**Audio Transcription**

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

**Title:** Le Court Opening Speeches – 1955

**Duration:** 15 minutes and 55 seconds

**Location:** Le Court Cheshire Home, Hampshire

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**Start of transcription**

00:00:09 **[Professor Cheshire]** ...To what they have done and to ask their chairman, Mr David Marshall to declare this building open.

[Applause]

00:00:31 **[Leonard Cheshire]:** Mr Chairman, Mr Marshall, ladies and gentlemen it gives me very great pleasure indeed to be speaking here today. My first public engagement for nearly two and a half years. The only thing is that I hope that I will make the grade. I'm liable either to lose my train of thought and break down or else go on talking so long that I never stop [laughter].

00:01:01 We, as you know, we owe this building in which we are standing today absolutely and entirely to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. And it's my privilege and honour today to thank them in the name of us all, of all the patients, all the staff, all our helpers, all over the world. Now, the, our true thanks are not of course any words, however well-chosen or however eloquent, they are rather putting the gift that we have received to its best possible use. And, it's along those lines that I'm going to say these few words. What I would like to do, as briefly as I can, is to give some idea of the setting in which the Carnegie Trust came our way, gave us the gift and then to say a few words about where we go from here.

00:02:07 When the war finished, and I left the Air Force, for one reason and another I was very anxious to try and build up a community of ex-servicemen and women, with the idea, or the main idea of getting back something of the friendship and, and spirit of mutual help that we knew so well in the war. We received a great deal of publicity and a great deal of money, and we had a great many very enthusiastic helpers.  We were surrounded with problems, it was one perpetual struggle, one perpetual problem and there was quite a lot of squabbling. And in the end we completely failed, we never got the community.

00:02:49 After that, due to one thing and another, the community which was here in Le Court, in the old Le Court, changed to a work for the sick, and one or two very ill men and women came our way, those of us that were left and we had to forget all about any idea of building up a community and get on with looking after these ill people. The result of that was that without realising it we began to get the community, the family, which I think is perhaps the best word I can choose, that we'd tried so long, and with so much money in the past, without getting. And then, as more and more sick people came along, we set as our objective, the aim of taking in all those who applied to us and who were really in need of help and who hadn't anywhere else to go. That was probably a very ambitious objective and of course we weren't able to keep it, because more people came our way than we could take.

00:04:00 We were aiming not for those who were in need of treatment, which of course the hospitals are there to provide, but rather those who didn't need treatment but needed care and attention and were likely to be in that condition for a very long time. Therefore our primary aim was to try and build a family, so far as possible we would take the place of the families of those who were coming. Obviously one can't take the place of one's own natural family, but we'd get as close as we possibly could.

00:04:36 Now we weren't very well equipped for this work, and I myself had never had any great flair for organisation and the house used to get into a terrible muddle, and I have no doubt that those who came to see us from the outside must have thought it was a pretty queer place. Nevertheless we knew what we wanted and we did have the will and we had a lot of enthusiasm.

00:05:00 To make it safe was going to cost thousands of pounds, far more than we had or had much hope of getting. And also around about that time we had a visit from the Carnegie Trust, because we had asked them whether there was any possibility of them giving us a station wagon [laughter].

00:05:22 Well they came down and they saw us, and they said that unfortunately we didn't come within their terms of reference and that therefore we were outside their scope. However a little later we had another letter saying that they would like to go into it further and they came down again. And we were then much occupied with this problem of the house, wondering what was going to happen, and Carnegie Trust had pity on us, and they said that if we could provide some of the money, they might provide a bit more. Well that gave us new hope and so we said, alright, well we'd go ahead see what we could do.

00:06:04 That was only the beginning, the result after a little longer, a few more weeks of discussions, was that they said that they would give us the entire building. Well I expect many of you know that when you start to build a house or even to buy anything, or get anything made, it starts off at a fairly reasonable figure and it ends up very much larger. And, Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, gave us a building that was far, far more expensive than anything we had ever thought possible. Because we had never thought in terms of a building as beautiful as this one and even today when I've seen it built, and have visited it three or four times, and I've seen the photographs of the house as it came along, can still hardly believe that this really is our Le Court.

00:07:05 I never, I don't think I ever thought that one building could so combine a family informal atmosphere with efficiency and simplicity of running. Now, the point is that this building hasn't been given to us just so that we here in Le Court can settle down in it and make ourselves comfortable and that's the end of it. This building has essentially been given to us so that it can be both a model for, for other homes and also a, as it were, a powerhouse from which we can go out and do our best for all those who haven't a home for living.

00:07:53 A charity in some ways is rather like water, if you keep it to yourself it stagnates, and if you pass it on it runs freely and keeps clear. And the function that we've always seen for Le Court is it's the first of our homes and it is as it were a starting point for all the others. Every single day of the year we receive an application for some patient who wants to come in to Le Court, 99% of whom we have to turn down because there's no room. And that goes for the other homes too. We have four homes now occupied, and a fifth at Angmering in Sussex, going to be occupied after Christmas. Even so the applications keep coming in, and we are unable to receive them. Therefore, the purpose that we should put this house to, is to encourage other people to start other homes as and when opportunities arise, and to act as it were, as a powerhouse to radiate the idea that we've all joined together to fulfil here.

00:09:14 And it’s this that the Carnegie Fund has made possible for us by giving us, so to speak, a base or a foundation from which to build and go forward. The result has been in the last twelve months that we've had offers of help outside the country, and we are hoping, before too long to be able to extend our work beyond these shores in other countries where there are a great many sick and suffering people, without a home to live in.

00:09:58 **[Professor Cheshire]:** I will now ask Mr Hugh Evans to say something on behalf of the patients.

[Applause]

00:10:12 **[Hugh Evans]:** GC, Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen. I have a way of introducing myself as the bad boy of this family [laughter] and this is the reason why. Nearly six years ago, I was admitted to the sheltering care of Group Captain Cheshire, in the old house of Le Court. Soon after my admittance I felt I must do something about this to try and help my fellow man, such as to become an orderly or perhaps use a fork and spade in the garden... I have not yet achieved this, hence my punishment and privilege on this great occasion to try and say something on behalf of the patients of Le Court...

00:10:58 What does it mean to us to be at Le Court? Not a monotonous dull level, not needing a mere existence, but living a life. We are grateful to our founder and all who have helped him to make Le Court what it is, for many things, but chiefly for two great opportunities we couldn't get anywhere else.

00:11:21 The opportunity to live this rich and free family life away from institutional monotony, and the opportunity of now being able to share it with others. As Le Court becomes famous we all hope that many more similar homes will spring up on the same family lines. We may be a mixed lot, ladies and gentlemen, but we are what we could not be elsewhere. Real people, not mere cases, given the chance to be ourselves in perfect surroundings. I think I have said enough, to let you know what is in all our hearts today. May God bless GC and all his work. In conclusion, with the words of Helen Taylor 'Bless this house oh Lord we pray, make it safe by night and day. Bless these walls so firm and stout, keeping want and trouble out'.

[Applause]

00:12:34 **[Professor Cheshire]**: Ladies and gentlemen, one final word is just this: that having been given this wonderful fabric it was left to us to make it comfortable and home-like inside. Well, now that was a very big job, if you think of a few of the items that had to be considered. The curtains and all the accessories that go with them, rail-ways and pelmets I think they're called [laughter]. The electrical out-fittings, and the furniture. The furniture for the staff rooms, and the furniture for the patients, and, that in itself a very difficult problem because the furniture has to be made first to be accessible for people, or some people in wheelchairs. Then we had to consider the most thorny of all thorny problems in life, the colour scheme [laughter]. Because it is very important that we should avoid the sort of drab and dreary off-whiteness of the ordinary hospital. Well, all these things are beyond us. We hadn't got the money, we hadn't got the man-power, and we hadn't got the expert knowledge for all those purposes. And therefore we did what I'm afraid we've become rather good at, we sent out an appeal to all and sundry to come and help us. And the appeal didn't go in vain, help came from all sorts of sources. A colour scheme was devised and accepted, and unless you're colour-blind you can see the result for yourselves [laughter].

00:14:47 Materials came, in some cases free, from certain firms, and in many cases provided at a very heavy discount. Gifts of money came from some big charities and from charitably-minded persons. The tedious and exacting job of making up the curtains was performed entirely by voluntary workers. And in the week in which we moved where our only cooking stove was out of action, because it was being taken to pieces and rehabilitated and re-erected, certain.. a succession of stout-heated ladies braving the rigours of this most odious of all summers [laughter] set up their own kitchen in the open ...[unclear] and served meals as well as ever.

**End of transcription**