**Film Transcription**

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

**Film Title:** On Reflection – Leonard Cheshire in Conversation - Pause for Thought

**Duration:** 12 minutes

**Transcription Date:** 13 July 2016

**Archive Number:** N-608050

**Summary of Main Points**

00:17 – Leonard Cheshire recounts TB reactions and his convalescence at Midhurst

01:26 – Leonard Cheshire describes Le Court repair costs and the Carnegie fund

03:52 – Leonard Cheshire recalls “Lesson Learnt” at Midhurst

05:07 – Leonard Cheshire describes running costs and financing for the homes

06:48 – Leonard Cheshire describes how his situation is associated with providence

08:19 – Leonard Cheshire responds to question about opposition and his objectives

09:41 – Leonard Cheshire describes reactions to starting a new home in Cornwall

10:09 – Leonard Cheshire interprets a sense of ownership contributing to increased new homes

**Start of Transcription**

00:03 [no speech] music interlude to 00:16

00:25 **Leonard Cheshire:** When the doctor told me that I had TB and I was not going to leave the hospital even to collect my clothes and put me straight into bed… Of course a number of things started to happen rather quickly. The first naturally was that everybody came and said [smile laugh] how sorry they were… but in the same breath they said what are we gonna do? …because Saint Teresa’s was there and th the third home Holy Cross was there… who was gonna run it? …who was gonna find the money?

Within a fortnight they had moved me away from Hale right to the other end of the country to Midhurst in Sussex. So I was away from St Teresa’s… and it was quite clear to me that uh very soon I didn’t know how long I was gonna be there... It might be a year it might be 2 years I might even not get out at all [unclear]… they could tell me. So I had to readjust myself, and I had to rethink… and what was happening [chuckles] in the committee’s minds, I don’t know.

01:13 **Leonard Cheshire:** Now one thing that happened was, Le Court had already developed, the crack in its foundations… and the house really was falling down. In point of fact that the crack had occurred sometime previously... and by an *enormous* piece of good fortune, Carnegie Fund, were coming down, to have a look at us…

01:37 **Leonard Cheshire:** …because we’ve written to them and asked if they’d give us a van and we were short of transport.

01:42: [no speech] to 01:43

01:43 **Leonard Cheshire:** Of course when we discovered the crack and knew they were coming, we just didn’t know what to do. We wondered on earth what they’d think of us… but uh… their reaction was quite different from what we expected it. And very humane and understanding, they looked at this crack, and instead of giving us up as hopeless… uh, they offered to do something about it… and the upshot was… during the time that I was at Midhurst, that they agreed that they would give us a new building completely new building.

02:16 **Leonard Cheshire:** …but this was to lead to a very traumatic experience for me. When everything was settled and finished, and it was agreed the money was coming. The entire money to pay the full cost [unclear] the new building… Carnegie wrote and said this was subject to 1 condition… and that was that I was to sign uh… uh… a guarantee that I would have [unclear] renounce all control over Le Court I was to have to no personal say over Le Court… whatsoever. Well to me this was a a shock, I I was shocked, I was affronted… uuh and I sat up in bed and I wrote to the committee and I said… I was trying to say that freedom to work as we wanted was more important than money. I wrote this letter, I couldn’t get it right I I ha had to tear it up I started again. I wasn’t very well then… and the second one didn’t work and I I getting nervous I was getting… [unclear] ta post time was coming up, I found I couldn’t write it… so I couldn’t write it [unclear] I wanted so in the end I gave it up. I I just gave in, I said alright accept it, just one short sentence I wrote.

03:24 **Leonard Cheshire:** Now if I’d been fit and strong I know I would never have accepted that condition… in fact of course we’ve lost nothing. It was probably even a good thing that I didn’t have control over Le Court I [unclear] just one other person who could add his own voice. We lost nothing... we gained a the building. And what is more uh… I think that I learnt a crucial lesson, but a difficult lesson… cause when I was in Midhurst, I realized that either I was gonna have to… let the homes go, and see them collapse, or else I was gonna have to hand everything over to the committees. I could no longer run it cause I didn’t know how long I was going to be in bed. They didn’t know where they stood St Teresa’s how much authority they had.

04:11 **Leonard Cheshire:** So… you find that if it’s something the you started yourself… it’s very difficult to hand it over to another person, you think this is my baby… he doesn’t understand it, he doesn’t understand my child.

04:25 [no speech] to 04:27

004:27 **Leonard Cheshire:** But now I was forced one or the other, let it go… or hand it over. And I found out that, if you hand it over then you must let the other man do it, you you can’t breathe down his neck, and keep telling him not this way, that way. If you delegate you must delegate, if he does it wrong remove him, but when you delegate leave it.

04:50 **Leonard Cheshire:** It was a very hard lesson, and uh… I owe this to Midhurst, if it’d not been for Midhurst I would never have learnt… it and if I hadn’t learnt it by force, the homes would never spread.

05:02 [no speech] to 05:03

05:03 **Male Interviewer**: But what about money for thee the running costs that can’t have been easy?

05:07 [no speech] to 05:08

05:08 **Leonard Cheshire**: Well in a funny way it was easy. [briefly fiddles with ear] It was never… finance never seemed a great worry, although we didn’t have any… [unclear]

05:17 **Male Interviewer**: Sorry but… [unclear]

05:17 **Leonard Cheshire**: I mean uh… Arthur Dykes had… uh 26 shillings a week… uh Granny had nothing. The Hospital Board gave me 2 pounds a week for Alf.

05:31 **Leonard Cheshire**: We used to get our money from selling the flowers in the garden… uh my mother sent used to send over large carloads of flowers which I sold… I used to go around people’s dust bins and pick out [unclear] I was surprised how many things people throw away that you could use *brooms*… things like that that I salvaged. Then there came a moment which was quite different. One day uh a news chronicle reporter turned up… and he wrote an article. And uh it brought in an *enormous* response, I think we got 1400 pounds. And what was extraordinary was that uh, 2 people arrived almost simultaneously, 1 blind, and the other not and they said we we know you must have had lot of letters, we’ve come to see if we can help you answer them. It really was a tremendous, [unclear] a personal little act.

06:21 [no speech] to 06:23

06:23 **G.C**: There was another moment when uuhh… we had a brown paper parcel turn up and I I [unclear] just put it to one side this [unclear] so many letters. And when I ventured to open it, there was 400 pounds in notes… and just a tiny little uh anonymous, but a little written uh piece of paper that said, something I want to make up for, I’m sending you this money.

06:46 [no speech] to 06:47

06:47 **Leonard Cheshire**: You see the criteria was need. And I think that uh…, in a way that perhaps is difficult for me to… describe properly. I felt I hadn’t chosen this… [film transition back to Leonard Cheshire continue to narrate]. it was there in front of me. That uh I don’t want to sound irreverent in any way but… that I could say t well providence has put this in my hands, therefore as long as I do my best I can expect providence to help me... and I think there are moments in life where you know that you’ve chosen the course, and it’s your responsibility, in which case you have to take the can for it. There are other cases where you feel this not of my choosing… and in those circumstances, in your heart you feel it will come.

07:33 **Leonard Cheshire**: Another thing is that uh I question whether having enough money is is good for you… when you haven’t got money, you can only do what providence will let you do, you can just say well I’ll do this I’ll do the other. You have to do the best you can, you make do with whatever you’ve got. You can’t go out and purchase things. You say to yourself, well can I paint this myself, instead of putting it out to contract. You’re sort of paced… you you’re you’re made to give your utmost. And in a funny way, although it was always… it was a worry, you wondered what will happen next week. Have I taken on more than I can manage? Uh in a certain way it was a challenge and it was… you felt secure.

08:17 **Male interviewer**: But I would have thought some people would find your approach a bit chancier a bit amateurish surely you must have met with opposition.

08:24 **Leonard Cheshire**: There was opposition, and it worried me because I wondered in my own heart whether I was doing the right thing. People would say well what’s the object to doing this your not a nurse, there’s a National Health Service? I couldn’t answer that except to say but here are people that nobody can find a place for… so that I thought well [unclear] until they do find a place for them I must carry on.

08:46 **Male Interviewer**: All the same it could be argued that there were more urgent priorities.

08:50 **Leonard Cheshire:** Yes you see the main argument was, alright well if you’re going to do something, do it for those who can recover. Do it for thee for the children, for the young, send them back into the world. Why take those whose lives have finished anyway? …Well I could only answer that by saying, I can’t judge the priority, I mean you can put all sorts of priorities before a man, who can judge which is the greater? All I could see was that here was a category of person for whom nothing apparently was being done. If the others were in greater need I accept that but I didn’t feel that was my job. So I felt a particular affinity with those that I could see were not going to be reintegrated into normal life… and I just felt in my heart, that this was my work, and perhaps obstinately I stuck to this.

09:41 **Male Interviewer:** At that stage you decided to, apparently completely on your own to go off to Cornwall to to start a new home… after all Le Court was uhm still very insecure wasn’t it? What what was their reaction at that time?

09:54 **Leonard Cheshire:** Well they were violent uh. There was a great disillusion a great disappointment they said but look… we‘re we’re [unclear] we can hardly manage, now you’re going to start another home, well all our support will disappear. I hadn’t thought of that to be honest, I had merely thought of, of uuhh Michael and Hilda. The truth was that nobody in Cornwall was gonna give money to Le Court… Cornwall were not in the least interested in Hampshire, but there were interested in Cornwall. It meant everything to them. And I think this set the uuhh the style of everything that it was local. That those that lived around Le Court would say well this is, our home… And they’d they’d really give and work for it. Same with Cornwall, I mean Cornwall is a county that really feels we are Cornish. And uh again there was a wonderful team spirit down there, that again made up for all our deficiencies, *mine especially*. And, it was the same when we were invited to go to India… there was there was *shock!* …but it never took anything away [unclear] it added. And no new home will ever take away from the existing home this is right on top of it, it adds to it.

11:08 **Male Interviewer**: So one home leads to another?

11:10 **Leonard Cheshire:** Yes and uh uh I hate using a commercial uh uh similie but success breeds success. And if somebody goes to a home in Cornwall and sees a good home, as we’ve learnt so often, they get a better impression of the foundation they may go away and start their own home, this is precisely what happened.

11:29 **Male Interviewer**:And I suppose do it in their own way.

11:32 **Leonard Cheshire:** Yes you see this is what’s so nice everybody started completely differently they did in those first few homes, take St Cecilia’s and St Bridgette’s, started when I was in Midhurst… I had very little part in that except I wrote letters and telephone calls, and when I had uh a couple of days off I went to, to Bromley and St Cecilia’s, they did it in their own way. Again I was a bit… startled because it was different you see it was not my way I thought no it’s not right. But they were completely right it was their own. And this feeling it’s, we have done this, not you.. we’ve done this. They’ll put much more of their heart into it.

12:06 [no speech] music interlude to 12:14

**End of Transcription**