**Oral History Transcription**

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

**Participants:**

Jill Roberts, Archivist

Trevor Protheroe, former employee at Le Court

**Duration:** 44 minutes 56 seconds

**Date of Original Recording:** 10th September 1996

**Transcription Date:** 26th August 2016

**Archive Number:** AVS/319

**Summary of Main Points:**

00.52 – Trevor talks about his first contact with Leonard Cheshire

03.02 – Trevor talks about the experience of first arriving at Le Court

05.21 – Trevor talks about his role at Le Court

06.40 – Trevor talks about his wife’s role at Le Court

07.44 – Trevor talks about former resident Frank Spath

09.21 – Trevor talks about Ron Travers volunteering at Le Court

10.24 – Trevor talks about Richard Dimbleby visiting Le Court

11.48 – Trevor talks about Professor Cheshire

18.21 – Trevor talks about Professor Cheshire’s thoughts about the work of Leonard Cheshire

18.60 – Trevor talks about Leonard Cheshire’s time in the RAF

23.12 – Trevor talks about his impressions of Leonard Cheshire

24.20 – Trevor talks about a trip with Leonard Cheshire in an airplane

35.33 – Trevor talks about Leonard Cheshire’s skill as a public speaker

38.54 – Trevor talks about a fire at Laundry Cottage

**Start of Transcription**

00.00 [No speech] to 00.09

00.09 **Female narrator:** This is an oralhistory tape made with Trevor Protheroe, on the 10th September 1996. He's in conversationwith the Foundation archivist, Jill Roberts.

00.22 [No speech] to 00.27

00.28 **Jill Roberts**: Trevor, you...were... gardener? handy man? don't quite know really what, what to call it, but you, you worked here at at Le Court, the first Cheshire home erm, in the very early days. I think you came here about 1955?

00.44 **Trevor Protheroe:** That's right.

00.45 **Jill Roberts:** Erm tell me something about... your first contact with Leonard Cheshire and his foundation. What made you want to come down here?

00.52 **Trevor Protheroe**: The first contact I had was reading a magazine in err hairdressers in... Manchester, was having my hair cut [laughs] and err I was so impressed by it I I wrote away to see if they wanted anybody down at Staunton Harold.

1.06 **Jill Roberts**: What, what was the article about?

1.08 **Trevor Protheroe:** It was about the, mainly about the running of Le Court itself and the old days, the starting of it -

1.14  **Jill Roberts:** Hmmm hmmm

1.14 **Trevor Protheroe:** And all the...erm, first people were working practically for nothing, or as voluntary workers and it seemed to be doing such a good job I was really interested in... what it was all about and wrote to find out about it.

1.28 **Jill Roberts:** Hmm hmm.... so you wrote to Staunton?

1.31 **Trevor Protheroe:** I wrote to Staunton, and then... Group Captain passed my letter on to his father down here, to Professor Cheshire down at...down at Laundry Cottage, he was chairman of the management committee down at Le Court because they wanted a maintenance man who could drive, and do some gardening, especially in the kitchen garden...and there was also a need for a relief cook, so we both could get involved in it, my wife was interested... she was quite keen, and having lived in the country we was very keen to get out of Manchester was another reason beside behind it.

2.09**Jill Roberts:**So you came to Le Court, for an interview...or?

2.11 **Trevor Protheroe:** Came down for an interview yes. In April... stayed overnight down at the local pub [laughs] ... and, erm... they gave us all the details, showed us the old, the old bungalow at the back... erm... it wasn't very interesting [laughs], apart from the adder [laughs] we saw on the step

2.34 **Jill Roberts:** An adder?

2.35 **Trevor Protheroe:** An adder was on the step, giving us a welcome [laughs]

2.38 **Jill Roberts:** It didn't put you off then?

2.39 **Trevor Protheroe:** Didn't put us off, no. It was strange, I mean everything looked so derelict up at the bungalow, It's a wonder we weren't put off but anyway, we decided, we went back afterwards and we thought it all over we still decided to come and have a go... and we were very very glad we did.

2.56 **Jill Roberts:** When, when did you come here for, to to actually start the job? Was that straight away?

2.60 **Trevor Protheroe:** In May

3.00 **Jill Roberts:** In May? So straight away? Yes.

3.02 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yeah. Pretty well, about a month in between coming down. Then... when we were coming, erm, most of the staff was on the [unclear] being changed over, they were...  err, actually... given notice to leave [laughs]...

3.18 **Jill Roberts:** Why were the... staff on notice to leave?

3.21 **Trevor Protheroe:** Well I think that erm, the warden was quite, well, very young man... and they were having some sort of riotous parties with these voluntary students from Oxford and Cambridge were coming down here, I don't know they got a bit of out of hand, or perhaps the Professor was a little bit old fashioned and perhaps he thought, you know, the those things wasn't quite done those days, I mean today nobody'd take the slightest notice would they?

3.45 **Jill Roberts:** Mmmm.... So the the Professor was Professor Cheshire, err -

3.48 **Trevor Protheroe:** That's G.C.'s father, yes. I understand

3.50 **Jill Roberts:** What, where was the G.C., at this time then? He wasn't here, obviously

3.53 **Trevor Protheroe:** No, he wasn't here. I don't know where he was, quite. Err... before he went to India anyway,

3.59 **Jill Roberts:** Mmm mmm. Perhaps  he was at Ampthill, or one of the other new homes -

4.01 **Trevor Protheroe:** He could have been at any one of the other homes round about.

4.04 **Jill Roberts:** So it was all change, when you arrived?

4.06 **Trevor Protheroe:** All change, the whole lot changed, even the... and the worst part was that the maintenance officer or maintenance chap was leaving, Frank Reid, and err, he was supposed to show me everything and  didn't show me anything, so... it was pretty difficult getting things going at first, but we overcome that, fairly easily, erm boilers were the biggest trouble, I had no knowledge of boilers at all, never worked in a... looking after boilers, so I, I got the err, the warden in, erm Commander Stephenson, and we talked to him and we got him to get me a place up at Combustions Limited at Surbiton and done a course up there with them then I came back, and after that I could sort of service the boilers myself which was a great help.

04.54 **Jill Roberts:** Right...the, can I, I err, I'm right in thinking that erm Le Court was quite new then? That they hadn't...-

05.01**Trevor Protheroe:** That's right -

05.01 **Jill Roberts:** They moved in in 1954 I think, to the new building?

05.03 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes, that's right.

05.04 **Jill Roberts:** The maintenance... must have been fairly, erm, smooth -

05.09 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes -

05.10 **Jill Roberts:** Of the building, I would have thought?

05.11 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes, the new building that that part was fairly smooth. The boilers were, well, fairly new, but the thing was they went wrong, even then, those days no-one knew what to do with them -

05.20 **Jill Roberts:** Right.

05.21**Trevor Protheroe:** 'Cause previously to that they'd had about 11 days, in wintertime, without any heating or anything because the engineer - one engineer - was down in Cornwall, another up in Manchester, another down in Wales, they had to wait 11 days before they [coughs] before they came back.... so we overcame that by going up to Surbiton and they were very good up there they gave me loads of spare parts and all sorts I come back with, which saved quite a bit of money for the home.

05.46 **Jill Roberts:** Mmm hmmm... What other jobs did you do?

05.50**Trevor Protheroe:** Oh gardening. He had a kitchen garden, I used to get stuck into the kitchen garden, they had no tractors or anything to dig it they did it by hand most of the time...planted beans and peas, normal, anything that'd go in the kitchen. The usual vegetables... No time to do anything fancy. Cut the grass, ah... about 9 acres altogether...

6.11 **Jill Roberts:** Tremendous amount of land, yes.

6.13 **Trevor Protheroe:** Cut the grass, and erm... do the driving and as well in between times, going down to the church, take, residents used to go down to church about twice every, twice a Sunday or every morning, Sunday morning anyway. Take 'em down there twice on a Sunday, really working 7 days a week to keep on top of the grass cutting in the summertime, it was very very busy but erm... I don't know, we really enjoyed it, so that was the main thing.

6.39 **Jill Roberts:**And your wife was cook?

6.40 **Trevor Protheroe:** She was doing anything yeah. She was in the kitchen for a... about 2 years when we first came, then they asked if she'd go on to erm, care work. There she was doing night, err, looking after them at nights as well for a long while... Erm... she'd fit in anywhere, do anything - cleaning, or no matter what it was she was quite willing to have a go [coughs]... One time she was doing care work, doing the night staff work on her own, err where they only used to have 1 care, err, night staff, on at that time, looking after 39 residents then, course now they are 50.

7.16 **Jill Roberts:** Still, even 39 is big -

7.17 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes, yeah -

7.17 **Jill Roberts:** Big number -

7.19 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes, yeah. The difference then was there were sort of 4 in a room, or 2 in a room, and... nothing less than 2 in a room, there was usually 4 in a room so it wasn't quite so, you know, quite such a stressful job getting round to, to see to them all and they... things used to, seemed to work out alright.

7.40**Jill Roberts:** Do you remember the residents, particularly in the early days? Frank Spaff?

7.44 **Trevor Protheroe:** Oh yes, I remember Frank. Frank was a great man, with, with his err... If we went to London or anywhere, Frank was the man to go with you. Frank would get up the front and Frank had his maps in front of him, and Frank would guide you anywhere in London or anywhere for that matter, he's, you you never met Frank, course he would have died before you -

8.02 **Jill Roberts:** No, no -

8.03 **Trevor Protheroe:** Incredible, he used to have his lone chair, sit back here, you couldn't, whatever you could see. And he'd have his map out there and his... he had, erm, very bad Rheumatoid Arthritis, his fingers were all twisted up, but even so he he could hold his pen and he, he'd sing out you know, 'left here!' or 'in the middle lane' [laughs]. Going to London for me being stranger to, well, at that time I'd say London was quite a strange place for me, it was get Frank up the front you'd go anywhere... We'd do a lot of trips up to Festival Hall, and erm... to, different places in London... Albert Hall, up to the, err... Earl's Court and places like that. The trips were all quite well catered for in that particular, particular line, they were well looked after, the residents.

8.53 **Jill Roberts:** Did they, did they used to organise these themselves?

8.55 **Trevor Protheroe:** They used to organise themselves, yeah, in the early days we used to, we used to have a collection amongst ourselves to pay for the petrol because [laughs] things was pretty tight, you know, things was tight like everywhere else.

9.06 **Jill Roberts:** Yeah, yeah...

9.07**Trevor Protheroe:** But now they've got, what, 3 traffics on the big bus? Everything's organised, they can get up to, it's wonderful really how things have developed over the years.

9.17 **Jill Roberts:** Do you remember the volunteers who used to come? Do you remember -

9.20 **Trevor Protheroe:** Oh yeah -

9.21 **Jill Roberts:** Ron Travers?

9.21 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes, Ron. I remember Ron when he was a boy! [laughs]

9.26 **Jill Roberts:** Straight from the BBC?

9.28 **Trevor Protheroe:** Well before the BBC. Yeah he came here as a boy to... err help out.

9.32**Jill Roberts:**I didn't know that!

9.33**Trevor Protheroe:** Yes. He was here before, before the BBC.

9.37**Jill Roberts:** Oh no I thought his first contact was sort of -

9.39 **Trevor Protheroe:** No no

9.40 **Jill Roberts:** In the '60s.

9.40 **Trevor Protheroe:** No no, he was working at the [unclear]. He come here as a voluntary worker at Le Court.

9.43 **Jill Roberts:** Mmmmm?

9.44 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yeah. Remember Ron when he first came. Remember him taking his first driving lessons!

9.48 **Jill Roberts:** How old was he when he first came?

9.50 **Trevor Protheroe:** Oh Lordy, quite young then, I couldn't quite remember. He was only a youngster here.

9.55 **Jill Roberts:** Hmmm... And he, of course, went on to become international director of...

10.00 **Trevor Protheroe:** Of, of overseas? Yes.

10.01 **Jill Roberts:** Yes.

10.02 **Trevor Protheroe:** Marvellous, yeah.

10.05 **Jill Roberts:** And G.C.'s right hand man.

10.06 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes, that's right. Old Ron, I always have a long chat with Ron when we meet up... [laughs].

10.12**Jill Roberts:** Were there many volunteers?

10.16 **Trevor Protheroe:** Mrs, Mrs Dimbleby. Richard Dimbleby knew Ron through, through, erm... what's her name?

10.23 **Jill Roberts:** Dilys?

10.24 **Trevor Protheroe:** Dilys yeah. Dilys was working here for years... Erm... That's how Ron and her met I suppose, in a round about way, 'cause they used to go on holiday with... we used to take the, erm, residents up to Caister and... down to Weymouth at first, with Peter Wade in the early days. He used to sort of organise... erm, holidays for young disabled. One of the first ones went down to Poole. Then we started going up to Gawston, then up to... erm, Caister. Dilys and Ron, they used to go up as voluntary workers, Richard Dimbleby was alive then, he used to come up in his Rolls Royce [laughs]. He used to come up here quite often and David and Jonathan, they used to put an appearance up here. I remember them quite well [laughs]. They got on well didn't they? [laughs]

11.15 **Jill Roberts:** That's going back to... '60's, I suppose?

11.17 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes, yeah yeah. They've sort of moved on in life since them days.

11.22 **Jill Roberts:** Well, they're... way well known now aren't they?

11.24 **Trevor Protheroe:** Oh Lord yes… They’ve done very well, they’re very… good… erm, well, like the father weren’t they? He was a great – very nice man

11.34 **Jill Roberts:** Um-hum, great journalist -

11.34 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes, great journalist, great speaker.

11.38 **Jill Roberts:** So, just going back a bit. Professor Cheshire. You were, you mentioned him briefly as being here in charge to a certain extent when you started –

11.46 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yeah

11.47 **Jill Roberts:** Did you have much contact with him?

11.48 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes, every week, every… err… I, I err, I got asked to go over there after about, we’d been there about 12 month and the gardener – they had a gardener –

12.01 **Jill Roberts:** Over where? Over where?

12.01 **Trevor Protheroe:** Over at Laundry Cottage, where G.C. owned a load of cottages just up the drive.

12.05 **Jill Roberts**: A-ha, right.

12.06 **Trevor Protheroe:** And the Group, err, Professor Cheshire moved down there in 1944 I think, or ’43. Err G.C., was the old building was going and he was, things was a bit…well, bit mixed up I think with the, with the erm… TB patients, and the odd people kept coming in and –

12.27 **Jill Roberts:** This must have been late ‘40s, 1948?

12.28 **Trevor Protheroe**: Yeah [coughs]. Professor got really worried about what was going on, so he decided – ‘cause he had had his place at Greystones nearer to other side of Oxford – I went up there a few times, I drove him up to Oxford a few times and he we had always had to go by Greystones to have a look at it –

12.46 **Jill Roberts:** Greywalls?

12.48 **Trevor Protheroe:** Greywalls, rather. Not Greystones. Greywalls. ‘Cause they he practically built it, G.C. and the –

12.53 **Jill Roberts:** He did.

12.54 **Trevor Protheroe:** Himself and the other, the other brother. They built themselves pretty well, and they always went round that way. No I got in, asked if I’d go down there sort of weekends and do a bit of gardening, keep the place tidy. Wash the cars, and anything to, you know, they wanted doing. Which I did, then it – I was only supposed to go down until they found themselves a gardener and I ended was there for about 23 years until he died [laughs].

13.19 **Jill Roberts:** Very temporary then.

13.20 **Trevor Protheroe**: Very temporary [laughs]. I couldn’t have been too bad, else would’ve got rid of me before then. G.C.’s mother was alive then – Primmy, Primrose. She was a lovely lady. She was, I forget how old she was when I was there. I remember when she died, quite suddenly one.... sort of, 'bout... daffodil time.

13.45 **Jill Roberts:** Um hum, was it about 1960 I think? Or, possibly -

13.46 **Trevor Protheroe:** Something about it.. I'm not quite, I don't quite remember the date she died. Then Professor was on his own for a couple of years, and erm, very lonely for a long spell... until err he met Dame Mary Lloyd... who lived in Hailing Island and next door neighbour with chairman of the committee up here at times, so Christopher like, he introduced her to Le Court and that's how she met err professor. I remember quite well the old professor used to, nip off sometimes in the evening and wouldn't say where he was off to [laughs]. Usually he'd tell me where he was going but he used to nip off and say he was going off for a few hours and erm eventually it came out that he was going down to see Dame Mary. And in, well, less than about 2 and half years I suppose they decided they would get married. She ... she lived with him for about 9 years she had a fall going down the drive one winter time walking down from Le Court from one of the committee meetings, she were going down the old drive, and there was ice in the road, she slipped up and she fell bang on her back and the specialist said that that started off erm rheumatoid arthritis. She suffered very much, she was not not first few years, she didn't notice it but then it gradually took over, in the end she could hardly walk at all. But they were very very happy together. They had long spells where the professor going up to London to Nuffield and down to Bath, they used to go every weekend, I used to drive them pretty well everywhere - used to drive himself as well but, weekends and other I used to drive him down to Bath and different various places.

15.28 **Jill Roberts:**  What was he like?

15.29 **Trevor Protheroe:** Oh he was a great man -

15.30 **Jill Roberts:** Was he?

15.30 **Trevor Protheroe:** Oh wonderful! Real gentleman. No airs, no graces, but erm... we used to have long without, 'specially after Dame Mary died, I used to go work, I supposed to be over there working and many a time I used to spend hours in just talking to him... 'cause he was very lonely. But erm... one thing I always remember, no matter what he told you - I mean over the years we talked about dozens of things and places he'd been - he never seemed to repeat himself. In that old people [laughs], probably myself I expect one day, they repeat themselves don't they? it's a sort of thing with old people, but the professor you'd never never hardly ever, I don't ever remember him, and I'm sort of amazed by this, he'd marvellous memory 'cause he was 93 when he died. But when I was, no he was well into his 80s and that when I was - well the whole time I was there, 23 years - so you're going back - 70-odd when I went there first. Hmmm. But he never repeated himself you know, he's telling the places he'd been to and when they went and holidaying together himself and Primmy or himself and Dame Mary but he'd never sort of tell you the same story over, marvellous gift.

16.35 **Jill Roberts:** What did he used to talk about? Holidays, and..?

16.37 **Trevor Protheroe:** All kinds of thing, and his life 'cause he was Bursar at Oxford, next to the college at Oxford, and then he was working in, up at the Royal Courts in London and many a time they used to send special mess - big courts, big court cases going on in London they'd send a special messenger down here with loads and loads of papers -

16.58 **Jill Roberts:** All tied up with ribbon?

16.59 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yeah [laughter] that sounds right. He'd read 'em all through, and then give his verdict you know, he was more or less... giving the judge or giving whoever the, or the solicitors, or whatever they were were sending, sending them down. QC's they were then anyway. All big cases of course. He would give his verdict and that went back to London and they said took his advice from there 'cause he was a big powerful Lord, Dunning as well. Lord Dunning used to come down here as well one time.

17.26 **Jill Roberts:** They were both one of the first trustees weren't they?

17.30 **Trevor Protheroe:** Trustees. That's right, yes yes. 'Cause you see he got worried about what was going on with these parties and that's when he decided to move down here to keep an eye on things [laughs]. He always said G.C. was no, he said you know he's for all that's done and for being a marvellous man in the R.A.F. he said but he's no err - what did he, what was the words he used? - he was no accountant [laughs].

17.54 **Jill Roberts:** I don't think G.C. would suggest he was an accountant! [laughter]

17.56 **Trevor Protheroe:** No no, it's made me laugh he said, he his idea of accounting was [laughs] just just get it and don't worry about paying for it, just get it and carry on like. The professor was highly amused with that.

18.14 **Jill Roberts:** Did he say anything else about his son? G.C. that is.... What did he think about the work he was doing?

18.21 **Trevor Protheroe:** Oh, yes he thought that was wonderful. He thought, you know, he was right into it himself 'cause he did a lot of work on the committee, got lots of things improved and moving under his own, with his own efforts. But he he was, you know, he really thought I mean he - well he was a marvellous man there's no 2 ways about it - but err he really err thought the world of G.C. they got on very well, he used to always come down and get his father's advice or... they used to spend hours talking together in the study.

18.52 **Jill Roberts:** So I think his parents were quite worried about G.C. weren't they when he first left the R.A.F.?

18.56 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes -

18.57 **Jill Roberts:** He didn't quite know what to do with his life.

18.60 **Trevor Protheroe:** He certainly didn't [laughs]. I remember, I remember his Dad and his Mum went up Greywalls, G.C. was in the R.A.F., and he appeared in a great big 4 seater open, open tour car one day and he, when the war was on or just some some period during then he said 'oh, come on Dad we'll go for a ride.' Dad, Father said 'what do you mean go for a ride? there's petrol rationing we got no petrol, I've got no petrol to go riding about.' He said 'no I'm loose,' he said, 'the staff car.'  'We can't go riding around-' 'oh yes, we can,' he said, 'jump in!' So they both sat there Mum and Dad, and the erm American Airforce were stationed at at Abingdon, there's a big R.A.F. place at Abingdon now isn't there I think?

19.53 **Jill Roberts:** Yes, I think there is, yeah.

19.54 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yeah, and err the R.A.F., the American air force was there, just their part of it. G.C. drives up to err to the petrol pumps, drives in to the station for the R.A.F. - not the R.A.F. the United States Air Force station - drives in and gets saluted on the way in, drives up to the petrol pumps - they had a place for filling up the cars, all the staff cars or whatever inside - drives up and a young man appears and spoke to him, he says 'just fill her up, we'll you know, just fill her up whatevers, what do you call it? Corporal or whatever's on duty, this chap, so fills it up and he's just signs a chit and they drives off! [laughs] His father was terrified, he thought they were gonna get locked up straight you know, never heard no more about it [laughter] But in and out of the American airforce place just like that! Another time he said he had a after the war, he had a Mosquito. I don't know if he owned it, or if he'd borrowed it or whatever. Anyway he appeared one day and he said 'Come on Dad, we'll go take it for a fly around,' he said. This was 'cause they were stationed at Abingdon - the airfield was theirs - so he said to dad, 'Come on Dad, we go for a flight, we go for a little fly around,' but Dad - after some thought about it - he decided to go with him, he said they ended up in France! [laughter] No papers, no clearance papers, no nothing, over the Channel down in France! [laughs] Then they got, they got erm, they got told off for landing there, he thought he was going to be locked up with the, in you know with the police over there, anyway, when they found out who they were they had a good lecture then they sent them back to England and when they come back here they got another good lecture [laughs], they got no landing, no landing papers no whatsoever. That was G.C.!

21.50 **Jill Roberts:** Not a lover of authority?

21.51 **Trevor Protheroe:** Not a bit, no. G.C. told me as well, he had a, he had a little 2 seater sports car, that's when he was a student at Oxford. Of course he was one of the lucky ones to get a car I suppose because Dad was fairly well off, and erm himself and 2 others, there's a big roundabout near Oxford somewhere and they decided to have a bet about who could go round the most times without being stopped round and round this roundabout like fools! [laughs] All for about a pound, a pint of beer or something like that, some stupid dare. [laughs]

22.28 **Jill Roberts:** What about erm Primrose Cheshire? G.C.'s mother. Did you meet her?

22.32 **Trevor Protheroe:** Lovely person yeah. Yes yes. She was, she was well into her 70s when I first went over but err yeah she was very very sweet natured person... thought the world of G.C.

22.46 **Jill Roberts:** Yes I think G.C. had a a close relationship with his parents, and -

22.52 **Trevor Protheroe:** With both parents.

22.53 **Jill Roberts:** And his step-mother as well I think -

22.54 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes, yep.

22.57 **Jill Roberts:** Coming coming to G.C. himself, you must have seen a lot of him over the years? I know that there's correspondence in the archive between you and him, about maintenance matters, tennis court and things like that. What what was your impression of him? As a person?

23.12 **Trevor Protheroe:** Oh, wonderful! Full of humour. No idea when he was, when he was serious or when he was pulling your leg... [laughs] Like the time he came down and asked me, asked me while I was cleaning Professor's shoes one Saturday afternoon, and he came along and he said 'Would you mind cleaning a few pairs for me?' I said 'Certainly.' [laughs] 'Certainly, Sir,' I said. I used to 'Sir' him and he always told me not call him Sir just G.C. Then towards the latter end I just called him 'Leonard' every time I saw him and it was a privilege. And erm I said 'Certainly,' so without thinking I said 'how many pairs you got?' and he said 'oh about 32' [laughs]. So I, and I quite - he was so serious about it - I quite believed him! Took about half an hour afterwards and he come out and he said something about these shoes and started laughing and I knew he was pulling my leg! He was always pulling people's legs, always you know having jokes, at himself very often as well.

24.16 **Jill Roberts:** Was he, erm... what was he like to work for as an employer?

24.20 **Trevor Protheroe:** Oh, wonderful! Could be, could be quite strict if he wanted to be, which was a good thing. But I didn't have a, you know, didn't have much dealings with me cause he didn't actually deal with Le Court as such, you had the warden at Le Court and I worked under the warden. The only work that I done for him was when his, working for his dad and err... I used to drive him round at one one stage when he came down. He hadn't got a chauffer then so I used to do quite a lot of driving for him at weekends or even Le Court used to give me time off to take him round various places. We once, once went down to err Wiltshire, down to Lynham where he was guest of honour down there. And err... I remember him sitting in the back of the car with his feet up, yeah I forget now one of the big Austin cars, I was driving away and could hear him nattering away and I said 'Pardon?' 'Oh,' he says, 'I'm dictating some letters,' cause he'd got a Dictaphone, which I didn't realise what it was, whether he was sitting in the back and I should think he must have dictated about 20 or 30 letters, before we got anywhere near Wiltshire! And they were going on, I mean I couldn't help but hear what he was speaking and that, I mean they were going to India and Canada, the High Commissioner this and the High Commission [laughs] of of of India and all these different places, I was amazed. And he told me that he sends that back to London and then they typed it all out and sent it off for him. We had a wonderful day down at Lynham. We had lunch with the officer's wives, and erm... he was guest of honour because the officer's wives at Lynham had collected some money to equip a room at at Greathouse, you know, which err, down there, near Lynham... with erm all hi-fi equipment - about 3 or 400 pounds worth. And the idea was, we had a, G.C. was guest of honour for the day up at Lynham and then we were going down to Greathouse and he was going to... officially open the room for them. So we had lunch up at Lynham and then we went, ooh we went all over the, all over the station, and then they showed us how quickly they could load up a a Hercules, one of these great big Hercules transports, to show him how quickly they could load it up for these , for the rollers, they got this staging with all rollers on they can fold in great great big crates about 2 ton or more in weight, just roll 'em in as easy as wink. Then the main thing was there to set aside, he had a Hercules with the engine running, quite quite near where we were, I said to him previously, I said 'I don't suppose you'll be going up?' He said, 'Oh no they won't lay on anything like that on.' So he said, 'Why? and I said, 'Well, if you're going up is there any chance come up with you?' I was only joking. Anyway, he spoke to the... to the C-Commander guy - I forget his name now - but he's a famous international referee as well, the Commander of the station, and he came over and said 'Well if you go up at your own risk,' he said. Well I said 'All you lot are going up so..' [laughs] I wasn't going to say no! So we went up in the Hercules. The idea was to fly over Lynham, over Greathouse rather, fly around and fly low over Greathouse and take some pictures from the air of of the home. But the cloud ceiling was too low, so we couldn't get the pictures but we went round for about 20 minutes I suppose. These 2 young lads, 2 young pilots, they must have only looked about 18 or 20, 18-19 at the at the least I should think. And err... we were up on the flight deck, I was stood one side and the G.C. stood the other side and the Commander was standing just behind me and he said, 'Right, we'll do a short take off.' We could see the airfield there, they err when they take off it's about 3 miles long you know, the runway rather, and I thought 'Oh, it must go waay down there before we get off the ground, this massive great thing.' You only had about 500 yards and they pulled the stick back and the Commander said 'Hang on because you're going up fairly steep here,' [laughs] and it goes up straight up in the air [laughs]. I thought it was great, the G.C. was, was interesting you know because we had all of these earphones and intercom, only you could hear him speaking to the lads and they were asking him, he was telling them when he used to fly Lancasters, and they said 'How do you fancy flying this?' And he says 'No thanks,' he said, ''cause it's all computerised,' and he said 'I wouldn't have a clue,' he said. He said -

28.51 **Jill Roberts:** When when was this? What year was this?

28.52 **Trevor Protheroe:** Ooh...

28.54 **Jill Roberts:** 70's? Or -

28.55 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yeah, about ‘68, ‘70, somewhere there.

28.59 **Jill Roberts**: So it was computerised even by that point?

29.00 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes yeah, they were. They had their little like television set near the front and they could see everything in this. But they looked like 2 farm 2 farm lads with just green overalls on... [laughs] They took it up off the ground and they brought it down and when we up to the clouds you can hear the ground control saying exactly, telling them exactly where we coming in to land they said you're so many - you know - yards, whatever it was they were speaking in, and you'll be on the end of the runway when we come through the clouds spot on the end of the runway and they brought it down like it was an Austin 7 or something. I couldn't believe it. Had a wonderful day with him. No, he was great, we had a great day out. Then we went down to Lynham and he opened this room for the, for the ladies down there. Of course, everybody wherever he went everybody was, you know, they were all, everybody wanted to see him that was the main thing.

29.50 **Jill Roberts:** It must have been very tiring.

29.51 **Trevor Protheroe:** Oh, terribly tiring. I remember one time he was down here we'd to take him he had lots of meetings down in Bournemouth and Southampton and, one meeting after another and he had to get up and, you know, make speeches at all these meetings, must have been terribly tiring. I used to just sit out in the car and play the radio 'til he come out [laughs].

30.10 **Jill Roberts:** Did you ever see him... did you ever see a bad side of him? A down side of him? So many people say… erm what a wonderful man he was, and of course he must have been - I never met him myself - but... everybody has off days..

30.22 **Trevor Protheroe:** Oh yeah, he had off days. Yeah, I remember him once he, he said... I went down there and err... I probably wasn't in very good, didn't look in very good form, because I used to go over err he was always in the study always either reading his Bible in the morning as he always was wont to do... always read a chapter or 2 out of the Bible and then he used to sit there in sort of contemplation. I used to take the papers over in the morning when he was in residence up here 'cause he used to come and stay for weeks at a time very often.

30.52 **Jill Roberts:** At Laundry Cottage?

30.52 **Trevor Protheroe:** At Laundry Cottage for a rest, have a break, get away from everywhere, was his hideaway. That's the term he used 'his little hideaway.' This particular morning [coughs] he looked a little bit... annoyed, and erm he said "Erm

31.06 tape stopped to 34.11

34.11 **Jill Roberts:** [Stealing] his firewood, did you say?

34.12 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes! Somebody had been telling porkies I think, for some reason but why he believed it I don't know. "Ah," he said, "yes," he said, "Anthony's been stealing my firewood." Well the funny part was... Anthony was living in a flat down at Greatham and he'd only got gas central heating so he'd no need for firewood [laughs]. So I waited and listened to what he had to say and I said "'Scuse me Sir," I said, "but..." I said "I think somebody's been telling you porkies," I said "because Antony's got gas central heating" I said, "and he wouldn't want to steal you wood anyway," I said. "For that matter, I've got tons of wood across, across the other side of the road from my place which I bought off Chippy Carpenter." So he he didn't, he took a long time to get over it. He didn't actually believe me. Then he he did, a couple of weeks after he did apologise and said he was mistaken. I said "would you like to come down and see Antony's flat?" I said, "it's only down in Greatham, you'll see," I said "he hasn't even got a fireplace." [laughs] I don't know he really got his back up that particular morning. It's about the only time I think... I've seen him get annoyed with things... over at Le Court something'd gone wrong or something, he could get a bit cross at times then which was unnatural, but I've never seen him really lose his temper and let fly at anybody.

35.20 **Jill Roberts:** Okay -

35.20 **Trevor Protheroe:** No.

35.21 **Jill Roberts:** Right -

35.22 **Trevor Protheroe:** He was wonderfully sort of self-controlled... [coughs]... I remember once we had a memorial service up in London for one of the staff - I can't remember her name - that's going back in the early days. Young lady died of cancer quite quite young. And we went to -

35.37 **Jill Roberts:** Carmel, no?

35.38 **Trevor Protheroe:** No, not Carmel.

35.40 **Jill Robets**: Nor Margo?

35.41 **Trevor Protheroe:** No not Margo, no this was a young girl. Worked for, worked with Market Mews -

35.45 **Jill Roberts:** I know, I know no, I can't think, yes -

35.47 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes. And we went to... Westminster Cathedral and G.C., got up in the pulpit... and you would have thought he would, you know, he was a regular preacher.

35.58 **Jill Roberts:** Turner! Maggie Turner.

36.00 **Trevor Protheroe:** Turner was it? Yes. Maggie. Probably was, I couldn't remember her name.

36.03 **Jill Roberts:** I think that was it.

36.04 **Trevor Protheroe:** But I... he gave us the most wonderful... 3/4 of an hour I should think, he stood up there never looked at no notes, no nothing, and he just talked and he he explained her, you know, her background and what a wonderful person and... but they way he spoke - and he's a marvellous speaker - he's such such a character such a way over putting things over and his voice was so good at speaking, he was really, he's a wonderful person... as a speaker in that sense. He could have made a good priest I would have thought [laughs].

36.34 **Jill Roberts:** Other people have said that.

36.35 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yeah, he could have been a priest quite well.... But, you know, those things stick in your memory for always.

36.45 **Jill Roberts:** Are... talking earlier Trevor, you were saying that... in many ways you feel that a lot of the things you'd learnt in your life before you came to Le Court seemed to be preparing you for this, do you, do you still feel that?

36.58 **Trevor Protheroe:** Still think, I still think that because erm there was so many things that I did before, have done before, like learning driving coaches, getting passing my test to drive double deckers and things like that in Manchester and being involved in electrical work in... in metropolitan vicars and Trafford Park. And erm then I worked for a builder doing painting and decorating, all these things I've done up at Le Court. I mean I've done years of work decorated every room in the place from time to time I expect. But I've always been a, been a good gardener anyway or fairly good gardener you know, not a, just ordinary kitchen garden but always been involved in that so everything that I'd to do up here I'd sort of done before and it all came in so useful. Really, really helped out in... it came easily to me the driving was no problem at all, the only thing was the boilers but [laughs] we got over that fairly well!

38.00 **Jill Roberts:** That all seemed to be leading up to -

38.02 **Trevor Protheroe:** All seemed to be leading up to this and... I mean, I still can't fathom out for the life of me why after seeing the old bungalow where we were going to live, I mean there were rat holes in the floor, but [laughs]. Fire place had been taken out and left out, if anybody else'd seen it they would've said it was completely nutters! [laughter]... But we took it as it was, and not everything improved from then it's still, what, things are still improving.

38.33 **Jill Roberts:** Well, Trevor -

38.34 **Trevor Protheroe:** Since I was there [unclear] I don't know whether you want me to say anything about the, I was there when he, the night of the fire when he... He was down here at the fire when he... He had Motor Neurone disease then obviously

38.45 **Jill Roberts:** We're talking about erm G.C. the earlier the year of his death? There was a fire at Laundry Cottage. Yes, please tell us about that yeah.

38.54 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yeah the night, the night before the fire... the night of the fire rather, he came to Le Court. But I used to take, sometimes I'd take his err, I was down here but very often I went to Le Court and got some sandwiches. He used to ring me up and ask me if I'd take some, take a lunch over for him. At this particular night he didn't ring up I knew he was coming so I went over to see him and the door was, the door was unlocked so I went in as I normally did and shouted... "Are you there G.C.?" And I always, Leonard I used to call him, and he always in the latter years he's always called me Leonard. I shout "Are you there Leonard?" So he was up in bed. So he said "Yeah, I'm having a lie down Trev," he said "I'm rather tired." So I said "Alright." I went upstairs, I knew where he was, so I went upstairs to see him, and I said "Are you alright?" and he said, "yeah, not too bad." He said "I'm very tired, just going have a lie down." So "Do you want anything?" "No," he said "I don't want anything." So err I said "you sure I get you nothing? Cup of tea, nothing?" No, didn't want nothing so I said "Okay, see you in the morning." So he said "Alright." So apparently I see him next in the afternoon, of course he was taken to hospital next morning, the ambulance [unclear] you probably know how he got out through the window.

40.06 **Jill Roberts:** I've read the newspaper report -

40.07 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yeah -

40.08 **Jill Roberts:** That's all.

40.09 **Trevor Protheroe:** Mmmm. He got out... See what happened, he told me afterwards. What happened was he heard some banging and crashing and of course he got burglar alarm on the building, but this banging and crashing he thought was somebody had got inside... were outside in the passage. So he opened the door and course he was, what the banging and crashing was all the timbers was falling down because Laundry Cottage is... It's 2 buildings - one like that and one a bit lower like that... connecting the. Up the back where the fire was all the roof was caving in -

40.39 **Jill Roberts:** It was as bad as that?

40.40 **Trevor Protheroe:** Oh yeah. All the roof went, right. On the one section - which was the lower section - the roof went right through and fortunately it didn't go into the top loft, top side which faces the road. But erm... He opened the door and of course he was met with a, with with with a [unclear] and he couldn't switch the lights on. The lights had gone because the the blanket, the electric blanket that he'd put on for Gigi was coming down next morning, coming down to stay with him over the weekend. You know, you know Gigi?

41.09 **Jill Roberts:** Yes.

41.09 **Trevor Protheroe:** And err, she was coming down and -

41.11 **Jill Roberts:** That's that's his daughter?

41.12 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yeah. Elizabeth, yeah. And he came, she was coming down and he got this old blanket out of the cupboard. It was an old one, I suppose it'd be folded up and you know they get brittle. Blankets - I mean electric blankets - unless they're laid out they want to be sort of fairly flat I suppose it'd been bundled up and got the wires had got probably perished being an old one. He put the blanket over to warm the bed for her, sort of near the bed, and what had happened... this thing shorted out in the night, and of course that, I don't know why the fuse didn't just blow and it went, and it erm... the heat went out of the blanket I don't know but it might have been the fuse might have been too big you know them days they weren't so so particular as they are today. I mean you only want a 1 amp or 2 amp fuse at the most in electric blanket. Anyway, the way it went it caught the bedclothes... then all the electric went off -

42.04 **Jill Roberts:** That was in his part of the house it must have been?

42.06 **Trevor Protheroe**: Yes. In -

42.07 **Jill Roberts:** So the fire started very close to him?

42.09 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes. He was in the. There's 3 bedrooms in the front of the house and there's 1 at the back in the corner, and that was the one that Gigi used usually for herself. So it was in this lower part of the building.

42.21 **Jill Protheroe:** So G.C. opened the door, there was no lights -

42.25 **Trevor Protheroe:** No lights - what had also happened, he'd pulled out the, unplugged his telephone so then he wouldn't be bothered because he was really tired. And pulled the plug out... from the telephone, you know the little, you can pull 'em out just plug them in... and [unclear] he's met with these - could see the flames - once he opened the door and the smoke came in... So he shut the door quickly, and he managed to go back to the, he found his way back to the bed, and he knew the telephone was plugging in at the back, behind the bed, and he couldn't find his torch, he was feeling round in the dark. Anyway, he pushed the, so anyway found the end of the the telephone he followed the wire and found the end of it and plugged it in and called the Fire Brigade. And then he kept as low as possible - he was quite with it - he kept really low down because of the smoke, and he opened the window. Over the front door there's a little ledge over the front door, so he opened the window in the bedroom and he got out onto the ledge and he shut the window behind him and he, he was sitting on the ledge. And he sat there until the Fire Brigade came. But he had inhaled some smoke, with him only having 1 lung because he lost the one lung as you know, erm course they took him off to err took him off to Basingstoke hospital. Anyway, came back in the afternoon and we had a talk, he told me what was happening, and that was... probably the last time I saw him... Because he went off then and he never did, no that's right - he came back that afternoon - and that was the last time we see him because, err he was more or less... I think he must have known he got Motor Neurone disease when, then, but he didn't, he never told me that.

43.58 **Jill Roberts:** I think he did know then, yeah.

43.59 **Trevor Protheroe:** He must have known it then because he, he was so unusually tired and he'd lost... he'd lost his old vitality a bit. I thought there was something wrong with him... And then after that of course he was in hospital and, sort of went down and down and then he went off to India didn't he with... yeah.

44.13 **Jill Roberts:** In May?

44.14 **Trevor Protheroe:** Yes, that's right. Yeah.... But that was the, you know, a real great loss that was. Course he'd, he was lucky he didn't lose his life in the fire but erm, having to lose it with the with the Motor Neurone disease afterwards that was a real blow to everyone course.

44.29 **Jill Roberts:** Yes, yes, yes.

44.31 **Trevor Protheroe:** Like he said, well I spoke to him once or twice, he said "Well, I know what it's like now... to sit, you know, on the other side in a wheelchair like, I know both sides now" It's incredible after all he'd done why he should end up in a wheelchair like that, yeah

44.46 **Jill Roberts:** Almost like Providence, isn't it?

44.47 **Trevor Protheroe:** It is, indeed yes. Wonderful man, no doubt about it.`

44.50 **Jill Roberts:** Well Trevor, thank you very much indeed.

44.52 **Trevor Protheroe:** Well. If that's any help. Good. You're welcome. [laughs]

**End of transcription.**