

Transcription of an interview conducted 10 May 2018

Interviewee: LESLIE GREEN (LG)

Interviewer: ALISTAIR CARTWRIGHT (AC)

Also present: MARIANNE GREEN

Berrylands, England

Transcription: JAREK ZABA

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**[00:24] AC: So erm er-I'm Alistair Cartwright. I'm helping with the ShedX project. Er with Community Brain and the Kingston History Centre. Er and I'm here talking to Leslie Green. Er we're in his living room. Er-on Endway, very near the allotments. Erm so err Leslie, thank you very much for-for meeting with me today. Erm. Can you just tell me about erm your experience on the - on the Tolworth erm Main allotments?**

LG: Er yes I first had an allotment in erm 1965. We moved here in 1963. Which is 50 odd plus 8 years ago so I've had my allotment as well for more than 50 years. Worked on it nearly every year and er - it's showed a - the site itself has changed over the year. But er what in the early years all the allotments came right up to our garden fence. Erm in 19-the early 1990s that ceased to happen because the allotments were closed i-down for a period of about 18 months, 2 years. When they were af-a fully cleared. Erm. But erm but well uh-uh - th- well on a whole lot of the allotments were cleared. And the council were suggesting that erm th- the site would be changed and er they wanted housing to come onto the end at the bottom of our a-garden so it was going to be quite an extensive housing site at that stage. Erm. It was a lot of local protests at the time. Err th- [pause] and er from - from local residents. And erm it m-meetings were arranged with councillors and in the end even though the - it went - it went in front of an inspector who I believe granted position - err permission to build houses, make it a housing site. But in fact the local councillors said no in the end because of local opinion. And it was kept as a o-as an open space. So I'm not sure what degree of open space - whether the a- the council could come back on that and an-and because they got permission to build suddenly say right we're closing it down, we had permission in 1992, build houses and we'll carry on I'll build them. Particularly now there's pressure on the site to er - er build erm houses. Err. I-I - when that decision was made not to build the allotments came back, they were there all sort of redone and all replanned out. And erm the h-area there were to be no allotments coming up to the fence of N- er to the fence to the Endway. Was to be left as a wild area which it is in quite a lot of places. And erm [pause] I-err but if residents in Endway wished to still use it as allotment you could apply for permission and get an agreement which I got through - to work - to work an allotment there so I do. I - because y'know I behind the house I have an allotment. And going up to the - the main - well - well one of the road - the allotment roads. But there - y'know so some-some that worked as allotments. There are allotments this side of the track that goes in but they only come in ten metres. So there's generally a - a wild area for foxes and birds and squirrels and what have you.

**[04:33] AC: So you said that it - it originally came right up to the end of your garden. So I c-l can see your garden right now from the living room. So it came - the allotments went up to the fence.**

LG: People - cos we got quite a long fence - cos we're a corner house we had quite a long fence at the back here. Sort of b-bites a triangular shape [?]. So we had quite a number of people y'know who worked in their allotments - well I say quite a number, sort of 3 or 4 working allotments along at **[05:00]** the end there, yes, mmm.

**[05:03] AC: And what was that like that you could - you could see those allotments just over the fence or see people working there.**

LG: People - yeah people went there all the time so it was OK. Y'know we had a bit of screening I suppose. From - from our garden to the allotment but er we we - you got quite friendly with the people working over the fence y'know. W-w-we got to know them very well. Mm.

**[05:25] AC: And erm - and some of those people erm - d-did you err - you got to know them well you said, did you stay in touch with some of those people?**

LG: Not really - well not - no not once they went, not really, no.

**[05:40] AC: Yeah and -**

LG: Y'know we'd ack-we'd acknowledge them in the street or anything. We didn't have any social contact really.

**[05:48] AC: Yeah but they - they were a presence. And you talked about the council's plans in the 90s to build housing on - on some of this land and then how - how that changed in the face of local protest. Erm. Errm. So what was - what was that moment like? Was it - was it quite tense?**

LG: I think it was tense at the time yeah, yeah. People were very unhappy y'know. Not only people working allotments, people along here backing onto the allotments, but generally all round to suddenly find there was going to be a big housing estate put on here. Mm.

**[06:22] AC: And did you erm - did you in a way hear from the other side of that argument? Y'know. Was it - people saying actually we really need this?**

LG: No. No I can't say - I didn't go to any of the meetings, I just let the - I helped in the pr- y'know in some of the protests I met - I remember I got erm err err I went and stood at Marks & Spencer with a board for a petition. And I did that one Saturday afternoon. I remember doing that.

**[06:51] AC: And do you remember the kind of - what that was like?**

LG: Oh peo-well yeah. Yeah quite - people would sign y'know and say oo we're protesting about building on open land just at the back here. Will you sign our petition? Of course most people you ask sign.

[Laughs]

**[07:09] AC: And. So that was in the high street that you were doing that petition signing was it, yeah?**

LG: Yes. Er - y'know Tolworth Broadway. Outside Marks & Spencer.

**[07:18] AC: And then you also talked about - so as a result of those protests some of this area they wanted to develop became a wild area you called it. W-what's that like? Is that - does that still exist in some form?**

LG: Well the wild area. Yeah. Yeah. Still along there. On the park where they put in the Millennium Green because they put in the Millennium Green right at the end. And they - and that separated again by this sort of I think er - up down to the old track. Er where there's no er - there's no div-y'know there hasn't been any - I don't think are any allotments in there now. Unless people from Endway want to do them.

**[07:58] AC: And you mentioned the wild area, like the animals that you would see. Erm what's that like? Y'know. On your allotment.**

LG: Well you do see the occasional fox and er squirrels, plenty of squirrels around. Birds. Good for birdlife round here. Mm.

**[08:13] AC: Erm. And so you've had the allotment since the 1960s you say?**

LG: Yeah, '65.

**[08:19] AC: '65. Can you erm - can you remember what erm - what your first day on the allotment was like? So you got granted the allotment and then.**

LG: I can't really say.

**AC: Or maybe in those early days what it was...**

LG: Mm. Yeah there - y'know plenty of people - more people worked them then and er - I erm - my wife Marianne she lived down the end of Endway, her family home was - we're at number 1, her family home was at 61. And her father had an allotment so I had experience but before we came here working on his allotment at the back of his house.

**[08:57] AC: And sorry where was that, his house?**

LG: 61 Endway.

**AC: Oh so just down the road. So was that when you were a bit younger? That was before the 60s?**

LG: Oh yeah well when I was married y'know.

**[09:11] AC: But when you were - when you were like a lad? Or a bit later?**

LG: Yeah. Yeah. I - yeah well I was 20. When did I get married? I was 22. Mm. So about that age. Early 20s.

**[09:25] AC: Erm. And I - can I ask did the allotment - did that play a role in how you met each other?**

LG: No. Not at all.

**AC: Just a shared passion with your - Marianne's.**

LG: No because I went to your house and her father had y- y'know - he worked the allotment like I do here. I - I had just gotten involved when I was over, I couldn't help it.

**[09:46] AC: And in terms of the things that you produce on the allotment. What's - what's - what's that like? Like what do you grow?**

LG: Oh it's OK. Gives us a - y'know quite a - quite a good -

**AC: What do you grow on it?**

LG: What do I grow? I put in potatoes. **[10:00]** Er - runner beans. Erm. Broad beans. A variety - other beans as well. Er. I mentioned potatoes. Tomatoes we do. Onions. Again y'know if some years you have successes, other years you have failures. Gardening's like that. Mm.

**[10:20] AC: And erm - so does it give you enough y'know - like how much does it provide you each-**

LG: Oh quite a - yeah quite a - y'know, beans and broad beans. We - we wouldn't buy those normally from - from a shop because we pop them in the freezer once they're picked and they last us probably - y'know for the year. Or even longer than the year. We have blackberries, blackberries that grow in the wild areas out there - I don't know if I've put those in. We grow raspberries as well. Raspberries we have quite a number of. Erm. In - they go into the freezer. That's the soft fruit - gooseberries. We have a rhubarb patch there which gives us a little bit of rhubarb, we don't have too much. We don't freeze that do we? No.

**[11:06] AC: Keep that fresh. So it provides a lot of your fruit and veg then?**

LG: Mm. Quite a bit. Oh yeah. Yeah. I don't - y'know if I did a profit and loss account about it I'm not sure -

**AC: You'd break even maybe.**

LG: Possibly break even with the costs and the - of - the seed that I have to buy and what have you from the labour I put in it, it probably wouldn't be particularly economical.

**[11:30] AC: Erm.**

LG: It's a pleasure not y'know - it's not a - I find it a pleasure, it's not a - it's not a task. It's a pleasure.

**[11:39] AC: Erm. And in terms of the labour is it - is it quite hard? Is it quite hard work?**

LG: Oh digging, digging quite hard yeah.

**AC: For us non gardeners how would you describe that?**

LG: We've had a very bad winter and this year it's probably looking the worst it's ever look-done really. The winter I couldn't get on it and then suddenly it's been very hot, we've had two very hot spells. Which has sucked all the weed - the weeds come up wonderfully well.

**[12:09] AC: Right yeah. Cos of that change in the temperature.**

LG: But I've got bits done. I-I'll get it - I'll get some done by the end of the month. I-it'll be OK what I produce.

**[12:19] AC: And you talked about good and bad years in terms of the produce. Can you remember a particularly bad year there was?**

LG: There was one in 1970 th-the drought I think that one, I can't remember the precise year of the 70s but it was a long time ago. And I don't think we had very much water on the allotment y'know cos there

was I think th-there water was restricted generally. And that's er - you need - you need - you need to have a water - mm and use hosepipes and that type of thing to keep er - keep it running in the - in the summer months. Mm, mm.

**[12:54] AC: And I'm just thinking about how the climate is. It's changing. Have you noticed a change in that? I feel like-**

LG: I can't say no - I can't say particularly. Y'know no - it's so varied anyway. I couldn't say y'know I notice any particularly great change. Mm.

**[13:12] AC: Erm. And - I mean what - can I ask what-what would you say you most like about having an allotment?**

LG: Oh well the - the pleasure it gives me. I like gardening, I like going out there and doing something quite the opposite of what I would normally do.

**[13:32] AC: Er - so - so when you - when you were working do you mind me asking what you-what you - what you did for a-**

LG: I was a chartered accountant by profession. So figures, all figures. Still is quite a lot of figures. [Laughs]. I y'know - as I was once the - the treasurer of the Friends of Kingston Museum and that type of thing so y'know I've done those types of jobs I do locally.

**[13:57] AC: So that must have made a nice change to do the-**

LG: To come home and do - yeah. Yeah. Y'know I've - I don't like sitting around anyway. I don't - I'm not a sitter in the sun, if I'm getting sun I'd rather be working and putting - putting seeds in or weeds in. [Laughs]

**[14:16] AC: And - I mean you said y'know spend a lot of time doing the gardening on the allotment but also your job was an accountant and those skills have also been useful - have there been other - I mean I know there's an allotment society, is that right? Have you -**

LG: Well the horticultural soc-y'know yeah the Royal Horticultural Society we've always belonged to, used to go to Wisley quite - fairly often. We don't go so much now do we? It's more too much walking there now y'know. Mm.

[Marianne Green: You belonged to Malden didn't you?]

LG: Oh that one yeah. Well this allotment society cl-this allotment society - we used to belong to The Hut **[15:00]** over there. Y'know The Hut don't you? At the entrance. Well th-y'know that used to be the Tolworth Allotment Society. Of course they closed down so I moved - I still go to the Hut but it's now in New Malden. Get supplies and that type of thing.

**[15:16] AC: OK. So what kind of things do you get from them?**

LG: Oh er - not erm. Let me think, what do I normally get? I I-I normally get canes, y'know, bamboo canes are always useful for supporting things. And er err - fertilisers I suppose to make things I get.

**[15:35] AC: So they sell those on?**

LG: Yeah. Cheaper than the supermarkets. That's why I go there.

**AC: OK. So what does that work then? How is that all organised?**

LG: Well you go - they have a hut with these things in it. They y'know-  
[Marianne: Voluntary workers].

LG: Yeah voluntary people there. So you just go in and buy it as normal.

**[15:58] AC: OK. That sounds good.**

LG: That's what that hut used to be. It used to be full of canes and bags of compost and all that type of thing.

**[16:07] AC: But now you go down to the New Malden one.**

LG: I go to the New Malden one, yeah. Mm.

**[16:14] AC: OK. And I mean with those - kind of New Malden group there and previously there was the Hut here and the Society attached to it. Was it as well as a practical thing was it a social thing as well?**

LG: No. Just practical. Yeah, yeah. No there was - there may have been a social side to it but I don't - y'know p-I think the Malden one has outings, it has a-it holds monthly lectures that type - I don't norm-I never done any of that, no.

**[16:45] AC: Do you know of what kind of things those are, those outings and lectures?**

LG: Well normally to well known gardens around the country, closeby to London I guess. But I - I've never experienced one so can't say.

**[17:03] AC: Erm. And through - and through doing - doing this. Y'know doing - doing the work on the allotment and buying in the seeds and stuff. Do you find erm - h-how's your erm - has your like err knowledge of gardening changed?**

LG: Oh I think so, yeah. Better gardener - not a brilliant gardener, no I'm not, mm. But y-yeah - I've been alright haven't I? Fairly consistent with what we have.

**[17:35] AC: And what kind of things have you picked up?**

LG: Oh it's hard to - it's hard to say. You just y'know g-guess. You just get a bit better at doing things - know what to do y'know I do the same things if it's [?] just do the same thing. Year after year. Mm.

**[17:52] AC: And erm - can I ask just to get into the nitty gritty of it like, what would be a typical day that you - you decided today you're going to the allotment, how would you start up?**

LG: Well if - well generally if I had nothing else to do I y'know I - after eati-I've had my meals here as usual and I'd go at - I'd go over there or in my greenhouse, not so much on a hot day. But erm and do-and do work over there. I think you would agree Marianne that I spend more time there than I do - than I would in the - I'd rather do work there rather than paint the house. I've never been very good at that. I find it much more pleasant being outside. Even mowing the grass I quite enjoy.

**[18:46] AC: And you - even in the cold you don't?**

LG: Yeah. Oh yes, yeah. I'm not too worried about - more so now. When I was younger I didn't worry too much about the cold, I'd feel it a bit more now.

**[18:57] AC: Erm. So erm. Er - and then d-is there a particular routine on a day like that? Certain processes you do?**

LG: No, no. What needs to be done gets done. Or tr-try and get it done. I'm - I'm running quite a bit behind, I should think I'm a month behind on the allotment at the moment cos of the bad weather.

**[19:19] AC: So what are you growing now?**

LG: Well I've got broad beans coming up. I've got mangetout sort of er - what do they call him, other word for the mangetout pea. It's a type of pea. Er - potatoes are coming up erm - I've got er some onions in. I have a few lettuce in. Bit slow. Er. The raspberry canes are coming on nicely. For raspberries. The erm gooseberry bushes have gone mad this year because of the amount of wet we've had and the sun pulling em up. Brighter weather pulls - so much moisture in them **[20:00]** coming up to... Yeah the thing's coming on but the digging has been the problem this year. The ground hasn't been in a good condition to dig it over.

**[20:12] AC: Why's that?**

LG: Well because of the wet. Very very wet. And at times very cold. Mm. Mm.

**[20:19] AC: So it gets kind of -**

LG: So it's partly me - it's the weather and partly me because I'm not willing to go out there and freeze. You can't - you can't dig a very wet ground.

**AC: It's just too -**

LG: Yeah that's right. Bit too gooey. Mm.

**[20:37] AC: Erm. And er coming close to the end but erm. Erm. I just wanted to ask because you said y-you've seen it change over the years. W-I mean when you think about the future of the allotment erm - what do you imagine?**

LG: I would hope it continues y'know as it is. Yeah. But I hope - there always used to be a lot - a lot more people, a lot of retired men used to do a lot of allotment work in the old day. When your dad was still doing allotments on a Saturday afternoon, the ground would be quite a lot of people around y'know. Older me-older men. But er doing it and er but you don't get that normally if it's er if they come up er err it's sort of er y-young - it's younger people who [coach here?] come up in their cars, do a bit and jump in their cars and then they're off again. So you don't see so many people out there as you used to. Mm. I think that's the different - the change in picture. Mm. I don't think you get so many re-retired men working an allotment these days. There are other - so many other things to do. Mm.

**[21:52] AC: Why is that?**

LG: Well as I say other - just other things to do. Whereas - I suppose when I started in 1960s OK, y'know.

There we - a lot of men were following what their fathers did still y'know. Going off to their allotment, y'know. There was a [pleasure in] people, didn't have gardens.

**[22:17] AC: So I mean in - in your view is it very much something that's - it's mostly men as opposed to women doing it?**

LG: It was then, it was then. Quite a few - a number of women about out there yeah.

**AC: So there were some women gardeners out on the allotments back in the 60s?**

LG: One or two women, weren't they?

[Marianne: Oh yeah]

LG: Was always men were fairly predominant weren't they.

**[22:46] AC: And has that changed? With younger people?**

LG: Well I'd say there's not so many older men.