**Leonard Cheshire Resonate Project**

File title: ‘John’ interviews GLC about his life and work

Duration: 11:47

Transcription Date: 09/10/20

Archive Number: AV-S 015 Part 8

Start of Transcription

00:05 GLC: Slate 3, take 1.

[silence and intermittent muffled speech until 00:24]

00:24 John: Action. Of course, parallel with this wonderful development overseas, the United Kingdom homes were also developing, weren’t they?

00:34 GLC: Yes, they were developing very much. I mustn't give the… can you give me another question?

00:43 John: Yes.

[recording jumps ahead]

00:46 John: With this exciting development overseas, you had a large number of homes… I won’t put it that way. With the development overseas, you not only had an expansion of your work in the United Kingdom, but different kinds of homes were opening up, weren’t they?

01:02 GLC: Yes, there was a variety of… can you stop? I’m not there—

[recording jumps ahead]

01:10 GLC: Slate 3, take 2.

01:16 Man: Camera ready.

01:17 John: Action. Leonard, you had this great development overseas, but of course in England, or Britain, you had trustees that your father informed for you - did they also control the overseas homes?

01:30 GLC: No, the trustees never had any control of any sort overseas. The same principle we adopted in England of leaving the individual committees to run their own homes was adopted overseas, so every country is completely autonomous. It has its own trust overseas, the same as we do here, though they probably operate a bit differently. But of course, all this period did see the emergence of the trust here in Britain. I know that the trust sounds a rather remote organisation, but in fact it was the keystone, or the cornerstone, on which everything was built. In a sense, it was taking over my place. See, when there’d been the first four, five homes, I was the link; I was going round. I was the person who the committees might come to - though not necessarily agree my views. Now the trust was taking this over. So we were forming a body of people who represented the different areas in which their homes, and they had to work out their own constitution, their own way of working from scratch in the same way the committees do. Although it may sound a peculiar parallel, in their building up I see the same struggle as the homes, because they had to face a completely new situation.

02:49 John: So, each individual trustee is responsible for a group of homes?

02:54 GLC: Yes, more or less. Every home will have a trustee who looks after it. The trustees come from different parts of the country - they used to meet once a month. Now they had to, and still do, they had to meet their own travelling expenses themselves. It’s often been argued, well, should we not pay their travelling expenses? Because to come down from Scotland, or Wales, is a big expense. But every time it’s been brought up, the trustees said, “no, if we’re asking the washerwoman or whoever you like to come and help in a home, and she doesn’t get her bus fare, how can we as trustees claim our expenses?”. So, they met these expenses entirely themselves. We have this problem, now that the homes have grown to a reasonable number now, of personal contact. We’ve got this perpetual problem of remoteness. You have to have a body who are going to look at it from the top - going to see the long-term perspective. Going to coordinate the activities of the homes; going to ensure that the aims and principles are kept, and at the same time allow virtual autonomy to each home. The problem is, how do you marry these two rather contradictory elements? And there’s no denying that this is a great problem, and I don’t think we’ve entirely solved it. And I’m quite sure that many homes feel that the trustees are rather remote. In fact, they’re giving a great deal of their time, and they don’t want to be remote. But there are just the sheer difficulties of knowing how to overcome it. And this is one thing that we’ve undoubtedly got to work out.

04:36 John: Yes, this will also come round to management. A management structure for what is now a vast empire, isn’t it, the Cheshire Foundation?

04:45 GLC: I should hate to think of it as an empire. My great hope is that we will go on trying to meet the need. In other words, expanding. But without building up bureaucracy - the one thing that I am absolutely insistent on in my own mind, and I know that the trustees are too, is that we do not build up the overhead administration and expenses beyond the point than is really necessary. And there’s a great temptation as you grow to say, “well, we must have proper control, we must have a big office staff”, and so on. We are struggling not to do this. Of course, we can claim that our administration expenses are less than 2% - that’s very low. The danger is, of course, you may make economy of administration costs an end in itself, which is quite wrong. But I know that one must keep these to a minimum. We like to think of each home as being its own little unit, developing in its own way, and experimenting. Because we know perfectly well that we are in a new field, that the whole world is beginning to work out the problem of how to integrate a disabled person into the community so that he feels part of it; so that he can play the fullest possible role in the community.

06:08 GLC: We have a tiny little part in this big, whole new movement. Our role, we must admit, is limited. But it’s an important one. And so, my wish is that we will always be forward looking, and I hope that every member of the foundation, whether resident, or staff, or helper, or trustee, will always be ready to rethink. I find it’s very easy to fall into a groove, you know - what I have done in the last 15 years has been successful, therefore go on. But it isn’t necessarily right. Things change, circumstances change. What was right yesterday may not be right today. And this ability to rethink, to examine yourself, is all important. And that’s why we so badly need the young. We need involvement of the young at every level. And I think that of all the things that have struck me over these years, it’s precisely been the concern of young people, from all of them - from primary school upwards - in the needs of others. To me, this is very moving. It’s very inspiring. It’s given me more… how can I put it - support, and almost motivation than anything. Because I know it wasn’t so in my day. From the first day that that little boy walked up St Theresa’s with his duck, to today when schools in West Lancashire have raised £13,000, more than half the sum that the whole committee has raised in two years, for the building of a new home. It’s been the involvement of the young. Of course, the young have got to learn how to do it. They come with vigour, and initiative, and idealism - great idealism. But it also needs channeling into the right path. And this is where I hope the Service Corp is going to play its great role. The Service Corp will accumulate knowledge of the disabled. We can’t offer diplomas so that the person who goes through the course will go out into the world with a diploma, sadly we can’t. But I do believe that we can offer know-how. And we want to offer security in a future. We want to think that the future matrons - or whatever you call them, house mother, whatever the name is, it doesn’t matter - of the homes, will come out of the Service Corp. In the Service Corp, we see the means of providing the right care staff. It’s a joint effort - involvement by residents, by trustees, by committees, and by members of the Service Corp. We’re all together trying to work out what is the right way of building a home and running a home in which those who live in it, the residents, can flower. Can feel that here is a life that they want, and therefore are going to make their tremendous contribution to society.

09:12 John: The disabled making immense contributions to society?

09:15 GLC: Well, they’ve made - they’ve changed my whole life. I mean, they’ve given me something to live for, to work for. It’s the same with Sue, my wife, her life is entirely pulled by the great example of the disabled. And the privilege, really, of being with them. And this feeling of unity you know - they draw us together. In my travels throughout the world, they’ve enabled me to meet people and know people I’d never have met otherwise; to learn new ideas. You realise your own ideas you thought were so good are not always so good. We need this involvement of the whole world, whatever nationality, whatever condition of the country - each has got his own contribution to make. We’re trying to gather it within our tiny little field. I don’t pretend our field is big; it isn’t. But it’s our field and we must do the best we can in it. And I hope that everybody who’s concerned will feel the same and out of it we’ll get fulfillment, and the realisation that a tiny little drop makes up the ocean.

10:22 John: Yes, and of course this tiny little drop, this field, brings its own energy - the place of the disabled in society - which must cause intense discussion at the homes, which these young people will have to cope with.

10:34 GLC: You get such differing opinions, people feel so deeply about it, you get almost fights in a way that perhaps you don’t get in normal life. Because people identify their own ideas with the good of the cause, and therefore they feel they must fight for it. Often, in charities, you get this almost bitter clash. It really derives from good will. This conviction that what I am doing is for the good of the resident. You also find, of course, an insularity amongst charities. You find that each charity thinks that this is the all-important world, I mustn’t let anybody else interfere with me, I am the person who should get the most help from the neighbourhood. There is an unfortunate insularity amongst charities - in a sense what is their strength is also a source of their weakness. And I think this is something we must fight against; we must be willing to collaborate with others, to give… to find ways of working together, even sharing resources. We must not become insular.

11:45: Speech ends

11:47: End of recording

End of Transcription