**Oral History Transcription**

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

**Participants:**

Jill Roberts, Archivist

Frances Hopwood, former resident of Le Court and editor of the Cheshire Smile

**Duration:** 1:07:21

**Location:** Petersfield

**Date of original Recording:** 14th May 1998

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**Summary of Main Points**

00:58 – Frances Hopwood discusses coming to England from Rhodesia and staying at Greathouse

02:55 – Returning to England from Rhodesia, Frances goes to Gerrards Cross

05:11 – Frances describes her impressions of Le Court

05:57 – The empowerment of residents by enabling them to be part of the management committee

07:46 – Frances discusses her time as editor of the Cheshire Smile magazine with John Regan

11:17 – Frances recalls an event at Le Court where she volunteered to welcome delegates and visitors from around the world

14:15 – Frances discusses Project 81 which later became the Hampshire Centre for Independent Living

16:54 – Frances explains how ‘Living Options’ was created by residents of Le Court

19:07 – Frances explains how Le Court and Liz Briggs helped her to live independently

**Start of Transcription**

00:00 [No speech] – 00:17

00:18 **Jill Roberts:** This is an oral history tape made on the 14th of May 1998, err Frances Hopwood, former resident of Le Court Cheshire Home is in conversation with the Archivist Jill Roberts.

00:30 – 00:38 [No speech].

00:39 **Jill Roberts:** Frances, um you’d recently moved out of Le Court Cheshire Home to um, come and live err independently in, in, in Petersfield, a town nearby but your connections with the Leonard Cheshire Foundation go way back and I think started in the 1960s when you came to the UK from Rhodesia, is that right?

00:58 **Frances Hopwood:** Yes, that’s right they’d sent me there in 1964, I came over from Rhodesia to, to England to a rehabilitation centre and sadly this didn’t work out, err the first rehab centre I went to and um I went to Greathouse Cheshire Home in the meantime just to fill in the space between finding another, another rehabilitation centre to attend. So I, I went to Greathouse, um in June 1964 and at that year it was actually the year of the um, the annual conference was taking place at that particular Cheshire Home and it was the um, the first time that I’d met Leonard Cheshire.

01:34 **Jill Roberts:** What was your first impression of him?

01:36 **Frances Hopwood** Oh, um I think err as you have heard from other people, it’s just one of um total amazement that this man that you’d heard so much about and read so much about and for all that he had done not just during the war but what, what he had set up was such a um down to earth just a normal human being you know. We put him on a pedestal but of course he was just an ordinary person and um we, I’ll always remember, um the day after the conference on the Sunday sitting at, at the back door at Greathouse which was this lovely big old, old house which has of course been um added to since, since those days. But we were sitting at the back and there was an old couch, a leather couch at the back by the telephone and err you could see him there sitting there, well sort of lounging back on it. He was talking to a group of residents, you know, just chatting to us about what we felt we wanted to do and what, what we wanted to get out of life. And he was a, a lovely man.

02:38 **Jill Roberts:** How long were you at Greathouse for Frances?

02:39 **Frances Hopwood:** I was there for 15 months.

02:41 **Jill Roberts:** Right.

02:42 **Frances Hopwood:** And then I went to a rehabilitation centre near London. [Roberts: ‘Right’]. And then I went back to Rhodesia.

02:46 **Jill Roberts:** Back to Rhodesia, you were born in Rhodesia?

02:47 **Frances Hopwood:** I was, yes I was yes.

02:50 **Jill Roberts:** Um, and then you, I believe came back again?

02:53 **Frances Hopwood:** I did yes.

02:54 **Jill Roberts:** [Laughs]. What was behind that move?

02:55 **Frances Hopwood:** I lived in, in Rhodesia with my mother [unclear] and in 1977 we decided to come back to England. Um, my mother was from, from Bristol originally, she went out to Rhodesia when she was a little girl. And err we decided to come back to, to, to England because there weren’t errm the residential care places errm [Roberts: ‘right’] in, in Rhodesia at that time. There are now 3, 3 Cheshire Homes in Rhodesia but so we came and stayed with a friend near London and we had been looking at um the possibility of going to a Cheshire Home near her but I was very lucky to be able to go there to Gerrards Cross…

03:37 **Jill Roberts:** Gerrards Cross, the…

03:38 **Frances Hopwood:** The Chiltern Cheshire Home…

03:39 **Jill Roberts:** Oh the Chiltern Cheshire Home, right, yes.

03:40 **Frances Hopwood:** Yes, yes and I went to stay there, I was there for a year [Roberts: ‘right’] before I transferred down to, to Le Court purely because of um having family in this area. [Roberts: ‘Oh right’] My sister and brother-in-law lived in well near Petersfield.

03:53 **Jill Roberts:** Right and did you, did you notice any difference between the, the 2 Cheshire Homes before you went to Le Court, were they run along the same lines?

04:00 **Frances Hopwood:** Oh no, very different, [Roberts: ‘Were they? ‘Right, right’] very different, yes. Um I think it depends um Gerrards Cross was nearer the town, it was smaller and um Le Court was, was vast and bigger and err out in the country [Roberts: ‘yes, yeah’] so 2 very different places. Err, both places run differently but but lovely, lovely people at the top.

04:23 **Jill Roberts:** And of course, Le, Le Court was the, the flagship home, wasn’t it, [Hopwood: ‘it was yes, yes, yes’] it was the first 1 that was established so?

04:29 **Frances Hopwood:** I, I don’t think I realised just how important the role it played or plays in the Foundation until I actually went to live there. You know, I’d heard about it way back in 64, I’d heard about Le Court and well I’d read about it too in the Cheshire Smile magazine but I didn’t actually realise it until you went there to visit and of course when I went there to live.

04:52 **Jill Roberts:** And you were there for…

04:53 **Frances Hopwood:** I was there for 17 years.

04:55 **Jill Roberts:** 17 years? [Hopwood: ‘Yes’]. That’s an awfully long time

04:57 **Frances Hopwood:** Yes.

04:58 **Jill Roberts:** So, shall we talk about um perhaps, a little bit about your days at Le Court? Your 1979, I think was the year …

05:04 **Frances Hopwood:** Ah, yes, I went to live there in early 79 [Roberts: ‘right’] yes.

05:09 **Jill Roberts:** And um, how many residents were there then?

05:11 **Frances Hopwood:** There were 54, there was 54. [Roberts: ‘That’s a lot’] Well actually there were 50 I think there were 51 and then there were 3 respite care beds or 2 respite care beds. And um at that time it was just the time when residents on the management committee were asking about whether we should really reduce the numbers and give better quality of living for residents because 1 or 2 of the rooms were very, very small [Roberts: ‘yes’] because they’d been made into extra bedrooms. And so it was under discussion and it was agreed that they could cut the numbers down to 50 and and and not the 2 divisions that were very small having 2 decent size bedrooms.

05:51 **Jill Roberts:** So you mentioned residents on the management committee, I think that was an, an initiative taken by Le Court wasn’t it to have residents on the Committee at all?

05:57 **Frances Hopwood:** It was, yes, in the late 60s [Roberts: ‘oh right’] I believe um. And from what, from what you know residents have told me about what happened that err that they decided some of the residents said you know why, why couldn’t they become involved in the management of, of the Home that they actually lived in? [Roberts: ‘Well it makes sense doesn’t it?’] Well, absolutely but there was absolute shock and horror by quite a few members of the voting committee retired [Roberts: ‘really?’] I believe. Yes but fortunately the, the Chairman at the time I think it was errm [unclear] who later was a errm trustee of the Foundation and also a judge, he said well why don’t we give it try? And I think 1 or 2 resigned from the management committee because what were disabled people wanting to, you know, be involved in the management committee of of the Home? The fact that they lived there [Roberts: ‘their own home’] their own home was beside the point so.

06:52 **Jill Roberts:** What was GC’s um opinion of this idea?

06:57 **Frances Hopwood:** I think he was, I have a feeling if I remember rightly that he was all for it. [Roberts: ‘I can imagine’]. He was, he was in, in agreement and of course the year’s trial period proved to be a great success and from there onwards um residents have always been included on the, on that particular committee as well as other people.

07:15 **Jill Roberts:** And were you on that committee?

07:18 **Frances Hopwood:** Yes, yes, yes, yes, yeah, yeah.

07:20 **Jill Roberts:** And I think you also played um a very important part in um, as editor of the Cheshire Smile, which is the in-house magazine for the Cheshire Foundation?

07:29 **Frances Hopwood:** That’s right. Well of course that started at Le Court. That was a newsletter um originally at Le Court in the 19 early 1950s that was the sort of in-house um newsletter.

07:40 – 07:45 [No speech].

07:46 **Frances Hopwood:** That, that was the in, that was um, that started originally at Le Court of course, it was the in-house newsletter and then um the person who was writing it um Frank Spath [Roberts: ‘Oh, yes’] President, I think he um he was asked if he would take it on and develop it into a more um in inter-home magazine um between the Cheshire Homes that were opening up at the time, rapidly like mushrooms all over the country. Whether he would take it on and he said yes and he edited it for about 14 years, I believe and of course that was um an amazing accomplishment and then it went to um Greenacres, up at um, that’s where um Sutton Coldfield. Yes a resident there was the editor. And then, um she passed away and in 1981, I remember um the Head of the Home at Le Court, Brigadier Regan, John Regan, he came to me and said would I be interested because um it was um they could no longer do it at Greenacres and I said yes but I want, I want to do it on my own, I wouldn’t mind. He said well I’ll give you the weekend to think about it and [Roberts takes a sharp intake of breath], if you go and speak to Dennis Jarett. Dennis Jarett was a great character at Le Court as well. One of the residents also that had a lot to do with um with the management side of Le Court, um other, other committees as well, he was a great character, very much one of the um the supporters and err residents who helped Le Court get on its, on its way and an example to other for other Homes to take a you know take an example from. And um he had said yes to editing the Smile as well. So I went and had a chat with him and he said well between us we could certainly do it, I’m quite sure and he had worked on the Cheshire Smile before [Roberts: ‘right, yes’]. He had been very much involved in it as, um as a reader, as a contributor to towards the err the articles that were written and um also helped with the, with the packing that used to go on in those days and the err articles. So together we did it, yes we did it for 5 or 6 years from Le Court.

10:01 **Jill Roberts:** And um it was then taken by the Public Affairs department, I think wasn’t it? [Hopwood: ‘It was yes’], it was taken over by the headquarters, so that suggests that it was extremely successfully developed at that point?

10:12 **Frances Hopwood:** Well yes it was. We enjoyed it but um it, it really needed, it needed to change again. Um, I think it’s a good thing, you can’t keep it always the same. [Roberts: ‘No’]. Err we, we changed it when we took over in 1981. We changed it again, we changed the style and the length, we tried to get different sorts of articles and I think by the time 86 came the Foundation were looking for a different way as well and we just couldn’t give it the time. And you know, for being so physically disabled um we needed more, more input and err we just couldn’t, we didn’t have the time to do it. [Roberts: ‘Didn’t have the resources?’] No, so um it was taken over yes, it was taken to London which err and once again it was changed and then again for the better as well. At every stage of its development, it’s been, it has grown until it is what it is today.

11:03 **Jill Roberts:** Um, Le Court is often used as a venue for conferences, international days, world weeks whatever you like to call them, gatherings of the great and the good from all over the world to do with the Cheshire Foundation. You must have been involved with those one way or the other?

11:17 **Frances Hopwood:** Yes, well together with many other residents. Um, I don’t think I realised just how, how grand and great Le Court was [Roberts laughs] until I started getting involved and especially when the first errm Year of Disabled People in 1981 when we had the big err international day at Le Court in the July. And of course um those of us who were on the different committees, we were very involved. And during that, during that particular World Week um, I went up with Dennis of course because being editors of the Smile. There was about 8 of us that went up because we had Frank as the, the historian um he went up. Dennis and I as editors of the Smile, then there were residents in their own right um, the Publicity Officer of Le Court [unclear] and about 8 residents all went up with their carer to the Tara Hotel and then of course we had a big day and it was on the Sunday that was absolutely incredible. Sadly it was the most dreadful um day, weather wise because um it was very cold and the poor people from the East and from Africa of course were used to hot weather. They um, they just couldn’t you know cope with this, this cold July day. But it was wonderful, we were part of the um welcoming group, there were 8 of us sat by the front door at Le Court welcoming all the delegates and um visitors I think there were over 800 people came. [Roberts: ‘Goodness me’]. Yeah, it was incredible and after the big lunch in this huge marquee um after the lunch there was um a fly past by the War Memorial fly past it it? And we had the Spitfire, [Roberts: ‘oh yes’] the Lancaster Bomber and the, the other aircraft, um I forget. The 3 aircraft anyway that, that fly over [Roberts: ‘yes I can’t remember’] but they came over and we all stood and waved. And the 3 of them terribly, terribly moving, very, very moving. [Roberts: ‘Recalling Leonard Cheshire as the war hero’]. Yes, yes of course yes. And he obviously in the marquee over during lunch he um gave a speech and of course the replies were given by international delegates as well all, all, all around the world. And that was the most amazing day and of course since then there have been other royal days as well. In 1981, there was another one in 89 and then another one in 94. [Roberts: ‘Right, yes’]. Yes, 94.

13:45 **Jill Roberts:** And this year of 1998 of course, is a very special year.

13:47 **Frances Hopwood:** Yes, it’s going to be another one.

13:49 **Jill Roberts:** Yes the Golden, Golden Jubilee day [Hopwood: ‘yes, yes, yes’] in July.

13:53 [No speech] – 14:00

14:01 **Jill Roberts:** So, um just staying with um the year of 1981 for a moment, um I believe that it was significant for reasons to do with changes in ways of living for some of the residents of Le Court. Wasn’t there something called Project 81 which…

14:15 **Frances Hopwood:** Yes, um a group of residents err decided that they would like to try and see what um the possibilities were for living out in, in the community and err, they got together and formed Project 81 because it was 1981 and um they discussed with social services how they could best achieve this and how they could be supported and errm thanks to people in the social services at that time who supported them as well and thought it was a, a good idea, why not? You know and the first resident out of that group to move out was a lady called Liz Briggs who was very much involved in the errm disability movement, independent living movement, um in the area in Hampshire and of course Project 81 went on to become Hampshire Centre for Independent Living.

15:07 **Jill Roberts:** Well quite well known as publishers [unclear] in the area, they publish leaflets…

15:12 **Frances Hopwood:** They do, very, very supportive of anybody who um is disabled who is living in the community or who wants to leave errm residential care to to go into the community. And errm yes and of course they were given the full support, backing of, of Le Court. Residents as well as the um, the Head of Home and the management committee, they were given all the support they could, could get.

15:35 **Jill Roberts:** Leonard Cheshire himself was um supportive of looking for new ways for people with disabilities to live wasn’t he?

15:41 **Frances Hopwood:** He was, yes

15:42 **Jill Roberts:** I mean look at the family support services…

15:44 **Frances Hopwood:** That had just started as well and it was, was, going very well, yes.

15:50 **Jill Roberts:** And, um so how did, was was Project 81 involved in um later plans for you to move into the community or was that…

16:01 **Frances Hopwood:** Um in a very small way [Roberts: ‘yes’]. Because, um when I suddenly decided having vowed and declared that I would never ever leave Le Court, you know it’s my, I love to go there, I still love the place but um I said I would never leave it. But about 4 years ago I thought that I just had this feeling I needed to move on in my, my own life which was obviously a bit rather like when your eldest child decides to leave home. I err, wanted to move out and develop my skills that had been developed at Le Court and errm I got in touch with Liz Briggs because she has all the answers as to how do you go about it and err, so indirectly yes they have been supportive and err of course Le Court was as well.

16:47 **Jill Roberts:** And there was something something called Living Options also grew out of um Le Court…

16:54 **Frances Hopwood:** Yes, Living Options started about 1989 when um, a group of um residents and management committee members decided that we really needed to look at something that people could do because things were happening in the rest of the country as well for independent living with um, err, err schemes err we were looking at what we could do. We held a seminar at Le Court out of which Living Options was formed and this was looking at a piece of land on which could be built perhaps um bungalows where people, disabled people could live who didn’t want to actually come into residential care but couldn’t manage at home. They’d get the support of errm either a care at home service or social services. And they found a piece of land, not far from Le Court. And Le Court and the Cheshire Foundation and the Housing Association all had input into that. And errm, it was finished I think in 1992. It was opened and 2 residents from Le Court went to live there and as well as a, a former resident.

18:05 **Jill Roberts:** Was this a Leonard Cheshire initiative? Or were there other agencies involved?

18:10 **Frances Hopwood:** There were other agencies involved, yes. And that was named after Ian Balfour, it’s called Balfour Drive [Roberts: ‘oh right’] because Ian was um he was very much involved as the Chairman and he was disabled and he’d lived at Le Court and sadly he died in, in 1991. So we asked if it could be named after him. So it was in memory to him because he worked very, very hard you know going to meetings up in London and everywhere.

18:39 **Jill Roberts:** And so that was in 1990…

18:41 **Frances Hopwood:** 2 I think it was, [Roberts: ‘92’] 92 it opened, yes.

18:44 **Jill Roberts:** And about 1994 you made your decision that you wanted to [Hopwood: ‘yes’] personally move, move out into independent living. [Hopwood: ‘Yes, yes’]. And um we’re here now in your beautiful flat um where you’ve been for, ooh, is it a year yet? [Hopwood: ‘Nearly a year’] Nearly a year [Hopwood: ‘yes’]. And so obviously very successful but it couldn’t have been easy. Couldn’t have been easy in practical terms or psychologically?

19:07 **Frances Hopwood:** No it’s certainly not easy because err all of a sudden you you think, you make you decide that you yes you want to move on and then it becomes more hard and without the, the input of, of um Liz Briggs from the Hampshire Centre for Care and Independent Living, I certainly wouldn’t have known what to do. And also um the Le Court residents and errm the Head of Home and Head of Care at Le Court um giving information that you wouldn’t know where to start. And the first thing of course is accommodation and I’m extremely grateful because errm Le Court have actually purchased the property so they are my, my landlords [she laughs]. So I’m actually still a resident but a sort of [Roberts laughs] an outside resident of Le Court which is rather nice.

20:00 **Jill Roberts:** You’re an extension of Le Court.

20:01 **Frances Hopwood:** An extension of Le Court. And it’s the um getting hold of um it’s all, it’d different, it’s managing your own affairs and it’s the finances, what you, what you pay towards your cost of living, in residential care just it’s just, it’s a different way of doing it. At first you’re in a panic and you think you’ll never ever cope with it, the financial side of it. Once you move out it all falls into place. You know the shopping and the errm making sure you pay your Television Licence and things like that, it all falls into place.

20:33 **Jill Roberts:** It’s control I suppose isn’t it?

20:34 **Frances Hopwood:** It’s control, once you’ve got that control it does all just fit into place. And um yeah it’s up to you to make sure that you [unclear]

20:43 **Jill Roberts:** And you have support, care support?

20:45 **Frances Hopwood:** Yes I use the social services care team which is um it’s running well.

20:56 **Jill Roberts:** This is a, a new departure isn’t it, is this not the first time that Le Court or any Cheshire Home have purchased a property and a residence for community care?

21:03 **Frances Hopwood:** I think other homes are doing it. I think down at St Bridget’s, I think down in, in Rustington. I think they have um 2 or 3 properties [Roberts: ‘I think you’re right, yes’] that they have bought as independent living units errm outside but Le Court is also within its own grounds. It has got 2 bungalows which they, they rent out to disabled people.

21:25 **Jill Roberts:** I’m thinking about Edinburgh has got a [Hopwood: ‘yes’] similar scheme is it Dumfries perhaps as well?

21:32 **Frances Hopwood:** In Dumfries, yes, yes.

21:34 **Jill Roberts:** It’s the beginning of yet another new phase.

21:36 **Frances Hopwood:** Yes and it’s something that Leonard Cheshire always errm, he always said the outreach programmes, you know. Go beyond your Cheshire Home don’t just err think about the Home, helping people in the Home, go beyond and and support people outside as well which of course he often mentioned in his, in his errm speeches when he spoke at conferences and things like that.

22:02 **Jill Roberts:** So you think he would have approved?

22:04 **Frances Hopwood:** I think he would have been highly delighted. I can see him sitting in the chair in his gentle way saying it’s delightful [she laughs].

22:13 **Jill Roberts:** So you can, you can recommend such a move?

22:15 **Frances Hopwood:** I can. If people who suddenly feel [Roberts: ‘the change’] yes, that they’ve come to the end of their, you know what they’ve been given errm in residential care. Without Le Court’s errm support and all the help that they give to residents to do, to, to lead as normal a life as possible as well as to help the Home run by, by being on the management committee and things like that which develops your skills and gives you the confidence to do it.

22:45 **Jill Roberts:** To go on into...

22:49 **Frances Hopwood:** To go on to a state of worth, yeah.

22:50 **Jill Roberts:** Very interesting, Frances Hopwood thank you very much for giving me your time.

22:52 **Frances Hopwood:** Thank you Jill.

22:53 – 1:07:21 [Silence – end of tape].

**End of Transcription**