**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**

00:02 GLC: Slate 2, take 1.

00:06 John: Staunton was this vast place – how did you manage to get all this help to put it right?

00:13 GLC: Of course, I was involved myself but in a different way from what I had been at Le Court. I moved in there, and I think I was given what had once been Lord Ferrers’ study. I think my main job was trying to find people – I used to go around and call on the mayor of different cities. I would go and address public meetings; go and call on businessmen. I think my job was to try and collect the team who were going to put it right. But there was something totally spontaneous about Staunton that I’ve seldom met in my life. Two things were clear: first, the obvious one, the whole district looked upon Staunton as theirs and they were determined to get it going. The second thing was it was a challenge, it was a very broad canvas. And I learnt a lesson that I’ve seen repeated elsewhere, that if you present people with a big challenge, they’ll respond, and they’ll respond in a big way. If it’s a small challenge – if it had just been a little bungalow there would have been hardly anything. This was a year when there had been a tremendous flood not long before and everybody had gone to help. It was a year when there was a major strike, and in the middle of that strike, the local quarry decided that they would put the drive right. We had a long drive, and it was unusable. And the quarry said that they would give all the tarmac, I think 90 tonnes of tarmac, if the men would give their work voluntarily. And these men did it over a weekend. And I know that a lot of them got up at 3 in the morning to be at the quarry in time to heat the tarmac, to be loaded on to the lorries when they first came. It was a very inspiring experience for me to see what people would do for something that they cared about.

02:03 John: How did you organise them in this vast House then?

02:07 GLC: I didn’t organise. There was a committee. The committee did the organising, but somehow, they’d each decide what they wanted to do, and everything was allocated out so that it was very personal. Each village had its own little job to do. But you must remember there were 55 bedrooms. It was a really dilapidated house, and that estimate of £110,000 wasn’t far out. The Ministry of Works owed the house £33,000 – they were very reluctant to give it. Very. They did, in the end, pay bills up to £33,000, after the work had been done. The whole of the rest was done by voluntary help.

02:50 John: And how did you get the money then?

02:52 GLC: It was just raised locally. Every little group that took on a room would find the money to purchase the materials. The men would mend the holes, plaster the walls and the ceilings, and then the wives would come in and furnish it. We let everybody choose their own colour scheme, and the colour schemes are absolutely startling, some of them, I can’t… so it was no use interfering if they… [John laughs] They had to be left to choose their own colour schemes, and according to their different backgrounds and so on, so they chose their colours. So, they did feel it was theirs, and even up till this day, those little groups still keep their particular room going. They re-paint it and they re-decorate it and they re-furnish it – there’s this sense of personal involvement.

03:38 John: Which you gave to the residents as well. Now let’s go to the residents – I mean, were the residents in there while this re-building was going on?

03:45 GLC: Yes, we moved them in very quickly because of need. There was an obvious need. And they came in… well, when water was still coming in through the roof – I mean it was months before we stopped the water coming through the roof, and I can still picture baths and cans and buckets right along that big corridor whenever there was heavy rain, because it was very difficult putting that huge lead roof right. Again, I think that they felt involved. I know that there are others who feel that you should not bring the residents in at a stage like that; you should wait until the home is fit and ready. I don’t want to dispute that; I think that each home is quite different. I find people do tend to generalise – they say, “you must have a home in a city, where there are people”. And I see the arguments, but Staunton was very remote. But I think it’s gained from its remoteness, somehow, they’ve built their own community life within themselves… they provide their own entertainment. I hate to generalise; I don’t think one should generalise too much in this kind of work.

04:57 John: No, obviously, and because there was the whole local feeling that the residents who went in were part of their feeling and they’ve still got it there. But you’ve rather skipped across the financial side of it. Yes, some people were coming and bringing their own buckets of paint and their own decorations – but there must have been some hefty bills, I mean you still had a builder to… about £10,000 to find. How did you get this money?

05:18 GLC: Well, Ravenshire lent us £10,000. We managed to find the remaining £3,000 within the first two months, I think, and paid the builder off. Money was always a terrible headache, there’s no question. But today that picture had changed, it did come. There was this feeling – I can’t explain it – that Staunton compelled local support. The garden fete at Staunton is the most successful garden fete that I’ve ever known, and it always raises £5,000. There is a queue of cars two miles long, and it’s so remote. And there was no more publicity given to that fete than any other. From the very word “go”, everybody just came in.

06:07 John: Do you think part of this local feeling is an affection for the Ferrers family?

06:13 GLC: There was great affection for the Ferrers family, and for its tradition and history and the part that it played. One must remember that Staunton did make a huge difference to Lady Ferrers – I mean, her health was broken. But the moment she saw the house coming back into use, she seemed to get over that illness. She had tremendous willpower, she was held in great respect, and she was really a central figure around whom everybody collected, in a certain sense. [pause] The builder.

06:44 John: Cut.

[pause]

06:51 Man: Mark it.

06:52 GLC: Slate 3, take 1.

06:56 John: Now Mr Ravenshire, the builder, lent you £10,000 – did he ever get his money back?

07:02 GLC: Uh, no… but there was a story to it. Two months after he lent us the money, he decided to go up to Staunton and have a look. He did. He was in his 80s, and that old man walked round every single square yard of Staunton, including the whole roof.

07:21 John: I think “square yard” is a very good statement. [both laugh]

07:26 GLC: Because it was a huge space. When he came back, he was in a terrible state – he rang me up, and he said, “Cheshire, if I’d known what state that building was in you wouldn’t have had one penny from me”. Well, I apologised, I said, “Mr Ravenshire, I thought I’d told you what it was like”. Anyway, that was that. A year later he went back to Staunton, and again he walked round every single inch of Staunton, and he was so astonished by what the local committee and the helpers and everybody’d done, that he came back and he said, “I’m gonna leave you every penny of my money in my will”. But he never made a will, and our chairman Lord Denning saw him twice and said, “Please, Mr Ravenshire, you’ve written to us saying you’re going to leave us money but do change your will”. He never did. And he died, and his estate was worth one and a quarter million pounds. We thought – I think we first thought – what a tragedy. But when we collected our thoughts, we thought, “no, if we’d had a million and a quarter pounds at that stage, we’d have been completely different”. We’d have been completely different, and I think it’s a tremendous blessing looking back on it that we didn’t have it.

08:47 John: The £10,000 though, did you pay it back?

08:51 GLC: Well, it also meant that we owed the £10,000. It was there because he’d not changed his will, we had to pay it back. In fact, the heirs – the final heirs – who were very remotely related to Mr Ravenshire very kindly let us off it. But the question was whether… anyway, we didn’t have to pay.

09:14 John: You didn’t have to pay. But you see, you say you came back a year later – were you by then thinking of leaving Staunton with your work, or the first part of your work completed?

09:26 GLC: All the time that Staunton was being renovated and being brought back to life, I was struggling in my mind of India. I’d had this request to go to India, and the question was: should I? I sent somebody out for me, a nurse who’d worked at Staunton for a while – came to Staunton to, as it were, prospect and report. And I was trying to make up my mind, dare I take this plunge? I think that Staunton gave me the courage and the confidence to do it. I had to set off to India with very little – £100 as my total capital, and the bus that I had and the Land Rover. If Staunton hadn’t succeeded, I would never have dared go to India. It was the fact of seeing what had been done, what could be done by human generosity when there’s determination, that just gave me that push I needed. And in my mind, the whole overseas expansion of the foundation I owe to Staunton.

10:41 John: Fascinating, a derelict mansion in this country started your projects in India.

10:49 GLC: It did.

10:51 John: Cut – I think you’ve run out.

10:52 Man: We’ve run out just….

10:53 GLC [overlapping]: Just right, was it?

10:54: Speech ends

10:57: End of recording

**End of Transcription**