**Leonard Cheshire Resonate Project**

File title: 'John' interviews GLC about his life and work

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**Start of Transcription**

00:00: GLC: Slate 3, take 2.

00:04 John: Just give me a moment, I’ll soon be ready.

[pause from 00:05]

00:09 John: And we’re ready.

00:09 Man: Action.

00:11 John: So, Leonard, I think this Ravenshire - the builder - came back about a year later to have a look at it. But by then you must have been feeling that your work at Staunton was nearly complete?

00:22 GLC: Well, all that year, of course, I was wrestling in my mind with the problem of India. Dare I accept this invitation? We had in fact asked somebody to go out ahead of me to have a look at it. But I needed confidence and I think I needed the courage to do it - I needed the certainty that it was the right thing to do. And somehow, seeing what was happening at Staunton and realising what human generosity and determination can do, watching it, gave me that courage. And it gave me a feeling that, yes, it was the right thing to do. It was a tremendous step for me to take, although I look back on it with happiness now. I only had a total of £100 to take with me to India, and only one address out there. I was leaving behind me five homes that were each struggling very hard. I knew that none of the committees felt that it was the right thing to do, but Staunton persuaded me. And when I looked at Staunton, there were 55 bedrooms. Although the work was far from complete, and I saw what had been done just by ordinary people in that short time, I felt - yes, to me, now all the overseas expansion is due to Staunton, and of course the homes that preceded it; but essentially, Staunton.

01:55 John: This is interesting, really, what you’re saying is the result of Staunton - it wasn’t just the committee at Staunton that told you to go.

02:02 GLC: No, it was a totality of everything, beginning with Le Court, and St Theresa’s, and the trustees that had come into being. But I think it was Staunton somehow that persuaded me that you can go out for something that’s big, if you know it’s right, and you can do it.

02:18 John: Cut.

[muffled 02:19 to 02:22]

02:22 Man: Running. Mark it.

02:23 GLC: India, slate 1, take 1.

02:29 Man: Just hold it, John, a second.

02:30 John: Yeah, I’ll give you an action.

02:32 Man: Camera ready.

02:33 John: Action. [pause to 02:36] So, Leonard - you went off to India. But I must ask two quick, key questions about your concern. One: how did you get the money? And second: how did you come to get an invitation to go?

02:50 GLC: I think that nearly everything that I was expecting was wrong about India. I set off with very definite ideas in my mind, and one of them was that land was going to be cheap. I was convinced you could get land anywhere for nothing. So my thinking was, we’ll get a bus, which I had, which was my caravan - an office, I could live in it. We’d put the bus down on a piece of land, and then live in the bus and build a home around ourselves. Very simple. But the first thing that happened when we got to India was that the… I must have filled a form out wrong [laughs] because the bus, and the Land Rover that I’d managed to get were both impounded by customs. And customs wanted £800 to get them out. And our total capital, having paid our fares, was about £100. We had the home down in the south of India, which had been lent to us by Bob Stool who wrote when I was at Midhurst. This was very unsuitable - it was right up, 6000 feet high, and it was the wrong place. And it was quite clear to me that to get anywhere in India, you must start in more than one place. Of course, Bob didn’t agree with this - he thought that the right thing to do was to spend 5 years consolidating the one home then to branch out.

04:13 John: He didn’t know his Cheshire, did he?

04:17 GLC: So, I knew that I had to start somewhere else. And in Bombay I had just one address that somebody had given to me - this was the wife of the chief engineer at Burma Shell. And she kindly came to meet me, she didn’t know what it was all about, and I explained to her and said that I was looking for a property. So obviously this took her by surprise, but she took me out in her car and eventually we did discover, I think it was an acre and a half of land, in the jungle, 15 miles north of Bombay. The great advantage was that the owner was prepared to let me have it on the promise to pay when I could. [John laughs] I think he’d been trying to sell it for a long time, and thought that I probably was as good a bet as anybody. We then wanted somewhere - a house, a building. Well, Nina managed to get the main contractor for Burma Shell, who was finishing a contract, to give us his contractor’s hut, an asbestos hut. And this he put up on top of this little bit of land over Christmas, so we called it Bethlehem house. And I was sitting in this little hut, the first day it was up, on January 1st; and an Indian, a local Indian came to see us. And I proudly showed him this land - it was up on a hill, beautiful view - and I said “look”. And he said, “Well, I’d always heard that you English are fond of views”. But he said, “In India, on top of hills, you don’t get water”. Well, I’d never thought of water - one doesn’t think of water, you know, you turn the tap on, out it comes. So our big problem, in fact, did turn out to be water. Fortunately, there was a Jesuit seminary about a mile away and they used to send us water twice a week in a bullock cart which plodded up with a tank full of water. We’d only been there two days—

06:20 John: Can I interrupt for a moment? You say “we” - who else was there with you?

06:24 GLC: We had two boys who came to help me, one was a driver and one was an orderly. And Margot Mason who was there to organise and get us help from the—

06:35 John: She’d gone out from England with you, in fact, had she?

06:38 GLC: The three of them went out on their own by ship, and I went out ahead by sea… Can you cut? Sorry, I lost my train of thought.

[Silence from 06:48 to 06:52]

06:53 Man: Mark it.

06:53 GLC: India, slate 2, take 1.

07:00 Man: Camera ready.

07:01 John: Action.

07:02 GLC: Well, we hadn’t been there in the home very long, about a week, when another kind of vehicle turned up. It called itself an ambulance, but I’ve never seen such a dilapidated car - I wouldn’t have thought it could even run. Now, we were a mile off the road, and it was only sort of dirt track, and we’d been warned that when the monsoon came, we’d be cut off. Of course that was going to be a few months so we weren’t worried. But this ambulance turned up, and out of it was lifted an old man. He had cancer, and he was given to us - completely unexpected, no warning, he just came. We called him Pop, and dear Pop, we put him into… there were two rooms in this asbestos hut, two and a half. We put him into one of them. And we’re looking after him as best as I could, and Sidney who was helping me. A few days later, somebody else was brought - this was an old woman. And it was impossible to put the old woman in the same room as the… as Pop, so the only thing to do was to move my own bed out of the hut under a tree, a cashew nut tree. As it happened, this combined with the fact that we had no vehicles, was a blessing, because occasionally Nina would bring people out to see us, and if they were the ladies, they invariably said, “The poor boys, living out under the trees. Must do something for them”. And if they were the men, they would say, “Well, I don’t think this is quite British. And the sooner we get this on a proper footing, the better”. So in next to no time, we had a committee, a small committee. [John laughs] And we held our first committee meeting on packing cases, round a… under the tree, I seem to spend half my life round packing cases and rooms that are being built.

08:57 GLC: Now, the one thing that the committee talked about was money. And one of the distinguished Indian ladies said, “Now, look. We have two patients, we have no furniture, and we have 35 rupees in the bank” - that was about £5 in the bank - “What are we going to do?”. So, Nina said, “I know. My husband will put on a pantomime”. Well, everybody said, “Very good idea”. And I’m convinced they didn’t know what a pantomime was. And of course Jimmy - Nina’s husband - knew nothing about this. And evidently she was waiting for a convenient moment to break the news to him. But the convenient moment didn’t somehow come, and at the next meeting we’d got Jimmy as chairman. And as the meeting was started, one of the Indian ladies jumped up and said, “Ladies and gentlemen, before we start this meeting, I think we’d like to thank Mr Carley for agreeing to put on a pantomime”. First he’d heard of it! We’ve always wondered what happened when they got home. But the pantomime was put on, and on one condition - Jimmy said, “I insist that you get the Governor”. We thought, “Well, what’s this pantomime going to be like?”. But the pantomime went on, and the Governor came, and what was more important, the Minister of Finance. And it was the first pantomime being put on in Bombay, and it was so successful that it had to be put on another four days after Christmas. And the Minister of Finance, as it happened, had been at school in England, and he’d never seen a pantomime until this day. And he was so pleased with it that as he went out, he said, in a very loud voice, “If there’s anything you want, I hope you’ll tell me”. And he said it publicly, so that really, he was committed. And we said, “Yes, sir, what we want is a road”. Have we run out of film?

10:57 John: Yes.

11:00 GLC: I thought you had, but I wasn’t—

11:02 John: I wanted to leave it running so that you could continue.

11:05: Speech ends

11:09: End of recording

**End of Transcription**