

Mapping Museums project interview transcript

Name: Joan D’Arcy, Geoff Sadler and Leonard Ashton

Role: co-founders

Museum: Little Chester Heritage Centre

Location of interview:

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Interviewer(s): Toby Butler

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For readability the transcript has been made using ‘intelligent’ transcription (removing ums, ers etc).

TB: Ok, so first of all, if I can ask, Geoff, I'll start with you. Can you just give me your name and your date of birth if you don't mind.

GS: My name is Geoffrey Sadler, XX-XXX 1933.

TB: Thank you. And Geoff. What role have you had as far as the organisation of the museum goes?

GS: Well I'm secretary of the history group. And obviously I was one of the starters of the museum here, yes.

TB: Brilliant. That's great. Thanks Geoff. And Joan. Same for you. Name and date of birth please.

(0:00:37.2)

JDA: Yes, Joan D'Arcy. And it's XX-XXX 1940.

TB: Lovely. And your role?

JDA: Well I was one of the people who started it. It arose out of the local history group, Little Chester Local History Group. And I was the Chairman. And it was ourselves, committee members who got it going.

(0:00:56.8)

TB: Ok. That's great. Good. And Leonard please, the same for you.

LA: Leonard Ashton, XX-XXX 1928.

TB: Lovely.

LA: And I, well I was a member of the history group, and was the Vice Chairman while Joan was the Chairman, when we began the group.

(0:01:15.1)

TB: Ok. That's lovely. And just a couple of, before we go on to actually talk about the early days, just some basic questions. As far as the organisation goes for this museum, is it part of the history society, or is it in fact a separately organised organisation?

JDA: It's part of the history group.

TB: Oh right, ok. That's important. And is the history group a charity?

JDA: No.

TB: Ok. Do you have a Board of Trustees? What sort of governance structure do you have?

JDA: No we don't have a Board of Trustees. We just have a committee. And aims and objectives, as anyone else.

TB: Ok. Lovely. And do you pay anyone at all in terms of the work on the museum or to supervise it?

GS: Pay in what sense?

TB: Is it all volunteers?

JDA: Yes.

(0:02:12.7)

TB: Oh I see, ok. Lovely. Great. Well look it sounds to me like the history group is quite important as it runs it. So you can just give me a bit of the sense of the history of the history group. And that goes back before the establishment of the museum.

JDA: Yes. I suppose it was in the 1980s that groups began to become active in this area. There was a community group set up. A resident's association. And a gentleman named Clifford Burton who started a newsletter, which is still going in different forms. And he also helped to found the history group. And I think that was about 1983. And in 1986 they put on an open-air exhibition of Life in Roman England on a patch of ground within the Roman fort area. The fort area being about 500 metres from here. And for that he made a model village which we still have some of. And then they built a full-sized village on the basis of his model.

TB: Wow. Right.

JDA: We have a load of photographs of that. And it ran for a week. It got a lot of attention. So they got a history group. They got quite a lot of things they began to collect. One of the ladies, Elwin Kitchen, became an archivist. At that time they were meeting in the daytime.

And they were a small group. But they had, as I say, they'd begun to collect things. And after Cliff died I think it was about 1991, it was a question of what happens to his village. And the family would like it to go somewhere. We had a lot of debate. And at the end of that it was decided, I'd become the Chairman of the history group by that time, it was decided that we would look for somewhere where we could put it on display together with other things we had. But we were not able to find one. So we spent a few years looking and wishing. And then in 2000 the church had a new vicar and he was very interested in history. His name was Eric Thompson. And he saw that there was an empty aisle, the south aisle of the church used to have pews, and they had been removed. And within a few weeks of arriving he said, 'Would you like this as a heritage centre?' So it was entirely due to Eric Thompson that we're here.

(0:05:04.3)

TB: Lovely. Ok. Would you like a chair? Do you want to come and join us? No, you're ok. That's fine. All right. No problem. So it sounds like, so there's two important figures here isn't there? Just tell me a little bit about Clifford and his background and interest.

JDA: Clifford had been in the printing industry until he retired. Excuse me just a moment.

TB: Sure.

LA: He and his family had lived in the area over many years.

JDA: He wrote that.

TB: This is *Little Chester, Tales of a Township within the City of Derby*.

JDA: Yes, and later we printed that with photographs.

LA: He was organist and choir master at the adjacent church, which was the daughter church, or was it the sister church, of St Mark's, which is just across the way there. And he did a lot of work with the choir in addition to the work in here.

JDA: I was going to look for a photograph of him, which I can find you later and you can make a copy of that if you wish.

(0:06:12.7)

TB: That's great. And just, it was interesting that this came about in the early 1980s. I'm just wondering, what was going on at that time in terms of this area? And why do you think the history group came about at that particular time rather than 10 years before or 10 years afterwards? What was in the air?

JDA: I can't explain that.

GS: No, it just happened. I wasn't around then.

JDA: We'd come to live here in 1980, no, yes about 1980. And we became aware of the history group. And I can remember a visit from our local councillor soon after we arrived asking whether I'd be willing to start up a history group, because I was a teacher. And me saying, 'Well not really because I'm working.' But Cliff was very keen. And so that's how it came to be set up. But other than that it does seem to be a time of a bit of a resurgence of local activities. One of the keys may have been that there used to be a school, St Paul's school, which was just behind the church, a little way behind the church. And that was closed after a major flood in 1965, so it was closed by 1967. And that had been a very big part of the community. I mean Leonard went to that school. And he will tell you a bit more.

(0:07:42.0)

LA: I was, well I came here when I was one in 1928. And lived on the main Mansfield Road, and was here all during the war. And a lot of people were brought together because of the war. And the school was, and we had evacuees in the school and things like that. And people liked to meet together and they could meet together in the school. We began, towards the end of the war, a dramatic society. And that brought one or two people, one whose name is still known now, as a young girl, it was in pantomime that I produced, and that is Paddy Green who is Gill Archer in the Archers.

TB: Oh really?

LA: And she's still with us. Although she's not 100 like the present one. [laughter]

JDA: And then towards the end, I think it was 1971, this became an improvement area. So lots of things were improved if you like. And some of the streets were opened up. And some were closed to traffic. That might have been a little bit to do with it. But I can't put a finger on exactly why.

(0:09:01.9)

TB: Just on the improvement, was that connected with the, you mentioned the railway line going in the '60s. You mentioned the foundry that's still empty though. But kind of industrial clearance happening in that period.

JDA: No the foundry was still going. It had become E W Bliss and that has, I don't think has much to do with this. But the removal of the railway line certainly made a difference. It opened up streets which had had a railway line running through them. In the case of the church, they

actually took down the church boundary walls, saying we wanted to open the whole area to the public. But that's 1970s.

GS: The railway's on an embankment as well which is very prominent. So when that was removed obviously, it was very open.

(0:09:54.4)

TB: I see yes. So suddenly you could cross that line that was cutting across the community.

LA: It was quite a high embankment wasn't it?

JDA: Yes.

TB: So the embankment was taken out as well?

ALL: Yes.

GS: Everything was taken.

TB: Oh wow, gosh, that's really dramatic then.

JDA: There was an issue which started the community group, and I'm just trying to remember exactly because I wasn't here.

LA: That was Peter Wood, wasn't it.

JDA: Yes. There was an issue of I think it was children crossing over to school. I can't remember the exact course, but led to the founding of the community group. And I think, and also the core of the resident's association, I think that's what got people thinking more of community matters.

TB: Oh that's interesting.

JDA: And the history group really grew out of the community group. So we've got a succession of things happening.

LA: It's fair to say Chester Green was a community in itself though, wasn't it? There were long term families at that time.

GS/JDA:Yes.

GS: There were long term residents at that time, living near to each other.

(0:10:59.8)

TB: I see. So it's quite distinct from the city? It's very interesting that the community group came about because of this history. And it was really about, you think, perhaps road safety. Was that, some big roads going through the area?

LA: The main Mansfield Road went through the area.

GS: Main Mansfield

LA: either way till [unclear: 0:11:18.6]

TB: Yes.

JDA: I can't ask Marie, can I Marie? I can't really quite remember. I wasn't living here at the time. So it's very difficult without...

TB: Don't worry, no that's fine. It's no problem.

LA: One tradition that I go back to is talking about the main road, which goes through to Little Eaton and further north. Good Friday, and there were no cars on the road at all. And so the people used to skip to Little Eaton, a big skipping rope across the road, and skip all the way to Little Eaton.

GS: There was a fair there wasn't there?

LA: There was a fair at Little Eaton.

TB: Oh that's lovely.

JDA: There were other things that brought the community together in that time as well. One of course was that Derby became a city, and perhaps the suburbs became more aware of a slightly new identity if you like.

(0:12:08.7)

TB: When did that happen? Was that...?

GS: '77 wasn't it?

JDA: 1977.

TB: Was it? Oh I see. So was there some government reorganisation when that happened?

JDA: Yes it was the city... There was a choice of places that might become a city as there often is. And it 27th July 1977.

TB: Right ok.

JDA: When Derby became a city. So maybe that was a little bit to do with it. There was a very active chapel. As well as a very active church. And they combined together, they began to share this newsletter that Clifford Burton was editing and writing. And they started well dressings.

TB: Tell me about that because I've heard of it dimly, but please explain.

LA: You've heard of well dressings? Oh my goodness. [laughter]

JDA: Right, I'll quote this to you, 'On Friday 13th June 1980, the Derby Evening Telegraph reported, People mysteriously shuffle in and out of an inconspicuous family garage. The car has been exiled to the roadside for almost a fortnight now. And there's a sudden shortage of flowers.' And this is the making of floral pictures onto clay boards. And it is a Derbyshire tradition.

LA: For which Tissington is still very much to the fore.

GS: It is in Derbyshire, yes. So most of the religious things at that time. They got more ecumenical if that's a word now.

TB: Yes.

(0:13:53.1)

JDA: And they went to look for sites of Roman wells of which there are at least two, well there are two still open in Chester Green. One of which on Marcus Street. And they set up their well dressing board at the well. And then the following year they found another one in the old vicarage garden, so that was two boards. And they went along like that for quite some years.

GS: Is there a picture in there?

JDA: There's a whole album of photos.

TB: They come out every year on a certain day, and they dress the well?

JDA: Yes.

TB: Right. I see.

LA: Tissington, which is the like I said, the famous one in Derbyshire, it's Ascension Day. That sort of weekend.

TB: And this is an old folk custom going back for a while.

LA: Well it's one of those things, lost in the mists of time.

TB: Yes, yes.

JDA: I'll just show you how the board was laid out.

TB: Oh wow.

JDA: And they grew bigger and better as time went on.

TB: That's absolutely extraordinary. I'll just grab my camera. I just want to take a picture if that's all right.

JDA: Well we have a whole book of photos I can find you later.

(0:14:58.0)

TB: Oh great, ok. Lovely.

GS: I don't think there's a museum on it though is there?

JDA: No. [laughter]

TB: That's lovely. Ok.

JDA: So it's a whole sort of movement, a gradual movement if you like.

GS: It expanded in Derbyshire. Various places have started it that never had it in the past if you see what I mean.

TB: I see, yes. So late '70s and '80s so we're seeing the blossoming of lots of community-based things haven't we, in the air I suppose. And out of that came an interest in history. But also that came out of Roman history first and foremost. And it's Roman wells that you're celebrating here. So that's quite interesting. That's going quite a way back.

JDA: Oh we have to go back a little further then. The Marcus Street well came about, its discovery came about because of the improvement area.

GS: The railway.

JDA: And when they took away the railway embankment in 1970-71 because of new legislation, and because the land was owned in part by the City Council, they had to carry out a major excavation. And during the excavation they uncovered the Marcus Street [unclear: 0:16:31.0] uncovered two wells and the Marcus Street well was left open for viewing. And that I think gave the inspiration for the idea later of the well dressings. Because we didn't have that tradition originally.

(0:16:29.5)

TB: Yes. I see. Well this is amazing. So through that change from industrial, you're saying a post-industrial time I suppose when all of those things were going, that's when the excavations happened, and that's when you uncovered this ancient history which you wanted to explore and celebrate.

JDA: Which people wanted to... yes. And that led, as I say, if we go back a little while to Cliff Burton's putting on of a week long activity of living in a Roman village, or an Ancient Briton village if you like, it was a sort of cross section.

TB: This was something, presumably people would dress up and it was a living history...

JDA: Yes we did.

TB: Great. So was that a festive occasion would you say?

GS: They had stalls.

JDA: Yes it was, he took it very seriously. And we repeated it I think a few years later less seriously unfortunately from his point of view.

(0:17:30.8)

TB: Oh I see.

JDA: But the piece of land he had used was no longer available. But he was fortunate that just at that time, there was a little piece of land owned by the City Council. And he was able to erect a furnace, and huts, and a fire, and did weaving, and pot making.

GS: Well the bishop came too, to bless the well sort of thing.

JDA: The bishop came.

TB: Really? So was that at the well site, was it to celebrate the finding... Oh it wasn't ok. Right.

JDA: No. As it turns out it was under the Roman defences of the fort, but that wasn't visible at the time.

TB: Ok right, I'm with you.

JDA: And yes, I mean there were a number of excavations which followed on. And a very big one was actually not in Chester Green as such, but was half a mile away on the racecourse where they found a, first of all they found kilns and then they found a Roman cemetery. All this coming together creates a bigger interest in history.

TB: Yes, yes. Did any of you attend this week long event?

JDA: Yes I was there.

TB: You were there? You were there too.

LA: Oh yes.

GS: I wasn't there.

(0:18:38.9)

TB: Ok all right. You've painted me quite a nice word picture I suppose of that. And so this, were there 100s of people turning up to this would you say?

JDA: I think there were. I was only there after I came home from school. Leonard, [overtalking: 0:18:54.2]

LA: Yes I think there were.

JDA: We have a book of photographs. One thing we had, I'll just mention, was a lady named Elwin Kitchen who had come to live in the area about 1965 who was very keen on history. And very keen on taking photographs. So everything from that time on was photographed.

TB: Wonderful. Do you think that event might have helped the society attract people?

JDA: Well as I say, it wasn't yet, it was only just starting up. Yes. Oh yes, I'm sure it was a big incentive because it was very successful.

LA: Again there was a community and I think most of the members were local people weren't they, at that time.

(0:19:38.8)

TB: And Leonard, just tell me about your involvement in that event. Did you see it as a visitor or were you involved actually in dressing up and staffing it in some way?

LA: I wasn't actually involved in the well dressing.

TB: Oh right ok.

LA: I mean I was involved with other things. I was in a dramatic society and taking part in various plays and so on. Not necessarily in this area. In other parts of Derby as well.

TB: Right ok. Right so you were interested in it in a kind of dramatic sense I suppose.

JDA: The community centre really spawned a whole lot of things.

LA: Although we'll come later on to when we actually got the Heritage Centre going. No, not the Heritage Centre, but the history group, and we did a lot of evenings when we acted some of the parts, the beginning of the school, and Sir Alfred Haslam and other people. And we put them together as a dramatic representation.

TB: Oh lovely. And where were these performed?

LA: In the school.

TB: Oh I see right. For the children?

LA: Not necessarily the children. No.

TB: For the community.

LA: When we get to, there was a local dramatic society, and it would, when they put the things on, it would be for local people. The poor caretaker had to put desks out and put some boards across the top of them to make the stage. [laughter]

TB: That's amazing. So who wrote the scripts and did the research for these sorts of things? Was it you?

LA: I did some, but not a lot. We put things together.

JDA: A Mrs Pumplins did it.

LA: Oh yes, there was a local lady who did a lot of, now what do we call it, what do they call it when they put it all together?

JDA: Well she did a pageant, I don't know about...

LA: Yes she did a lot of the pageants.

JDA: I'm just having a look here. After the community group was formed, out of that came our local history group. A branch of the Women's Institute WI, a luncheon club, a travel club, a craft club, a painting club, a whist club, and bingo evenings. All came as a result of having the community centre.

(0:21:55.9)

TB: And the community centre, where was that? Sorry was that the school, the old school building or?

JDA: It's just 500 yards away.

TB: But was that the old school building?

JDA: No no no. The old school was behind us here. This was a brand new building.

TB: Oh right. But it meant that you could meet at least, there was a space there for you to meet.

JDA: Yes. Because people, as Leonard said, used to put on activities and meet in the school. When the school was down, there was nowhere for people to meet actively like that.

TB: I see, right. So you needed that infrastructure for this to happen.

JDA: You needed this infrastructure. And there was a group of people who were very keen to push it forward. Oh dear I think Geoff has parked his car...

TB: Oh ok, don't worry.

LA: Is he all right?

JDA: I think Geoff's car is in the wrong way, the wrong place, sorry.

TB: So, the community centre was built in the what, 1970s, or...?

JDA: 1980? Oh dear. 1981 I should think it was, I have to look it up. Oh and then the other thing that happened of course as well as that, 1982, we had carnivals as well. Based from the community centre.

TB: Oh right ok, yes.

JDA: So you can imagine when I came here in 1979, there was an awful lot happening for a very small area.

TB: Yes, yes. So you're not local. You came from somewhere else. Where were you brought up?

JDA: I come from Stoke on Trent.

TB: Oh really. Ok.

JDA: But I went to university in London.

LA: But her husband works at Rolls Royce. Who doesn't work at Rolls Royce.

TB: Is that the big employer here?

JDA: Yes.

(0:23:35.5)

TB: I see. Ok. And Leonard just tell me a little bit about your background. You said that you've always lived here since you were one years old. You can't get much more local than that can you? And what's your background in terms of work? Have you worked locally as well?

LA: Yes I've been a teacher.

TB: Oh right. Both teachers then, that's interesting.

LA: For fifty years. I did a lot of music with juniors.

TB: Lovely. So would you say the membership of the people that have been involved in the history group and also the museum, do they come from similar sorts of backgrounds as you? Can you give me a sense of the...

JDA: No, not really.

LA: It's quite mixed isn't it?

JDA: It's very mixed. Yes. Geoff's an engineer. Elwin had been a nurse. Other people, it was a totally diverse group of people. Just happened to live here, or had lived here, or knew someone who brought them in, right, out of interest because I think you must have brought Geoff in for example.

LA: Yes I did.

JDA: Because he had no other connection here.

TB: Right ok. So what do you think the history group was giving you all? And by extension also setting this Heritage Centre up, because, I'm sure you got a lot out of it. But you can put into words why you, what you got out of it, and why you stuck with it for all these years.

LA: Oh dear, obviously we enjoyed it because we wouldn't go otherwise. Bit of entertainment and as far as I was concerned, researching various things.

JDA: And also we wanted to let people know more about the history. To give people more of a foundation.

LA: A lot of people didn't know much about the Romans being here. And to a certain extent didn't believe there was much in that line. But of course there is.

(0:25:39.3)

JDA: I suppose, sorry, I suppose Cliff Burton's first book which he put in his newspapers was an inspiration to a lot of people to do more. He was a very modest man. You would not see him as a great leader of people. But he was very conscientious, and determined, and interested. And he wanted to tell the stories of his childhood and his life here. And I think that was a good, a way of beginning to communicate with people, which passed on to us you see.

TB: So he published things in local newspapers as well as booklets?

JDA: No our local, the local paper.

TB: The local paper.

JDA: Our Chester Green News.

TB: Oh I see. Ok. So this would be reminiscences of when he was a child in the area?

JDA: Yes.

TB: I see. Ok. Lovely. And in here as well. I'm just getting a sense of it. Lovely. Do you sell this? You've got your last copy.

JDA: We do but, no, that one I can't let you have because it is the last one.

TB: I was just wondering.

JDA: You could have had one two weeks ago.

TB: Just missed it. Don't worry, that's fine.

LA: He can have this one here.

JDA: So you have got one. Oh yes, that's fine.

TB: I'll buy a copy off you. It looks wonderful. That's great.

LA: How much are they Joan?

JDA: Oh it's selling for £2.00.

LA: £2.00.

TB: Bargain, right.

JDA: It is a bargain because it's out of print.

TB: Yes, that's priceless in fact.

LA: It can be £3.00 if you want. [laughter]

JDA: It's the Little Chester... [laughter]. It's the *Little Chester, Tales of a Township in the City of Derby*.

TB: I'll get you some money for that in a minute. Thank you.

JDA: That's all right.

(0:27:19.0)

TB: Geoff we're just still talking about what you've got out being involved in the history group. And a couple of things came up. One was the joy of researching really, of finding out about the local past. And something else was the importance of telling the story which is quite an unknown one really, about the Roman history, all of that kind of thing. Is there anything else for you that got out of it, or you think has been very rewarding about being involved?

GS: Nothing more than that. Long term interest yes. Very much so.

TB: Why do you think it's important to get the local history story out there?

GS: I think it's built into your genes isn't it? Interested or not interested? You know that sort of thing.

TB: Yes. But if that's the case, then there would be no point in trying to tell people about it, because if you're interested you'd come and do it so. So what is it? Why is it important for this local community to find out about this stuff?

JDA: You know it's very difficult to answer the question.

GS: That's what I'm saying.

JDA: I think Geoff's got, you have to have a spark of interest I suppose.

GS: That's right. What's the word I'm thinking of? As Joan said, it sort of came together slowly the history group in a way. Everybody was interested at that time.

JDA: Yes it evolved rather than... There's a photograph there which will show you the first history group. I'm not on it.

TB: Oh that's nice. Lovely.

JDA: And there are only three people in that photograph that are still alive.

TB: Right, ok.

JDA: So it was an older person's group I think from the start.

GS: Well yes. [laughter]

JDA: I don't mean old. But in the sense of Leonard being 90, but I do mean that we were an older generation.

GS: Well it was. Well I think another time, now wait a minute, another argument to put forward is that at that time, there was a lot of early retirements going off.

TB: That's interesting.

(0:29:33.4)

GS: A lot of people retiring about mid-50s ish, 60. Being asked to retire I mean, you know. Or incentive to retire shall we say. I think that probably helped as well. Having a lot of those sort of people around at the time.

JDA: Yes I retired I think 19...

GS: I think that was general, not just here. I've come across it elsewhere.

TB: Absolutely, yes, yes. So suddenly people had the time to do it. Right?

GS: Yes exactly.

TB: And I suppose also, well I don't know, presumably it gave you the opportunity to meet other people and have friendship.

JDA: Yes. There was that social...

GS: There was that social. Because you, if you're working all day and then suddenly not working, you've got to find something to do. You've got to find it. It won't come to you.

TB: Yes, yes. Absolutely. And so as a group did you meet fairly regularly? Was it weekly or monthly or how did all that work?

JDA: We would meet once a month. And we still do.

(0:30:27.3)

TB: Ah ok. Right. And it sounds like this Heritage Centre is just one thing. Because you've mentioned the plays. You also mentioned the fact that there were pageants. And a carnival aspect as well, which perhaps the group was involved in. Was there anything else? Any other, and also we've got publications, I notice. Was there anything else we've missed here which, in terms of things that you did apart from the history centre itself?

JDA: Well we do walks.

TB: Oh ok.

JDA: Yes. We do walks.

TB: I noticed a trail booklet.

JDA: Yes, yes. We've hand written one or two trails.

GS: Is it this blue one?

JDA: Yes, and there's the one behind it, the yellow Little Chester Trail, which we did originally.

TB: So just tell me about that, because that's rather lovely to put something like that together.

JDA: Yes.

GS: That's actually at the centre if you've seen it, not seen it.

TB: Great. Thank you. Oh no brilliant, I'll take that one. Thank you.

JDA: And we have been involved in a Derby Trail as well.

GS: Yes for the, we're in the buffer zone of the Derwent Valley Heritage...

JDA: I haven't got the Derby one. We've sold out.

LA: Various things like that in a way helps to get people to come here, to the centre. You know, meet up for a walk, then they get a chance to look at the centre.

GS: Have we mentioned the buffer zone?

JDA: No I haven't. We're now part of a World Heritage Site Buffer Zone.

GS: In the buffer zone.

JDA: But we weren't originally obviously. This came later.

GS: As the Derwent Valley Heritage, what's the word?

JDA: Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site.

TB: I see. And this is connected with the silk mills on the buffer?

GS: Right up to north of Derbyshire.

JDA: It's Cromford Mill really. It's the Arkwright history right down the river from Cromford to this silk mill.

(0:32:24.5)

TB: Oh that is interesting. And so has that had an impact on your work in any way? Have you... Is this quite recent is it?

GS: Well it's how many years ago now? Must be 10. More than that.

JDA: Yes.

GS: We did some interpretation boards for them either side of the river.

JDA: Yes, which are still there.

GS: Which are still there. [laughter] I'll see if I can find it.

JDA: And the other thing of course, we did quite a bit of campaigning against buildings lying neglected, including the railway St Mary's [unclear: 0:32:58.9] which is now redeveloped. It was left to stand idle and neglected. And we campaigned to try to get that saved in part, which we succeeded in part.

LA: Where are we getting to now? Are we near the beginning of the Heritage Centre?

GS: I don't know. [laughter] This is a trap?

JDA: That was the local history group still.

LA: Just on the edge of it.

GS: This is Toby's questioning.

(0:33:31.7)

TB: This is great because what I'm trying to do is get a picture of the group itself and what kind of activities that's all. But you're right, let's move on to the Heritage Centre itself. So let's just talk about, there was this model, and it seems like you needed the home, so it's a home, but also a place to display, right, because it was such a lovely thing to have.

JDA: Yes. It used to sit on a table in the middle of the Heritage Centre. But it got a bit dusty and the children would always be dabbling with it. And also because of our change in thinking, that table was in the way of people with wheelchairs etc. So the whole thing had to go. So it's stored in boxes. We haven't got rid of it.

TB: Oh ok, yes. It sounds like it's pretty substantial though, it was quite a bit.

GS: It's in big pieces of course.

LA: There was something that was quite an advantage to us was that the roof was being repaired at the same time. And the church authorities, it is the church authorities is it, cleaned the church we opened regularly. And they could get more grants towards welfare of the church if the church was opened more regularly. We were opening regularly every Sunday.

TB: I see. Well that's fascinating. So there was a win-win situation there, where you could bring people in, which then could mean that more resources could be given to keep the church going. Oh that's brilliant.

LA: It's certainly like that in a lot of places now isn't it.

TB: Yes, yes.

JDA: And they had two phases of repairing the roof.

GS: It was this roof and that roof, yes. This one and that one.

JDA: So we have been of great use to the church as well as the church being an enormous advantage to us.

(0:35:19.3)

TB: So let's just talk in a little bit more detail about the actual move into the church. So you were actually approached by Reverend Thompson is that right?

JDA: That's right.

TB: Ok. And he was a history enthusiast. Just tell me a little bit about the space here, because he had a spare space.

JDA: It was an empty space.

TB: Right. Because the pews had been taken away from the south.

LA: This extra bit had been built by Sir Alfred Haslam, he built it in memory of his wife. Celebrating.

GS: Something like the 1800s.

JDA: No. His wife actually laid the foundation stone. I think it was just an act of great generosity.

TB: Yes. Presumably it was to expand the church, right? Because the population was growing. Ok.

JDA: Yes.

TB: But at this point the church was relatively empty. But it was a functioning church? With services on Sundays.

ALL: Yes.

TB: Ok. But you open on Sundays.

ALL: Sunday afternoons.

TB: Ok. I've got you. Right so there isn't a clash. Ok. Sure. Sure. So you had this space. Now to set up a museum you need a building, but you also need a collection. And you need time, and energy and ideas. So let's just talk about the collection. So you already had a model. As a history group you said that you had perhaps already started collecting some bits and pieces. Is that right?

(0:36:38.9)

JDA: Yes.

TB: Right ok.

JDA: And also very usefully, I live on the Roman fort, and we had dug up quite a lot of Roman pottery.

TB: Wow. [laughter]

JDA: So we had that to house. And I had a couple of models which gave us a start. We had a gentleman named Derek Palmer who was very keen on making models and was part of a world dressing team, and he made us a couple of models. So we got things, we got a few things. But not a great deal. We approached the museum and they gave us a loan of some more Roman pottery. Members of the Derbyshire Archaeological Society also brought in their ideas and their help. One of those members died and his wife invited us to go into his shed and take out anything we wanted. So we got a couple more pieces of pottery. And by degrees, people gave us bits and pieces didn't they.

LA: Yes, yes.

GS: But not just the pottery is there.

JDA: No everything else seemed to follow on.

TB: I see.

GS: More sort of war time memories wasn't it.

TB: Right ok. At the very beginning you started with this Roman core by the sound of it. But did you also go into more recent times then, or did that expand, did that come a bit later?

JDA: That's a good question.

GS: Well it just expanded over time didn't it. It just gradually went that way.

LA: Yes. Yes. We had two models, a man and a woman. One was a Roman and the other was supposed to be Sir Alfred's wife. And well I got a recording of the Roman talking about his work here. And she spoke about her dress and coming down from London and all the rest of it. It was successful to a certain extent. But it never really took off very well.

JDA: It was nice when we had school parties in.

LA: It was all right with school parties.

TB: Lovely.

JDA: We had another advantage because Leonard's wife Pat was able to dress the models. She had all the skills that were needed to create the garments. And also made us a lot of costumes that children could dress up in as well. So we had that great advantage.

(0:39:08.0)

TB: Lovely ok. And so you mentioned school groups. So fairly early you had groups of school children coming in.

JDA: We had two or three groups of children each year.

GS: Remember we were 20 years younger then.

JDA: Yes, they mostly came here to us and we would take them on a walk, played them the tapes that Leonard had recorded for us on the Roman and the Victorian way of life. Dress in the costumes, do drawings, and stuff like that. So really...

GS: Fair to say the cabinets I say Joan, you saw them in a shop didn't you?

JDA: Yes.

GS: In a second hand shop.

JDA: Yes we managed to get a lot of cabinets that we could put stuff in. So display cabinets. I mean we had just over £4,000 in the Awards For All grant.

TB: And what year did that come in?

JDA: That was 2001.

TB: And that's the year that you opened wasn't it? 2001?

JDA: And we opened as soon after that as we could.

TB: Oh right. So before you opened you applied for the grant. And it was for the money to set the thing up.

JDA: To set us up yes.

TB: And so with that money, most of it went on second hand cabinets from a, was it a jewellery shop did you say?

JDA: Yes.

TB: Right.

JDA: No sorry, they were second hand cabinets from an antique shop, or second hand antique shop. Which had been jewellery cabinets.

TB: And the Awards For All grant, that was nearly £5,000.

JDA: It was, behind your head, I can't remember £4,000 and something.

GS: When we did get a grant, for example, to print those blue leaflets from a local firm. And over the years we got a grant from the Co-op. Community Fund. Which is a reason for those notices at the end there.

JDA: We haven't actually applied for many grants because we have a limited space. And really we have everything we need for the history group. We've got all the equipment we need. And we have money in the bank anyway. So we've never really felt the need to go any further. There is a limit to what you can do when you're in a church.

TB: Yes I see. And you mentioned that, in terms of storage, you've got curtains where things are stored behind. And that's enough space for what you need.

JDA: And we have two cabinets and a filing cabinet in the vestry.

GS: Behind the organ.

JDA: And recently Geoff found us two more low filing cabinets which we can keep in here so that when people come asking for particular themes of interest, we may have them on hand. A member of the church researched the name of every soldier on the memorial cross outside about three years ago, 150 something names. And he gave us five files full of those names which are in one of those cabinets. So that if people come in looking for the history of a member of their family who died in the First World War we can probably pull something out for them.

(0:42:13.5)

TB: And you were saying that family history is a big thing now. Has that been a recent thing that people have been coming in?

JDA: It doesn't seem to be as recent as it was. But we get families from all over the place. We had a couple in two weeks, about four weeks ago, who'd come all the way from Oxford. They're family had lived here. This is where they'd grown up. And they came in and had a look at what was here. We had, for example, a lady whose father had been a teacher at the school. And she came from Cornwall and brought us some photographs and stuff like that.

TB: Oh nice. She brought some things for you to copy.

JDA: Yes. So we get people from all over. We've even had people from Australia. New Zealand. And that's really family history, family connections that brings them here.

TB: I see yes. Lovely. And in terms of objects, the collection has expanded hasn't it? In some of the cases, it's rather nice, you've put a little thing to say donated by, to give credit to the people that have...

JDA: We keep an acquisition book. And everything that comes in is entered into the book.

TB: I see. And who set up that system? Is this something that you were advised to do or...?

JDA: No. Just knew that it should be done.

TB: Right ok.

JDA: And we have a very helpful member who keeps that in good order for us. Jo yes.

TB: But how did you find out, or acquire the skills necessary to run a Heritage Centre? Because that's certainly a learning curve there.

GS: What do you think are the skills needed then? What do you think the skills are needed?

TB: Well there's things like cataloguing, and accessioning. But also how to look after objects and keep them safe.

LA: I think you begin to think about it don't you?

GS: Well yes, it just came naturally to us didn't it?

LA: ... we should have done that but we forgot. [laughter]

JDA: Yes. We didn't keep the acquisition book for a year or two.

LA: I think it just came to you didn't it.

JDA: Yes.

TB: Were you getting any support from any, from the local museum or any professional bodies at all?

JDA: Yes the museum are quite helpful. They loaned us a few items.

GS: Not directly did they?

JDA: Well they loaned us a few items.

GS: Loaned us a few items and...

JDA: And when they were throwing out another case we obtained that.

GS: Yes they're helpful in that sense. They didn't advise in any way I don't think.

JDA: No.

TB: Ok. And are you a member of any networking groups or bodies? For example, the Association of Independent Museums, or anything like that?

GS: I suppose our insurance is with the British Association of Local History. So we're technically a member of those.

TB: Ok. Ok. Sure.

GS: And that organisation.

(0:44:57.8)

TB: Ok. Lovely. Just you mentioned money, and it seems to me that the money that you got from the grant initially was plenty to do the set up. But you mentioned the fact that you do raise about £150 a year which you give to the church.

JDA: Yes we have a donations box which we invite people, or we don't invite them, we just point it to them. We put on walks and the walks are always charged. We've done occasional talks in the church. We've got one coming up shortly. We don't charge, but there's a donation box. There's always refreshments on offer. Yes, I don't know. I mean...

GS: In the past we were more active with the talks and school visits.

JDA: I mean somebody gave us £20 two weeks ago.

TB: Right lovely.

JDA: You know.

GS: When a school visit or a group come round especially, that brings the money in.

JDA: Yes of course we charge £3 or £4 a head.

TB: And this covers the cost of the insurance?

JDA: It covers the insurance and the contribution towards the overheads.

TB: Towards the electric? I see. Ok. Lovely.

JDA: There are occasions when the church is very cold. We tend to go in on Sunday afternoon after they've had a service and they leave the heating on. But there are occasions when they don't have a service on that particular Sunday morning and it's jolly cold.

LA: It's getting a bit cold now actually

JDA: It is actually yes.

TB: Are you all right? I see. Ok. That's lovely. But it sounds, the church doesn't charge you a rent is that right?

JDA: No.

TB: Ok. So it's totally free for you to be here. It doesn't charge you electricity bills but that's on an informal basis where you make a contribution. So really the only cost you have is the insurance by the sounds of it.

JDA: Yes.

TB: Yes ok.

GS: I think first off it was to do the organ fund wasn't it. The original vicar, was for the organ fund.

JDA: Yes.

TB: Oh ok, yes. Yes. And that relationship has been going now for almost 20 years, so that's wonderful.

JDA: The big change that's come about two years ago was that we decided that we couldn't really open every single Sunday afternoon, which we were doing from the beginning of April to the end of October. We're all of us getting older. It was a big commitment. So we've reduced it to one opening a month on a Sunday afternoon, plus anyone who wants to come, like we have some Beavers coming in a three or four weeks time, we can open just for them. We

had a party come two weeks ago who were setting up a new museum, which goes against the grain, in Atherstone, in a church, and they wanted to see how we'd done it.

TB: Oh really.

GS: They're in the middle of a Roman camp aren't they?

JDA: They're in the middle of a Roman camp and it's a place called Mancetter and the church of St Peter in Mancetter, they're hoping to be able to put an exhibition on of all the Roman pottery that they've found. So it's specifically a Roman museum.

(0:48:20.4)

TB: Oh fantastic. Well that must have been fascinating. This is very unusual to have a museum in a church, that's quite something. So just tell me a little bit about some of the difficulties and issues about that shared space. Just for the record, if you could explain a bit about the idea that you wanted it hidden away really when the service was going on.

JDA: We didn't really want it hidden away. What we wanted was not to intrude into the service. And Pat, you and Pat had been to another church which did have a museum or a heritage centre of some kind, I can't remember where it was now, and they had had a curtained off section. So we thought we would do the same.

GS: Was that our point or did the vicar want it doing it, or the congregation want it doing?

JDA: No, no I think it was our point. Pat and Leonard thought it would be more respectful if you like. And so some of this blue curtaining stuff was spread across. And it was only after a few years that the question of light coming into the church was raised.

LA: Well the vicar changed didn't he.

JDA: Yes the vicar changed as well, and they became more ecumenical. More outward going if you like as a church. And they wanted to use the church for more activities like a soul café, and a soul breakfast. So there were some questions as to why we were here. But in the end it was determined that we would actually open it out so that people could...

GS: It's fair to say the soul café died didn't it.

JDA: Well eventually. There was a bit of clash at that time.

TB: I see. So for a while they did open a café, hence the kitchen in the corner here.

LA: When we say soul café, it was a sort of special event, with a café and music.

JDA: Once a month yes.

LA: Once a month, not every week.

TB: Right I'm with you. Ok.

JDA: Yes. Usually on a Sunday morning you see. And during the winter months we were obliged to pack everything away into a very small corner so they could use all the space.

TB: Right I see.

JDA: But it's resolved itself gradually.

TB: Ok. Well I'm glad to hear that. Still so there are moments where yes, you're kind of, you have to move.

JDA: Yes we have to accommodate.

TB: move around when the organ is being repaired...

JDA: Yes.

TB: But you're still here.

JDA: I when it was carpeted, recarpeted of course

LA: The church recarpeted it all at one time.

TB: Lovely. Yes.

JDA: But all of this means that you, there's a bit of an upheaval. We will have to see what happens next year when we have a new vicar come in. [laughter]

(0:50:57.0)

TB: Right ok. I see. So everyone's got to cope with those organisational changes I suppose. I suppose with any landlord I guess that's the case.

LA: You've got quite a number of churches, not just like a museum, but more activities. The Roman Catholic church over here, suddenly there's a week, the fathers handed out a lot of puppets, they got the congregation playing with the puppets, and putting on a show.

TB: Oh great. Yes, yes. Wonderful. These are such amazing community buildings aren't they. But they can be quite forbidding.

LA: They can. Yes, yes.

TB: I think it's important for these things to move a little otherwise they're just not going to be used anymore. That's lovely. You were talking about the volunteers and the fact

LA: I'll have to stand up in a minute.

TB: Oh yes, please, sorry. If you want a break, please, just, that's fine.

LA: Carry on.

GS: Are you getting up?

LA: It'll be all right.

GS: Have you got your breaks on?

LA: Yes the brakes are on. Don't worry. Don't worry.

JDA: If you think that it's time that you went home Geoff. I think perhaps it is.

GS: That's right. Yes sorry.

TB: Please don't apologise.

LA: Are you standing or walking around a bit?

LA: No, I'll just stand and sit down and be ready to go I think.

GS: When you're ready.

(0:52:25.8)

TB: Lovely. Well look, before you go there's one question which is, Leonard you've been here a long time, and I'm just wondering whether you feel having a history centre, what has it done for the local community? And you can look at that in terms of perhaps all the residents who've lived here a long time and perhaps know most of this anyway, but still it celebrates it in some way doesn't it. And then I suppose you could look at it in terms of people that are newcomers that have come here to settle, and finding out about it. But I'm

just wondering whether you've got any thoughts about that on either, what people have made of it.

GS: Well that's a very good question isn't it Joan?

JDA: It is.

LA: The difficulty is as one gets older, you don't, in a lot of organisations, you don't get younger people coming in. Perhaps if you have a complete break then somebody might do something. But I don't think, not just with our history group...

GS: No, no, lots of groups round Derby I've seen that.

LA: ...where everyone's getting a bit too old to organise all these things, and so would love somebody to give us a hand. But the younger people, they probably want to do it in a different way. And you could almost do with finishing it all together and somebody else starting without you being breathing down their neck all the time.

TB: I see what you mean. Yes.

LA: It's not easy.

GS: But lots of those you realise, people now have lots of activities don't they to do. What can be done.

JDA: I don't think you have the people retiring early either.

GS: They're not retiring early.

JDA: And people are more interested in things they can access on laptops, internet and whatever.

GS: The fact that they look after the families more now don't they. More family activities. Wouldn't you say. They're busy when at one time, years ago if you like, people were retiring in their 50s and 60s.

TB: I see what you mean, yes, that's quite an issue isn't it.

GS: It's a different time all together, because like Leonard says, a lot of groups in the same position. People are getting older. And not people coming forward. Various groups I've been involved with. Some have collapsed. One or two have collapsed.

TB: Oh really? Right.

JDA: Yes, my husband's the treasurer of the Derby Philatelic Society which would be in the 100s years ago. And if they get 12 in a meeting they're doing well.

TB: Right ok, gosh.

LA: Then suddenly something happens. There's a young lad next door, 15 year old. He spends nearly all of his weeks ringing bells. Goes all round Derbyshire ringing bells.

GS: Exactly. Well that's interesting.

JDA: So activity. Yes.

GS: Wonderful.

JDA: But there are more activities for young people. A lot more provided by schools out of school as well.

GS: Derbyshire side of engineering went for 125 years and people just dropped off. People didn't want to do any active work.

TB: I see.

JDA: And a lot of it is to do with people who are willing to run it as well. You know. Because they have such very busy lives.

TB: Yes, yes. Just tell me about the, how many members of the group are there at the moment, the history group?

JDA: About 38 now. 36? 38?

GS: 38.

JDA: Yes that what I said.

GS: I thought you said 28 sorry.

JDA: No I said 38.

TB: And of those 38 how many would be involved in the centre in any way?

JDA: Well originally most. Now it's perhaps 10 of us.

TB: I see. Ok. And do you take it in turns to staff the centre?

JDA: No. No. It's a little group of us now who do it every, it's only once a month and so we manage.

TB: And do you pair up for that or...? Do you pair up? Do you have two people working?

JDA: Oh always. We never have less than two, or three.

GS: You've got to have two, for health and safety and all that.

JDA: Anyway I think Leonard needs to go home.

GS: Yes.

TB: Well thank you for so much. [PAUSE]

(0:56:56.0)

TB: Joan you were just saying that you've got an MA in Local History which you got from Nottingham university, and then you went on to do a PhD there.

JDA: That's right.

TB: Which overlapped, the PhD part of it did overlap with the opening of the Heritage Centre.

JDA: Yes that's right.

TB: So I'm just, this is something that we've noticed, there are some local history museums which are quite entwined with adult education and education, particularly adult education, in the Lake District we found this. Was there any kind of... So clearly for you that's been the case. Have others been involved in that adult education or...

JDA: No. I don't think, I taught local history students after I'd got my own PhD for a time in Advanced History Certificates. And yes, I have a lot of, a group of friends who've, who were my students if you like, who had stayed together and we worked together. But none of them actually in Chester Green. Because most of them are actually involved in another local history group somewhere else in the city.

TB: Oh really, where's that?

JDA: Well there's Chellaston for example. I've been two of them, I belong to the Chellaston group. Allestree was another group that some of them belonged to. So there are...

TB: That's interesting. There's a crossover there then.

JDA: There's a crossover yes. Normanton I think I've got connections with as well. And I belong to the Derbyshire Archaeological Society, which again extends the people I know. And one or two, our present secretary I met through the Derbyshire, sorry, our present treasurer, our new treasurer, I met through the Derbyshire Archaeological Society. So that's brought somebody in to replace our previous treasurer who very sadly died two years ago.

(0:58:57.2)

TB: Right I see yes. Archaeology is very strong in the display isn't it?

JDA: Yes.

TB: So that's been very important I'd have thought. And the fact that you've got objects donated from the Society as well.

JDA: Well not just that but we've been the centre of flood defence works for the last three years. And the year before the flood defence works there was another round of archaeology. So that got us very much involved again at that time. We had a lot more visitors, and people who got very interested in what's happening locally.

TB: Oh really? Oh that's interesting. We're seeing some transformation aren't we? Urban transformation and it's leading to a) objects because the digs are happening, but also interest. It's almost in waves isn't it.

JDA: Yes, it does.

TB: This is the river going through Derby. They're very close aren't they.

JDA: That's right. And the new flood banks have come all the way through Chester Green. And it's still being built actually. But because they were coming through the fortified area, they had to do a certain amount of archaeology to determine where to put the new flood defences.

TB: I see. Ok.

JDA: And that brought a community activity here. And there was a community dig. So it brought a lot more interest and more people in. And we benefitted from that for a short while.

TB: And in terms of numbers, I was looking at the booklet, saying that you get, well more than 1,000 a year, would that be fair to say, or at some point I don't know.

JDA: I haven't added up for a long time.

TB: Sorry, this was an event which got 1,000. Sorry.

JDA: No, no, no. Yes. This is a, actually, I'm amazed, that it says 2016 season. And that doesn't make sense to me. We haven't been keeping it up to date is all I can tell you.

TB: Of course, because you're only open once a month aren't you?

JDA: Yes.

TB: Yes ok. Right. We're probably into sort of...

JDA: But if you would sign it. The last people to sign it were from Wantage, I said Oxfordshire, but it was actually Wantage. So we kept it very meticulously for a long time. And we don't always ask people to sign, or at least we sometimes forget to ask people to sign.

TB: So probably from looking at, and your open seasonally as well aren't you, so it's probably, I don't know, 50 odd, 60 visitors do you think? Or maybe a bit more than that?

JDA: I think at the moment we're very low numbers because of the once a month. We're probably going to have about 50 over the year. Except that we're having a talk at the beginning of July and when we have a talk we might have 30 or 40 in.

TB: Oh really? Yes.

JDA: Yes. So that makes a bit of a difference.

TB: Yes, if you have a group, a school group. You've stopped doing the school groups now.

JDA: Well we haven't got... We've got some Beavers, yes we've got some Beavers, so probably about 20 people coming in in the next couple of weeks.

TB: Yes. They won't fill this in will they?

JDA: Although we don't count them as visitors really.

TB: Yes. Sure.

JDA: No but if we have a special talk then people come in for that. So you need to put on events basically to keep people's interest. And that might be a walk. When we have a walk we 20 to 30 people on a walk.

TB: Wow. Ok. That's really well attended.

(1:02:24.7)

JDA: Oh yes, and we have a group of us who will actually go out on the walk, probably 3 or 4 of us on anyone one walk. And we used to do walks sponsored by the City Council. But that was withdrawn, that sponsorship was withdrawn from the whole of Derby.

TB: Oh really? Was that cutbacks?

JDA: It's a cutback.

TB: Right ok. It's interesting. You mentioned something about the school visits, and that you didn't just have them here, but you took them out on a walk.

JDA: Yes.

TB: Why is that important do you think? Just tell me?

JDA: To show them something that actually exists rather than something we're telling them about. So we would walk to the Roman well and they drop a coin in the well and that's real. And they could look at the building or the remains of a building at the side. And we also sometimes took them down to our house because we're on the Roman fort. And we have quite a few artefacts there. And we actually planted a Roman garden on the estate so they could learn about plants and so forth from the Roman garden, and cooking, and things like that. That has been stopped because of the flood defences which have been all around us for the last 3 years. It's made it very difficult to do anything of that nature. So we're waiting for them to finish.

TB: I see. Is it literally building work that cuts off streets?

JDA: It's building work that was... No, it's building work that is going round the edge of Chester Green along the river. But we live by the river.

TB: Right I see.

JDA: And the flood bank which used to protect us has been removed and replaced by a wall. And that is within a yard or two of our house. So that's made it very difficult because it's been very noisy. Very dusty. Time consuming. Not finished. So yes, so that's made a difference.

It's [unclear: 1:04:27.9] which has stopped us doing a lot of things these last 3 or 4 years. And you could see from Leonard that he is no longer a young man.

(1:04:40.6)

TB: Yes, yes. Do you have any younger volunteers? By younger I mean people in their, I don't know, 40s or 50s or anything like that?

JDA: We have some in their 50s who have joined the history group. But they're probably nearer 60 now you see. It's difficult, if you want young people to come into an organisation. They want to meet people of their own age. And when they come into our meetings, most of us are older people. And that, it makes it more difficult for them, I think, to integrate.

TB: Yes, yes, I see what you mean.

JDA: I mean they support us. But not by coming to meetings so much. But this is how life is. If I were 20 years younger I'd be far more active and whatever. But we advertise all our meetings locally through our local newspaper. But that doesn't seem to attract many people in. Maybe it's the wrong subjects.

TB: Right. Oh I see, the talks that you give, the meetings?

JDA: Yes. Maybe they're not the sort of talks younger people mostly want. It's difficult to know what they do want.

TB: There was something which I remember we did speak about very briefly on the phone, but you know Derby is now a multi-cultural area, and that I imagine, goes back probably quite a long way.

JDA: Yes.

(1:06:02.8)

TB: So just tell me about that. Do you think, I don't know, I mean clearly this local community might be slightly different to that. I don't know. Has there been much work around multi-cultural history or ...

JDA: There has on the other side of Derby, in the Normanton southern side of the city, where you've got a large Asian community, and a large Afro-Caribbean community. And they're very much interested in that aspect of their history. There's a very strong women's feminist history movement as well. But not in this area. There are very few people who have coming into this area that are actually non-white.

TB: Really? Ok.

JDA: We are a more expensive area. That might be one of the reasons. Also, because you're coming to an area you want to see people that you can relate to, and it may be not so easy. But it is changing because we have a lot more apartments now in this area. Whereas once it was all, I was going to say semi-detached, but it isn't is it, it's terraced housing. We have a number of apartments that have been built now which are cheaper perhaps, more accessible to younger people.

TB: Right. So that will bring the age group down a bit.

JDA: Yes. And as the population ages, so more of the younger members of families are moving elsewhere, so there is more opportunity for new people to come in.

TB: Right, yes, I see. Sure, sure.

JDA: But they tend to be mostly white.

TB: Right, ok, yes, yes.

JDA: And certainly we've only had one or two people in the Heritage Centre from this area that are local. So it isn't something that we had picked upon.

TB: Yes, yes, sure. And also in terms of the topics that you do, and I appreciate that things change, and also that you've got a lot of folders, and I'm sure that maybe, I'm kind of scratching the surface a bit aren't we with what's on display, but from what I can it goes up to World War One. You've also got some Second World War stuff. But a lot of it's from the nineteenth century [unclear: 1:08:26.1] and so on. Do you do anything post World War Two at all? Or was that a decision that in fact you didn't really want to go down...

(1:08:37.4)

JDA: Yes we have. We did a very big exhibition on flooding for example, the latest flood was 1965, but we had a lot of flood water in the in 2000-2001. So that's been one of the topics that we've looked at. We've looked at the carnivals and the well dressings which were ongoing. But topic wise rather than date wise if you know what I mean. It so happens that at the moment we're in the middle of the World War One, not sure what the word is really.

TB: 100 years.

JDA: 100 years reminiscences or whatever. So that's been there. And we've recently, or at least I recently bought an archive of a local gentleman who it's very difficult to pinpoint, but Leonard was talking about a tape he had found, a recording that he'd made. He was a very

simple man who served in the china department of the local Co-op all his life. But organised concerts for the DRI which brought in celebrities from all over. Gracie Fields, Paul Robeson, people you've probably not heard of. Old people. But all well known to the local area. And we're thinking of putting his name forward for a Blue Plaque from the Civic Society. So we're having a talk on that and I have got loads of programmes and photographs and stuff to put out. But he's pre-, no he's not pre-Second World War. He goes in for 1940s and we have a recording of his voice from the 1950s and 60s.

TB: I see, yes, nice.

JDA: But it's difficult. And whenever we have a big issue of redevelopment, that also is then shown in here.

(1:10:28.1)

TB: That's interesting. We're talking about Local Authority will display the plans kind of thing?

JDA: Yes. And we will make copies and we'll put them in here and people can come and have a look at what the latest plans are.

TB: Oh that's great yes. That pulls people in I'm sure.

JDA: Yes. It does some. I'm trying to think of all the other [overtalking: 1:10:49.3]

TB: No, no, no, that's given me a sense, because, it's tricky, usually the display is really only a proportion of everything else and when you've got talks and so on it's just nice to get a bit more of a sense of what sort of things you're doing. Did you model this Heritage Centre on any other kind of heritage centre. Or was this very much your own?

JDA: Oh it was our own. Yes. Certain aspects of it I pinched from other people. Such as the book stands. The little reading desk thing that I found in various places. But everything else I think it just happenchance is a good word for it. I happened to find these display cabinets. They formed the basis of what everything else happened. We happened to have somebody who was able to make these models for us, not in flowers, but in well dressing type. We just happened to have his experience. So it all happened.

TB: Right. I see yes. So people contributed their own skills, it shaped it.

JDA: We happened to have a lady who was able to dress the models. You know so, it was just the fact that we had the right people at the right time if you know what I mean.

(1:12:14.7)

TB: Yes, yes, absolutely. And in terms of space, you mentioned this when you were showing me round, but there is a limitation. You can't expand very easily because it's not your space really. And so, some museums I've been to, there's a lot of 1950s hoovers and tin cans. But you've decided that...

JDA: We can't do that.

TB: You can't accept that kind of material.

JDA: We were once a little bit longer, but the church wanted the space so we've retreated slightly. We do put boards and stuff out on all the tables. But we don't want to collect large objects. The bowls club in Chester Green closed two years ago because of the flood activities. And they asked us to take their bowls cups because members didn't want them. So we said yes to that, and we have half a dozen silver cups in a draw. But we can't put them out very easily. And what would we do if we accepted refrigerators and whatever, you know. It wouldn't fit in with what we were doing either. But we would have a huge problem.

TB: Right I see. So you have turned things away.

JDA: No, they're not offered actually on the whole. We're very fortunately, we're not offered. I think people come and they see the space that we have. I think the biggest thing that we've been offered is a stoneware jar. So yes. So fortunately we haven't had to turn anything like that away.

TB: Ok. That's great. I think we've covered pretty much everything. I did ask this earlier but, I mean, why is this important to you personally, this thing here?

(1:14:07.5)

JDA: Yes. Well I think it's because I could see a need for people to put on show and explain some of the history of the local area. I think that arises from my natural historical background. But I think it also arose from a number of people who all felt the same at the time. I mean like Elwin Kitchen, who's photographed until she can no longer leave the house now, but had photographed every single event in Chester Green that ever happened. And kept this huge archive. That sort of helps to bring you together with other people of like interest. And we tend to work in a group. I like working with a group of people. Not just on my own. And so yes, it's a wonderful way of meeting people as well. I've met lots of interesting people since we've been doing this. And heard a lot of interesting stories. And amongst all of that, we have actually met people that have helped us to interpret the history of our own house. So that has been a bonus as well.

TB: Oh that's interesting.

JDA: Yes, because our house goes back to the sixteenth century. And was a local farm. So people have been in and told us about the house and even sometimes directed us to a new photograph or something of that nature.

TB: Oh right, gosh, yes. Yes.

JDA: Yes. So it's had a spin off from that point of view.

TB: I see. That's lovely. Right, it's a collective endeavour isn't it? And your sharing knowledge. It's rather lovely.

JDA: Yes. Well I mean we still have social evenings as well. Geoff organises annual visits to places. So you've got that aspect of the social side of it all as well. But that's to do with the history groups rather than the Heritage Centre. They are divorced insofar as the history group could stop holding meetings, but the Heritage Centre can still continue as long as the history group itself, the parent if you like, is in being. And we almost came to an end this year because we couldn't find anyone to replace Geoff as secretary. But we've had a volunteer.

TB: Gosh. It got really close then.

JDA: It got very close, like Thursday. And the volunteer was 2 days ago. So yes. So yes, it is something that we would like to keep going because there are people who enjoy coming to the meetings, apart from anything else. And people wanting to know more about the history and the local area. And other issues. Sometimes it's a talk about a charity. It's not necessarily historical, time and history. And people just enjoy coming.

TB: Yes, yes. So the secretary, that was for the history group. The whole group. So that potentially could have folded.

JDA: Oh yes.

TB: Right I see.

JDA: Yes, it was on a knife edge.

TB: But you're getting such well-attended meetings, it does seem, you're getting 30 odd people coming to a talk.

JDA: None of them had the confidence to organise speakers. But we now have somebody within the group who has done a lot of that who has now decided that having resigned from one group as their programme secretary, he's willing now to take ours on.

TB: That's wonderful. Ok well look, last questions I think. I think I've covered all of this. We'll talk about what challenges you're facing, and I think it sounds like we've really covered that.

JDA: I think we probably have.

(1:18:09.9)

TB: Ok. Last thing. What's been the lowest point in terms of your involvement, and what's been the highest point? Has there been a...

JDA: I think the lowest point was when our treasurer died, who was a great support between the two of us, we more or less opened this and ran it. That was a couple of years ago. And from that point on we decided that we couldn't really open every week, because we would take it in turns. If one of us was on holiday for example. So we had to reduce to one meeting a month. But that has proved ok so far. At that time, a very low point was when we had whole series of weeks with nobody coming. And there's nothing worse.

TB: Yes, that's soul destroying isn't it.

JDA: Yes it was pretty dreadful. I mean there must have been lots of other reasons why that happened coincidence or whatever. But it was a low point. Highest point? I really couldn't say. I suppose the highest point was the opening.

TB: Tell me about that.

JDA: I can't remember it's so long ago. [laughter] I know we had the mayor. And a proper official opening. Or did we have the mayor? Yes we probably did. I really cannot tell you anymore than that.

TB: No don't worry, that's fine. But I suppose it was a moment wasn't it where the group suddenly had a space to do something, not just in an event way, but actually to have something to show, which is quite a status.

JDA: Yes I don't think there's been a higher point than actually opening it. There have been some very good times when we've had a lot of people in. We've perhaps had a talk or a walk or something like that and it's been buzzing, which has been very nice. But we had no one in last time we opened, for example. There were quite a lot of people there, but we were all members.

TB: Right ok, yes, sure.

JDA: And we were busy doing stuff, organising files and all sorts of things.

TB: Oh that's quite nice. Right so when someone comes on a Sunday, there is stuff to do. It's not like you're waiting there doing nothing. But still...

JDA: Yes. And in particular at the moment because we're trying to accommodate Elwin Kitchen's archive, which is probably 30 or more files because of her age.

TB: Is this the photographic one you're talking about.

JDA: This is the photographic one, but all her history archives.

TB: That's a lot of work, yes.

JDA: That's a lot of work. So that's been an ongoing task that we've been carrying out. So we're not without things to do.

TB: Yes sure. My god, on the back of that you could have some fabulous exhibitions that I'm sure... out of that.

JDA: Well we plan to.

TB: That's wonderful. Thank you so much. Is there anything that you'd like to put on the record that we haven't covered, or that you'd like to say.

JDA: I can't think of anything.

TB: Ok. That's brilliant. Thank you so much.

Audio ends: [1:21:42:0]