

Transcription of an interview conducted 10 May 2018

Interviewee: MARIANNE GREEN (MG)

Interviewer: ALISTAIR CARTWRIGHT (AC)

Also present: LESLIE GREEN

Berrylands, England

Transcription: JAREK ZABA

[00:04] AC: So I'm Alistair Cartwright. I'm helping with the ShedX project with Community Brain and Kingston History Centre and I'm here speaking with Marianne Green. Uh - and we're in her living room on Endway. We've just spoken to Leslie, her husband. Erm. And the date today is the 10th of May. Erm. Marianne thanks so much for - for speaking with me. Erm. Err. C-can you tell me y-your experience on - on the allotments then at Tolworth?

MG: Well m-my father always had an allotment and I lived down the other end of the road. I was used to allotments. B-but he couldn't get one for a long time a-at the end of the allotment because erm people were already occupied them. So it - we waited quite a long time to get one at the end.

[01:02] AC: How long was that that you were waiting?

MG: Oo several years, yes. When I was younger. And during the war he took on one when they dug up the allotment - the er - recreation ground. And so he had one opposite where the Red Lion used to be. Mm. That's -

[01:24] AC: So he took on additional allotments?

MG: Although there were allotments at the end of the garden he couldn't get one.

[01:29] AC: So he took on one further away?

MG: Yes. Because they dug up the recreation ground in the war. Mm.

[01:36] AC: And do you remember what that time was like dur-during the war when he ha-when your father had an allotment?

MG: Well yes. It was more important for them to produce then because a lot of things you couldn't get, yeah.

[01:54] AC: And so d-he - he - did he grow quite a lot of food then?

MG: Yes. Yeah. Yeah. Mm.

[02:03] AC: Erm. Ah - and - and so this was - this was when you were - when you were younger - when you were young - a young woman or a girl even that your father had the allotment?

MG: Yeah.

AC: Did you help him at all? Or was it very much his-

MG: I don't think a lot no. I don't think I gardened a lot then no. I mean I knew of what - about weeds and all that sort of thing which some of the youngsters don't know now. Mm.

[02:35] AC: Yeah. So you could tell - you could tell the basics and you knew a weed from a - from a lettuce. Erm. Er. And you - earlier we were talking about how the allotments originally came up to the end of the garden and you could see right through the fence and you were talking about how you would - how you would get there? Could you - could you tell me about that again?

MG: Uh- were there - always erm - por-wooden fence along and every so often they ch- they y'know came built a new one. They got damaged and they - they had to be cleared then and er - I say we - we sort of fixed a ladder and I then my father took two panels out which were easily repa-replaceable we y'know - th-that went on for many years climbing up there.

[Leslie: Over the fence yeah we did.]

MG: Which wasn't really allowed was it?

[Leslie: Not really. Not strictly but y'know].

[03:38] AC: But you had these removable panels, I like that. And so er - so your father started off - er-off gardening the allotments and you picked up a bit from him.

MG: Yes.

AC: Did you then - did you then start doing this yourself?

MG: Oh yes. As much as Les really, yeah. But often I had to do the digging to di-y'know so that he could plant the y'know. Yeah.

[04:07] AC: So did you work together on it?

MG: Oh yes.

[Leslie: Oh yes on weekends, we worked together.]

MG: And I tidied up a bit. Weeded and all the - y'know that sort of thing.

[04:20] AC: So would you usually digging would you say?

MG: Yeah. Oh yeah.

AC: And then Leslie would -

MG: Yeah because sometimes if you hadn't got it dug you couldn't plant. I was doing it y'know, yeah.

[04:35] AC: And when did you first start erm working on the allotments? Do you remember how old you were?

MG: When I - when I was a - well we were - we w-

[Leslie: Well early 20s]

MG: Used to do me mother's didn't we?

[Leslie: Yeah that's right first time.]

MG: My father died, we still did - my mother. She was interested but couldn't do it, we helped.

[Leslie: We did, oh yes.]

MG: **[05:00]** Early 20s yes. When I was 20 I mean you're not [mumbles]

[05:07] AC: So your mother had an allotment as well as your father?

MG: No when my father died she kept it on. And with our help she'd - she was able to go out in the day and weed and that sort of thing y'know. Keep her interested and she had o-older men by her side and she was - y'know she was friendly with them wasn't she?

[Leslie: Yeah well that's right]

MG: And it gave her an interest.

[Leslie: And it gave her an interest. Someone to talk to if you like.]

[05:37] AC: So was that important for her then, your mum?

MG: Yes it was, yes. Yes. Instead of y'know going out and walking the streets she sat out there, that was good, yeah.

[05:50] AC: Erm. And did she - did she do that straight away? Erm. Y'know v-very soon after your - if you don't mind me asking after your father died since you took that on.

MG: Yes we just kept the allotment on, she y'know. She kept - yeah.

[06:08] AC: Err. And I asked erm similar questions to Leslie, what's - what's - what's the thing that you like most about having an allotment?

MG: It's the fresh vegetables, you can't buy them. With the same taste as they are when you pick them. Cook them straight away, mm.

[06:32] AC: So it's yeah. It i-are there any particular things that you really value in terms of the produce?

MG: The greens I think. Especially them yeah. Varieties of greens. Broccoli in particular I think.

[Leslie: Broccoli we like yeah, we used to have. Cabbage use occasionally. Problem now we have a lot of pigeons, a lot of wood pigeons about so er y'know they'll - they'll get them first if you don't get them - if they're not covered up. I don't do - I don't do so much of that type of gardening as I would because of the what is a continual fight with the - with the pigeons, the local pigeons.]

MG: Yes we didn't use- didn't seem to have then.

[Leslie: One time we didn't have that problem, no.]

[07:18] AC: I wonder why that is. I wonder why that is the pigeons.

MG: One comes, they escalate don't they? Yeah.

[07:28] AC: Word gets around. Mm. Ah. And. Erm. And what about - is there - is there anything that you - that you don't like so much about about the allotment? Or that you'd like to change in a way?

MG: I think we look a bit messy now. Because we used to be rules and regulations, their sheds you could only have concrete sheds and concrete sheds. And only some allotment had them. But they were all *[Clock strikes]* regimented y'know, they won't all these shacks or things that they build now. The whole lot looking at it, looks a bit of a mess doesn't it? But they used to look a lot better because of that really. Mm.

[08:13] AC: Erm. Clock striking. And erm. D-do you remember the first - the first day that you were on the allot- on the allotments? Can you - can you recall that? Or one of the first times really early on?

MG: No. No cos it was - this one had been somebody else's so it wasn't that difficult was it?

[Leslie: No no.]

MG: We just got on with wh-

[08:45] AC: So it was already set up in a way?

[Leslie: Yes in a way.]

MG: Yes. Cos w-we could only get it when somebody else left it, y'know. But it hadn't been left to ruin.

[Leslie: Had to wait really 2 year from '63 when we moved in here and it was one season we met because of people who were working out y'know on their allotment out there. They erm and it's only when they gave their tenancy up that I got one y'know a - b- at the end of my garden.]

[09:18] AC: And what was there already on your plot leftover from the previous tenant?

MG: I don't remember do you?

[Leslie: We had the hut. The hut was there. The concrete hut. Which we paid - I think we paid a pound a year er for that with a tenancy agreement. But er that was dropped after a few years and then just became really ours. Mm. But other than that that was it y'know, they took their tools with them. There was nothing growing there really.]

MG: No. [?] the person before us y'know purposefully run it down, y'know. **[10:00]** Yeah.

[10:02] AC: And how do you mean by they had purposefully run it down?

MG: Well because they knew they were going to retire and not do it anymore.

[Leslie: There were no fruit bushes left or anything like that.]

[10:19] AC: Er. An-and er can I ask d-do you - do you know any of the other allotment holders?

MG: Yeah all of them, yeah.

[Leslie: Oh we did. We don't now.]

MG: No. Not now. But we used to know a- even right over the way didn't we? And I know that coalman had it and he used to fall down and we all rushed to go and pick him up. Quite a way away. Mm.

[10:47] AC: So what w-why-w- why was he always falling down?

[Leslie: Because he was elderly, elderly and a bit unsteady on his feet. He was alright when he was standing up.]

[Cross-talking]

MG: And you'd sort of exchange things. And somebody got something and you got something to give them, and it went like that you know.

[Leslie: We had a Korean at the end of my lot, we have Koreans now. And I don't think the lady who works here, I don't think speaks English so it's very difficult. Y'know. To get on with her. Er we used to have in the allotment next to mine we used to have the primary care trust - used it as an office, what you call these things, now bonding - an example f-for bonding. A primary care trust. They were y'know supposed to all come and work on it as an extra activity. Of-of of their office. And of course then the

primary care trust all got disbanded. Few years ago. This was only recently. And er there were few ladies who did it, mainly ladies came up. And then course I think that there were - there were more interested in taking the stuff they could get off the allotment rather than doing work on it. So I think the thing rather collapsed as a bonding type of thing. And it was left really for two ladies, just the money. And then they became unwell. And then it was - it's become redundant from about three years. And then they - they weren't working it at all. And there - then suddenly this year there's a erm - a l-a local man whose arrived whose started clearing it and putting things on it. So I've got somebody now who at least I can converse with, they speak the same language as I do and er - these things - the man seems very keen to get it going.]

[12:53] AC: And so when you were saying Marianne that you - you would exchange - exchange things with some of the allotment holders?

MG: Yeah.

AC: What kind of things would you exchange? Or how did that work?

MG: What- you might have a lotta - broccoli say because it kept on coming and er rhubarb or something like that you've got too much of and somebody got something you didn't grow and yeah, that's how it worked, yeah.

[13:23] AC: And that was something you regularly did?

MG: Yes. Yeah. Mm. Cos you're all like minded aren't - people need, you do it and-

Cross-talking

MG: Healthy. Healthy eating. Mm-mm.

[13:36] AC: And was that idea of healthy eating - was that - was that something that y'know you were thinking of and other people were thinking of?

MG: Yeah. W-yeah. If you - it's fresh and it's all the better isn't it? Mm.

[14:03]: AC: Erm. And d-do you think ideas about food have changed erm over your time? Y'know growing produce for yourself.

MG: Food sense.

AC: Yeah.

MG: Well yes. I mean we always knew really th-they go on about these things these days what we knew it already didn't we? In our day yeah, mm. Cos we didn't have all these foreign imports did we then? No. And every - things were seasonal. You didn't have things all the year round.

[14:45] AC: Were there erm - were there certain things er that y-you couldn't get? But you would've liked to.

MG: Well I don't any of us had a lot of money so we - if **[15:00]** y'know you didn't want to spend out on these erm e-exotic fruits and things did we?

[Leslie: No. No.]

MG: No. We just wanted to make do with what we got. Mm.

[15:18] AC: Erm. [Clears throat]. And. Er we talked a little bit about er th-the newer generation of people coming onto the allotments erm. C-could you tell me a bit about that in terms of the newer tenants?

MG: W-what? Les was saying younger people. Yeah. And they all build these surrounds and fancy things. Don't they? Where we would have y'know had

Cross-talking

[Leslie: The trend nowadays is to have a raised]

MG: Raised bed.

AC: A raised bed.

[Leslie: They're boulded round.]

Cross-talking

[Leslie: Putting boulding round it.]

MG: Before they start they build all these things. Build a shed, they put a greenhouse and y'know they have to have all these things before they get going y'know. By the time they've got going, they realise it's all a lot of work an-and leave it again.

[16:29] AC: So is that something you've seen happen quite a bit?

MG: Oh yes we didn't have all those. You walk around now-

Cross-talking

[Leslie: Oh there's some very nice allot-looking allotments over there. People do them very nicely, particularly some of the ladies a bit over, there's some very good looking ones. Mine's not good looking at all.]

[16:59] AC: Erm. And do you think the way people use their allotments has changed?

MG: I-I can't say I know about that really.

Cross-talking

MG: Not knowing - not knowing the people now I don't really. Mm. As I say, I can't be doing it all now.

[Leslie: No Marianne very difficult for her to get out, y'know walking. The ground's uneven so she can't get out there so she doesn't see people. It's quite - quite a long walk up the length of it to get to where other people are.]

MG: I'm too unsteady. I'm like the coalman now.

[17:39] AC: Need people to look out for each other. Erm. And erm you talked about erm yeah kinda this moment when the coalman fall down and you all rush t-to help. Erm. And then also exchanging. Erm was there also much erm communication between allotment holders in terms of just talking?

MG: Yeah.

[Leslie: Oh yeah.]

MG: Yeah.

[Leslie: Mm. Yeah. Partic-like you just said - particularly where it's er - y'know when we were all open. When people were working - the fence here y'know there wa-in there. Th-there - the people that had them were here quite often weren't they? So you did, more commun-now we got wild area we're rather - y'know we're cut off from the rest of the allotment holders. And I don't think there is very much a -

people come up, do their bit, and they go again. I'm thinking there's one or two of a community here. That's why - that's my - and particular they've got f-if they're more other nationalities as I say, the Koreans I think the Pole - there's some Poles doing allotment holders. You don't have that easy communication with them.]

[19:01] AC: So how has that - how has that changed things having people from different parts of the world on-

[Leslie: Oh they do a very good summer, the Koreans do a very good allotment up there. Excellent y'know - there's hardly a weed on it. Great all crops growing, fine, excellent. But the - because of the p-er - cos they have limited English p-possibly then y'know there's not that type of communication.]

[19:27] AC: Erm. And do you think that that's - do you think that that would - that that's changing?

[Leslie: Well it may do over time, yeah. Mm. Mm. Could do. But again I'm not part of it cos I'm really - I- again me down in this corner I'm rather isolated except for t-th-the man who has the allotment next to me now. And he's er - he's English, British. And er - so I can communicate with him - I've only just - y'know met him really. In the course of the last few er er couple of]

Cross-talking [20:00]

MG: We used to have other people up to the fence didn't we. We talked to

Cross-talking

[20:21] AC: Erm. And in-in terms of having y'know other y'know er-a different mixture of people on the allotments. What would you say are the positive things about that? If there are any.

MG: Well only that they are actually using the land to keep it there. Mm.

Cross-talking

[Leslie: I'd be very disappointed if we suddenly had houses. Y'know, I know there's a housing crisis in the country but if they build here it would really my - my life would change y'know. They took that away from me and I had - only had the garden.]

MG: And at first the Millennium Green was gonna be this end and the allotments remained at the other end.

[Leslie: Mm. That's right, yeah.]

MG: Well we wouldn't have liked to have stayed here actually. We would have wanted - needed to move. Because we like it, being over the back you see. We wouldn't have liked to look out on lots of houses.

[Leslie: No we fairly well screened off here, we can see Elgar Avenue over there, the houses. But they're not directly looking at us. We'd have had houses there, it would have been eye to eye wouldn't it really?]

MG: And I did go to meetings and at one time they even thought about compulsory purchase of these houses. To build a road through. And that was even came up at one of the meetings.

[21:57] AC: So at that time you discussed the possibility of actually moving house because of the - they might build on the allotments just at the end of your garden.

[Leslie: It certainly wouldn't have been the same in this corner, no.]

MG: No. That's the beauty of it. An open space really.

[22:18] AC: That's - yeah that's interesting. So would you say the allotments are for you an open space as well as a growing space?

MG: Well you got a view of something. Whereas - and they're not houses, other people's.

[Leslie: If you look this way there are a few tree but looking at housing that way, unless you sort of consciously look over in that direction you really don't see those houses in Elgar Avenue, no.]

MG: It's what we're used to it, see. I was used to it, you were used to it when you lived weren't you. Mm.

[22:55] AC: Just to go back to that moment when the council was considering compulsory purchase or similar things. Erm. Y'know that moment when the council was considering compulsory purchase and other things to get this - this development erm going erm. Er. We mentioned earlier like - there were local protests. Do you - do you - could you tell me a bit about that?

MG: Well. An- well anybody around that - Elgar Avenue people didn't want to have houses built in front of them. That was the pro- the main thing wasn't it.

Cross-talking

MG: We had Alexander

[Leslie: Residents wasn't it?]

MG: Association yes. And then they were quite heated some of these meetings.

Cross-talking

[Leslie: I can't remember his name. But it was very active in those days. I think it still exists. I certainly pay - still pay a standing order to them every year.]

MG: Do you?

[Leslie: Yeah to support their funds. And they were I think looking after the Millennium Green at the one time. I don't know if they do that now. But the man who lives over there y'know had a tractor in his back garden and used to go mow the Millennium Green. Mm. But I think that st- I don't know who does it now. We don't get much communication from them.]

MG: No I thought it was finished really.

[24:27] AC: So this is the Residents Association?

[Leslie: Yeah the Alexandra Neighbour Association - ANA they called it. Alexandra.]

Cross-talking

MG: And they had a meeting every so often and [?] didn't they? That was a sociable thing, yeah.

[24:54] AC: And those meetings you said got quite heated sometimes?

MG: Well yes some people yes did. Cos they **[25:00]** didn't want to give up their allotment. Even when we had to give them up for two years you see. That was awful. They just go wild in that time.

Mm.

[25:22] AC: And er - c-can you remember erm - did you have any meetings with the councillors then? At that time when - when there was this issue of the allotments being built on. Did you have any meetings with councillors?

MG: With the council?

[Leslie: Councillors.]

MG: Who arranged the other meetings we had?

[Leslie: I thought it was y'know the lo-the local residents association, they had meetings in these halls didn't they? With the councillors there. I know Peter Gray was one of the councillors. Mm. But there were meetings. Some of them got heated.]

Cross-talking

[Leslie: I think the local conservative councillors were fairly worried that they wouldn't be er councillors for very much longer if anything happened over there.]

[26:17] AC: Ok. So became quite a big issue.

Yeah fairly big issue.

MG: Yeah I went to them, you couldn't.

Cross-talking

Worked away things like that, couldn't go to them.

[26:30] AC: And just - if you don't mind going back in time a bit, just returning to that er the moment when your - when your father had an allotment. Erm. Er. Do you remember what - what this whole area looked like back then when-

MG: Well yes.

AC: Was it different?

MG: The houses you mean.

AC: Yeah. And just the area generally.

MG: They were all - everything was sort of new then you see. We went into that house new. And erm everything was - everything - every house was the same, every house had a hedge outside and

[Leslie: All had the same fences. No differences, no - none h- no loft extensions and all that.]

MG: Nothing like that. Everything looked the same. Everything all regimented it was, yeah. Mm.

[27:28] AC: And then it's gradually changed since then?

MG: Oo yes, a lot. We're about the only ones that haven't altered. [Laughs]. Mm. That - so that's our age. Mm.

[27:43] AC: And erm d-do you mind me asking did - did the - did - when - when the Second World War came, did that have a - did that have a - I mean maybe this is before your - your time and more your father's time. Did that have a - a big impact on the area?

MG: How can you remember that, taking the allotment on the recreation ground being taken by allotments. [?] didn't.

Cross-talking

[Leslie: I didn't know this area in the war, no. I lived in New Malden.]

[28:23] AC: So you moved at - just shortly afterwards.

[Leslie: Yeah. But only when I knew Marianne. When I was in my late teens. School. We met at school. And er - so it was only at that time that I started knowing this area. Mm.]

MG: Everybody just y'know carried on as they could, yeah.

[Leslie: Doing a lot the - a lot - their own gardens were - y'know producing food in their own back gardens and front gardens as well. When I lived in New Malden I remember my father having tomatoes in the front garden.]

MG: And we had r-rabbits and chickens.

[Leslie: And that type of thing.]

[29:08] AC: You kept them for food did you?

MG: Yeah.

AC: Where did your family keep the rabbits and the chickens?

MG: Well within the shed.

AC: In the garden?

MG: We had an extension on the garage that had a - they were put in, yeah. And then I remember us chasing the chickens round the garden. But everybody had them y'know what I mean. Because it was the - you had rabbits.

[Leslie: We had rabbits.]

MG: Your mother couldn't get eat them but she [laughs].

[Leslie: We had them for food, yeah. We kept them as a pet and then there would come a time you want it for a meal and they were killed. We got the local milkman - the local milkman used to do it for us. Kill the rabbit. Mm.]

[29:59] AC: And would you he do that for other [30:00] houses as well?

[Leslie: He would do it yeah.]

MG: Yeah. It was all more friendly and neighbourly [?] than now.

[30:15] AC: Did - did - did you er - how did you find that? Having-having the rabbits and the chickens and they'd end up on your plate.

MG: [??] I say, it was a new estate so all young people and lots of children y'know. It's what you were brought up really.

[30:42] AC: Erm. And did people ever keep animals in the allotments as well? Chickens.

MG: No. No. Th-we did have a donkey - somebody er parked one not far from us. And then when my children were young there was a donkey there for a while, whether that was allowed really and what have you I don't

[Leslie: No it wasn't.]

Cross-talking

[Leslie: I think they were told.]

MG: I could take my children out there and have a look at the donkey.

Cross-talking

[Leslie: Well I think the idea was that it had some grazing there for it.]

[31:26] AC: So the donkey was just there?

[Leslie: Mm.]

MG: Yes.

[Leslie: They probably had a shed for it or something.]

MG: Wouldn't be allowed now. Well it probably wasn't then really, but I mean - it's not erm not good for it to be - I suppose it was on a chain y'know. They wouldn't allow that now would they?

[31:50] AC: And you mentioned that you took - did you say your children out there? Did you say that you took your children out to see the donkey sometimes?

MG: Well yes. Y'know you want to take the children off for a little walk, there it was. Just at the end here wasn't it? Mm. And you could hear it you see. Mm.

[32:11] AC: And er - and did they generally - your - your kids did they erm did they spend time on the allotment? Would they go out there?

MG: Ah- only yes, you still - try and get them to do something y'know, yes.

AC: Get them to help out?

[Leslie: Yeah. Have an interest. Mm.]

MG: All part of their learning.

[32:37] AC: Any luck with that?

[Leslie: I don't think we were very successful but I think one of our - we have two sons and a daughter. Our youngest son y'know looks after his garden - I think he took some. Learnt something from it. I don't think our oldest son did.]

Cross-talking

[Leslie: I've got to go out at 1 o'clock Alistair. I've got to have my lunch before.]

[33:08] AC: Let's wrap it up. Thank you very much.