**Leonard Cheshire Resonate Project**

File title: SC 2 John interviews GLC about his life and work starting with his stay at the King Edward VII TB Sanitorium at Midhurst

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**Start of Transcription**

00:00 GLC: Service Corp 2, slate 1, take 1.

00:06 John: Leonard, you know, we have talked about Midhurst, but I feel that we’ve not really got into the depths of much it must have affected you and your relationship and understanding of the disabled. It must have had a much more major change than you’ve really admitted so far.

00:24 GLC: Yes, it did. But of course, it changed the external circumstances in my life more.

00:35 John: We know it changed that – I mean, you found yourself left without a home to manage or anything to do. But emotionally, there must have been much deeper changes in that two and a quarter year you spent there.

00:46 GLC: Yeah, you see John, the trouble is that it’s very difficult for me to assess – I’m sure I did have those changes.

00:52 John: Yes.

00:53 GLC: But they’re not apparent to me.

00:54 John: No, no.

00:55 GLC: Whether they were at the time, I don’t know. Obviously, you’re quite right, it obviously did. But it’s difficult for me to be honest and objective about it.

01:06 John: Yes, yes. In other words, it’s still an emotional experience.

01:11 GLC: I suppose it was, yes.

01:14 John: Yes.

01:14 GLC: It reversed the [unclear] of course, as we say.

01:15 John: Yes, that’s where we’re getting to now.

01:21 GLC: It had set the stage for something quite different. My role was completely different after than it was before, that’s the big change it made to me.

01:29 John: It’s not only were you a sick man there, with all the problems of the sick, but you found what you thought would be your future career had been taken from you, really.

01:40 GLC: Well, it may…

01:40 John: You’d lost control of your homes, hadn’t you?

01:46: Yes, I’d to a large extent lost control. Would you like to lead me into…?

01:52 John: I’ll lead you into it now, yes. Two and a quarter year passed at Midhurst, and then you came out faced with Le Court… I’ll start again – you spent two and a quarter year at Midhurst; Le Court, you’re no longer in control, has been taken from you. St Theresa’s running happily on its own, so they didn’t really need you down there. So, it seemed that you weren’t needed anywhere. And yet, somehow, something happened to springboard the next development of Cheshire.

02:29 Man: Your hands are just coming in, so…

02:32 John: Thank you.

[pause]

02:38 GLC: Slate. Yes, there was an extraordinary contradiction in a sense, that at Midhurst I’d known absolutely that my life now lay amongst the homes, amongst the disabled – and this was what I wanted to give myself to. But at the same time, circumstances had almost taken the control of the homes away from me. Obviously not completely, because I was going to have a certain say in them, but I no longer ran anything. But two things happened rather unexpectedly. And the first had its origins in St Theresa’s. Just before I went ill, Lord Ferrers and Lady Ferrers had come to see St Theresa’s, and we had a very happy afternoon. And I think probably I had almost forgotten the afternoon. Then a month before I left Midhurst, I received a letter from Lady Ferrers to say that her husband had died and asked me whether I’d like his clothes. I’d never had an offer like that before. But in her letter, she mentioned their home, Staunton Harold. And said that to their great grief, it had passed out of their hands – the first time in 500 years, it had passed out of the family’s hands. Now by coincidence, a week later, somebody gave me a clipping from a newspaper which told me about Staunton and this great tragedy that it had been bought by a demolition man who was going to demolish it, and build a prestige type modern building on the site of this very historic house. And the two things together made me think of it. The following February, I found myself in… can we stop?

04:35 John: Cut.

[pause]

04:41 GLC: Slate 1, take 2.

04:48 John: The stately homes today are big business in every kind of way – they have [unclear] and everything around them. When you move into it, they seem to be dilapidated, forlorn horrors.

05:00 GLC: They were very dilapidated. And I think in a way they fitted my mood, my state. Because what I can never forget about Ampthill and Staunton is the feeling that they were needed – that they had a personality, they had a life, they had a future. But there was nobody to give them that future. When I got to Staunton – I shall never forget it. To begin with the distant view as you drive along the road, you look down into this hollow, this huge house nestling, surrounded with trees, that in itself was very evocative. And when eventually I got inside the building, this rather cold – very cold, damp – February day, in this huge hall, front hall, rain coming through the ceiling. And at least two stories above it. This feeling of… it had had so much history, and its future was finished. And then there were these three people from the neighbourhood who’d come to see who I was. I mean, they didn’t know who on earth I was. The thing that I noticed was that they loved Staunton. They felt that Staunton belonged to the district, and I could see that they were determined, if they possibly could, to give it a future. But everybody had been tried – the Archbishop of Canterbury, almost every charity and institution had been approached, and nobody could see any sense to it.

06:33 GLC: Now I have found, if I’m not being… you know, pushing my own opinions, that when somebody comes to you with a project that they want to promote, of course you look at the project in itself, but you look at them. And if you can see that they’re determined on it, if you can see that they really mean it, that they’re going to go through with it come what may, I find this influences your judgement. And I think that it was this more than anything that persuaded me to take what was not really a very sensible step. I had nothing behind me. I had the little experience at Le Court. I was not in good health. The last thing that the other homes wanted was Ampthill or Staunton. The newly formed trust didn’t think that it was very sensible. But it was just this feeling that here was a house that was needed. And I knew that there were so many disabled who were wanting an opportunity, and the two married.

07:34 John: So you got a perfect Cheshire situation.

07:39 GLC: Well I… a situation in a sense rang accord in my heart. Lady Ferrers, whose home it had been, had written to me in Midhurst – she’d offered me her husband’s clothes, he’d died the night before the auction of a broken heart. Their house had been in the family for 500 years. It was a very historic house. I think one has to picture its history. It was built, a new building, in 1556. In 1668 I think, under Cromwell, Sir Robert Shirley had built a church – the only church that was built in Reformation times. Cromwell was very angry that he’d built this church, and he sent a deputation to him. Now Robert Shirley was having a picnic with his family by the lake, a nice summer’s day, and they heard the sound of hooves, horses’ hooves, coming down this drive – same drive we’d driven down. And this was a deputation from Cromwell, which said, “you’ve built yourself a church, so you’ll build me a battleship”. And Robert Shirley said, “I won’t”. So, he was put in the Tower. And he died in the Tower at the age of 28, because he would not give in to Cromwell. SO that was the spirit in which Staunton had started, and if we look at the inscription over the church… I think that it epitomises Robert Shirley. Part of it says this – “whose singular praise it is to have done ye best things in ye worst times and hoped them in the most calamitous”.

10:00 John: I wonder – you haven’t used that as the Cheshire symbol. It does so symbolise the history of Cheshire homes really, doesn’t it?

10:09 GLC: Well, I wouldn’t presume to take… you know, apply that quotation to us. But anybody who reads that quotation can’t help but be inspired.

[pause]

10:21 GLC: We could start camera again soon.

10:23 John: Yeah?

[pause]

10:28 GLC: Slate. Anybody who reads that quotation is bound to feel inspired. And I think there was something there that made me feel, “you must respond”. Now Lady Ferrers was ill – she was in bed; she couldn’t get up out of bed to come over that day in February. But I said that I would take the house if we could get it away from the demolition firm. But the demolition firm did not want to sell it. And so, a public enquiry was held to determine whether or not the preservation order that had been put on it by the Historic Buildings Council should hold or whether it would have to be given up. In other words, could the demolition man be prevented from demolishing it? Everybody thought the enquiry would go the wrong way. At the enquiry the demolition firm argued and proved that the damage was such that it would cost £110,000 to put it in order. And I really think that estimate was accurate. See, it had been requisitioned in the war, Lord Ferrers had been pushed out at a fortnight’s notice, it had been occupied by the army and they’d not treated it well, and then Italian prisoners of war had been put in it. It’d been terribly damaged; the lead had been pinched off the roof; it’d been empty for nearly ten years, and all this time while they were arguing, rain had been coming in. So here was this house. The enquiry went the right way, and so we were allowed to buy it for £15,000.

12:10 John: Which you had.

12:13 GLC: But the trouble was we didn’t have £15,000 – we were able to raise £1,500 to put the 10% down, and agree that we would complete on St. George’s Day, April 23rd, on condition that we could move in first. And so, we moved in. Now those months are months that I personally can never forget because the entire district rallied to Staunton. There was no electricity; there was virtually no water; you can imagine the damage there was in the house. And they used to come round – I’m not exaggerating – there’d be 50 volunteer workers, every weekend. And every village, every little group, would take over one room. It would be the Coleville Rotary Room, or whatever it might be – they would all take over, that was their room. At the end of the weekend they locked it, so that nobody could see what they were doing, and it remained locked until they came back the following weekend. Lady Ferrers got up out of bed – this was a completely new chapter for her – she’d come over for the weekend, and her job was to offer everybody tea. She used to take the tea around, and there she was, a very commanding – a very fine, strong looking person, though she was not in good health, in this front hall where I’d originally seen this rain coming through, receiving people. I can never forget that one day a journalist came up from Leicester to see what was happening. Lady Ferrers saw him, she walked straight up to him, picked up a broom and said, “young man, take this broom and go and sweep the dining room out” – he did.

13:55 John: The best story that he ever had! [Laughs]

13:58 GLC: [laughs] Perhaps. Well there was the problem with month – how were we going to pay for this, put this £15,000 down on April 23rd? Now, a few days previous to the 23rd, we had our first family day at Le Court, and the Queen Mother came down. That was our great occasion. And to it came a man who’d given some money to St Bridget’s, called Mr. Ravenshire. He was a builder, and he was a very wealthy builder. I went up to him after that Queen Mother had gone and asked him if he could help. He said yes, and he agreed to give £5,000 – to our immense surprise, £5,000. A friend of mine, an Irishman who had a wonderful gift of the gab, drove up to London; by the time they got to London, it was £10,000. So, we now had £12,000 towards the 15. Enough, with apologies to the builder, to get away with it.

14:59 John: [laughs]

15:04 Man: We’re running out now.

15:05 GLC: We’ll stop.

15:06 John: [unclear 15:06 to 15:08]

15:08: Speech ends

15:09: End of recording

**End of transcription**