've had this request, what do we do?" And I can remember ... vividly, Ted leaning against the errm ... mantle piece with his arm which was up like this [illustrates how Ted was leaning on the mantle] and putting his other hand up and saying "I vote for bringing him in". It made you feel that, we hadn't asked for this, that it was put on top of us and we were just doing our poor best 'cause it was a poor best ... to look after them.

4:18 But something had to be done ... and err ... I did what ... a lot of people in England do when ... they can't really see the next step...formed a committee. So that was the beginning of the committee ... but gradually the committee took charge, very effectively, very nicely and of course they began to rationalise, to simplify and work out a system. Well the committee was taking charge and I began to think, well, my job is virtually over. So I, I was going through another complete, sort of change of ... way of life and err again I think I was bewildered and lost and I didn't know where I was. I decided that I'd go off and err take a job ... and err, I was given a job with Barnes Wallis who was erm ... well, you, you know Barnes Wallis or know of him ... designer of the swing wing, he was working on the swing wing then. So I used to spend my weekends at Le Court and the week working for Barnes Wallis, I, I really I was torn in two, half my heart was in Le Court and half  was trying to come to grips with a job with which I was really unfamiliar. Anyhow, this took me down to Cornwall to err a very very bleak part of Cornwall but a beautiful part of Cornwall ... Predannack ... near ... the Lizard.

5:44 We had this remote airfield we were doing this highly secret flying tests. It was an RAF err station ... been built for the war and then left. And here was the station headquarters, S.H.Q, as we knew it ... at the hub of the whole station, abandoned. People had broken in, cows had broken in, the winds had broken in, the winds are very high at Predannack, they absolutely tear across that moor ... and it was really waiting to be used, one felt that. Le Court was full but it was running ... and then we got a, a different application. This was from a ... young man, a boy ... who had err, in effect epilepsy. He was a tough, he was, a tough man, he was a frogman ... and err, had no family and he said "Whenever I get into a boarding house, when they find out what's the matter with me they turn me out." Le Court wouldn't take him they said "We can't have an epileptic here, amongst the ... residents, it'll be dangerous." I didn't think I could turn him away, I didn't feel like turning him away, so I invited him down to Predannack where I was living in a little cottage, very small cottage, just so that I could see him. When he got there, I realised that he wanted something to do. And on this aerodrome in Predannack was, was the old station quarters ... and I thought, well, I'll get hold of that. And so Michael began to work there and then I began to help him in the evenings ... and err the next thing was that err ... we decided we'd, we'd make a start in this old building, with a second home.

7:25 Of course, today it's unthinkable that you would put disabled people into  building like that, it really was, as you can see, an utter shambles. But the funny thing was, they loved it! 'Cause they'd all come from hopeless positions, they had nothing to look forward to, here there was at least a companionship. There was a sense of purpose, 'cause everybody felt, 'well, let me do something to help'. Then our first Christmas we had nothing proper to give ... the household of 10 that it was, a special dinner. Two days before Christmas a little boy walked up with a duck! And he'd won this in a raffle ... err and he decided, he was only 11, and he decided, instead of having it himself he'd give it to err St Teresa's, as we'd called the home. And that really made the Christmas dinner but in a double sense 'cause they knew it had come from this little boy.

8:20 Well this was really now, bringing me to the moment of truth. Le Court was full, St Teresa's was full, but not only that we were beginning to get err all sorts of different people, err, I don’t know how to describe them but ... I think p'raps social misfits. Very, very difficult to ... turn them down. And so I realised that I was going to have to make up my mind, either to carry on with Barnes Wallis and do this in my spare time. Or whether to take the plunge and ... give up Barnes Wallis and go back full time to the home. And I decided, if I, I think it was obvious ... that err my heart lay ... in the home more than in Barnes Wallis and the two didn't mix. So I took that decision and I, I regretfully left Barnes Wallis, now Sir Barnes Wallis ... and then I decided as I had time that I'd take the misfits, if that's the right, not quite the right word ... errm into a third home, another building on the err, err, errm, the, it’d been the work officers mess, ha, ha, it was almost a worse state than the err station headquarters. But I think that although I meant this well, it was a mistake. I think that, I was beginning to get a bit lost with these, I didn't really know how to look after them. I, I’d not been frightfully well and every now and then I used to go down with a fever and people used to ... make fun of me and think well, you don't seem to be [Unclear 9:58 to 9:58] well, you're making, you're making, what's, is something on your mind? And one day a, a priest said "You're coming over to Hale", there's err, a hospital there and x-ray, so I agreed to be x-rayed. Had my x-ray, the doctor came in and he said "You're going straight to bed, you’ve got TB, you had a large hole in one lung, you're not, not even going back to collect your things".  And the, the way he said it, there was nothing for it, so I err stayed in hospital. The one thing that was a mercy to me, was that the day before a voluntary help had come said "Would you like some help with some typing?" and all that day, right late till the night we done the letters and I'd finished all the letters and err ... so when the Doctor said "You'll stay" I felt that I could.

10:48 That definitely was the end of err, a period for me and although I didn't know it at the time, the beginning of quite a new one.

10:55 [No Speech] music to 11:01

11:01 **End of Transcription**