

'I didn't know I was the child of unusual parents': Tom Keell Wolfe interview notes

Introduction

In June 1916, two London anarchists, Lilian Wolfe and her companion Tom Keell, were prosecuted under the wartime Defence of the Realm Act for publishing an anti-conscription leaflet. Lilian, who was pregnant at the time, pleaded 'Guilty - of telling the truth'. Both chose prison rather than paying fines, though Lilian was released early because of ill health. When the time came for her to give birth, the hospital refused to admit her – not because she was an unmarried mother, but because she was an 'unrepentant sinner' who lived with the father of her child. After the war, Lilian, Tom, and the baby moved to the anarchist colony Whiteway, in Gloucestershire.

On June 7, 1981, Sharon Roughan, Ame Harper, and Judy Greenway interviewed their son, Tom Keell Wolfe (1916 - 1997) at his home in Cheltenham. (A follow-up interview, which was to have included his wife José Wolfe, was discussed, but doesn't seem to have taken place.) As members of the Anarchist Feminist History group, we weren't professional historians (or interviewers): we were political activists wanting to piece together stories of anarchist women in Britain. I am now transcribing and uploading some of the material we gathered, in the hope that it may be useful to other researchers rather than just gathering dust among my files. What appears here is my 2022 transcription of Sharon's handwritten nineteen-eighties version - part transcript, part summary - of the Tom Keell Wolfe interview tape. The present location of the original tape is unknown, but if it is rediscovered I will make it available to researchers. Meanwhile, I would be glad to hear from anyone with further information, questions, clarification or corrections to add.

Judy Greenway, October 2022

Notes on text:

I have not indicated minor corrections to the original text – other 2022 amendments by me are indicated by *[italics in square brackets]*. Ellipses appear in the original document.

Q. - question or comment by interviewers. A couple of questions relating to [an earlier occasion when I met Lilian Wolfe](#) are specified in the original transcript as being by Judy Greenway.

T. - Tom Keell Wolfe

**'I didn't know I was the child of unusual parents':
Tom Keell Wolfe interview notes**

**Judy Greenway, Ame Harper, Sharon Roughan
Anarchist Feminist History Group, 1981.**

Q. ... Do you consider yourself an anarchist?

T. I don't know what an anarchist is really; over the years I've met such a variety of them, I don't know what the practical application of it is in this world.

Q. How did it actually affect you as a child, being brought up by anarchists?

T. I don't know, I just had parents like other kids, and I didn't know I was the child of unusual parents; I didn't make any notes.

Q. How about your education? And things like that?

T. Mother was the breadwinner in the family. She kept these shops and made it possible for my father to work for *Freedom* [anarchist newspaper] as he didn't get any money. If he got 5 bob a week he did really well. I went to a variety of schools and ended up at one – Stonehouse – private school – the thing that attracted mother to it was that one of the houses was vegetarian. She was a vegetarian – I still am – and it had a reputation for being a different sort of school, but it was a private school/ not state school and became a public school, in fact, while I was there. The head suddenly realised he wasn't immortal. Mother had to pay fees for it - but I was a day boy though, not a boarder, so it wasn't all that much I suppose. But ... very much the attitude of any parent wanting to find the best sort of school locally.

Q. Did other children from the Colony [Whiteway] go to that school?

T. No. Some of them started off at the local village school and then went on to the school in Stroud. We were in Stroud catchment area which meant – you either went to one of the two grammar schools there (boys/girls) – or to the Central School – equivalent of a secondary tech – it wasn't quite secondary modern ... You know Laurie Lee – writer – well he went to the Central School there; his brother Jack to the grammar – he says in his book his grammar was very good! I used to cycle to school with him.

Q. Wasn't there any attempt to educate the children in Whiteway?

T. Oh yes. There was a school at Whiteway for donkey's years. It was run by the people up there. They contributed so much a week to the school funds and then employed a schoolteacher, who probably got about 24 bob a week – or something like that! Oh yes, for younger children – I went to it for part of the time but I was also in an elementary school in London. Whiteway – although it was completely unrecognised actually at the County Hall in Gloucester – it was considered to be quite an advanced sort of school – in fact the modern village schools do quite well if they come up to the standard of what was run there.

Q. Was it run fairly conventionally?

T. Not really, no – all sorts of activities – anybody around the place who could teach anything interesting would be dragged in to do something. There wasn't just the teacher. This man Gassy [*Marin*] I was talking about; his great enthusiasm was Esperanto and he used to come and give us Esperanto classes when he wasn't walking around the world you see!

Q. Were you quite fluent in Esperanto?

T. At one time – We used to chat in Esperanto, the kids up there – I've forgotten all about it. Many years later I went with some people to an Esperanto conference in Zagreb and I found I could understand quite a lot of it, so – it made its mark somehow.

But the school I was at was fairly orthodox in its teaching methods.

Q. Why was there a vegetarian college at it?

T. I suppose because the headmaster was a vegetarian and was very keen that one of the boarding houses should be run on those lines.

Q. We're interested in your mother's reasons for being a vegetarian – two of us are vegetarians.

T. Are you? Poor things – years of frustration ahead of you! My reasons are I was brought up that way and never saw any reason to change; also added to that I suppose the humanitarian aspect is the main thing. I think from a purely health point of view it's better. There are lots of healthy carnivores, so you can't claim too much for it. People do claim too much sometimes – like vegetarians don't get cancer ...

I think she must have come in contact, I think it was somebody when she was working at the Central Telegraph Office in London, before she took off and became sort of an anarchist shopkeeper/cum prisoner. She was in jail for a time ...

What prompted your interest in mother?

Q. (Judy describes her involvement with interviewing Lilian Wolfe for *Shrew*)

T. My trouble is that with being full time at school – then seeing patients (osteopath/homeopath/naturopath) ... I haven't read... My political activity has been nil ... (He points out the picture of Lilian on her 90th birthday. Discusses spellings of Lilian's name. Discussion of photos. Passport photos – when Tom went to meet Max Nettlau in Paris. Lilian had auburn bobbed hair.)

Q. Did she ever tell you why she became an anarchist?

T. No this is the trouble – you don't discuss things like this, do you? In family. I wish I'd got to know my father better before he died – he was just my father you see. I knew people came from all over the place to see him.

Q. You didn't find the other children at school think that your home life was eccentric or anything like that, did you?

T. No – I found out afterwards that theirs was even more so... Boarding school ... Their parents separated, abroad, or some other reason for getting rid of kids. I did at least have a stable home background. Advantage of life outside – I had a full, interesting life.

Q. Did any of them come and visit the colony?

T. One or two, that's all. They weren't that interested. Laurie Lee used to come up ... He and I played fiddle together... Not much going on in his own village or Stroud and we used to have play-readings and music groups and gramophone societies... Helped him along.

Q. Did the little school in Whiteway close down – is that why you went to ...?

T. No I just got too old for it – it really was just for the younger children... Right at the very beginning they used to have to walk from Whiteway to Sheepscombe to go to school.

Q. It's a very beautiful little village...

T. And it's totally different now from when I was a kid there... (Our description of directions to Whiteway). Well, I lived on the side where the hall is.

Well, the history was that there was a stream over the other side where we could get our water from. Nellie Shaw lived down at the bottom there ... And for a long time they kept the other side of the road as a big field where they grew oats ... They needed more land so they started using that – it was always known as the dry ground because there was no water over there. And we lived down that road – it was very open – very bare ... And people very conscious of this so brought in bushes, trees, without any idea how they were going to grow, and of course they got damned great forest trees growing up in hedges, which is all very well but it's got very oppressive now – there's almost too much of it! But it was very necessary at the time. The roads were all made up by the people who lived there – communally – no roads to the place, we had to do our own – very nice too, working with a bunch of other people. Communal meals to go with it. That's even when we were bringing up a family there.

Q. Who cooked communal meals – women?

T. Whoever was around I suppose – the last one I remember – the day before my son was born – cold, muddy – Alan Maxfield's house – a big bowl of soup. I think it was women then – but anybody would join in.

Q. Were all meals vegetarian?

T. Yes – on an occasion like that because there would be some vegetarians partaking but there was no party-line about what you ate up there/no rules about anything - which was one of the strengths of the place really. A lot of colonies were set up with very strict rules – you had to believe this or that ... and passed out as a result.

Q. Why did you leave – because you couldn't make a living?

T. I couldn't make a living there anyway. I was in practice in Cheltenham ... I did two years at training college and got this job teaching in Gloucester (practical travelling problems - teaching and running a surgery - no fun - wife wanted to move, difficulty with buses for children... So generally desirable to move).

Q. I'm surprised you stayed so long – children move away from their family home ...

T. A lot did go. When my wife and I joined up – didn't marry for a long time (practical problems ...) We met at a PPU [Peace Pledge Union] camp in Derbyshire under the auspices of the Rev Dick Sheppard. I was training up in Edinburgh ... And after we got to know each other quite well – she came up there for the last year. In the meantime

someone up at Whiteway was proposing to leave; mother bought the house from her, and that's really why we went to live at Whiteway – she bought it for us to live in.

Q. What did the house sell for at that time?

T. I think Marguerite wanted £100 for it.

Incidentally when her bloke Fred Charles was building it, I can remember playing around amongst the rafters ... So I knew the place fairly well.

During the war she (Lilian) suddenly realised that she had £1000 in the bank and was so ashamed of it she got rid of the shop – that was her view about money – she got rid of it! Her sister died and left her quite a bit. She wasn't happy until she passed it on – "It's silly me having it – I'm 90" she said. Shares et cetera – passed them on to me.

Q. What did she sell in her shop? As well as food – literature?

T. Not much in the way of literature. She also sold herbs...

Q. Did she know much about naturopathy?

T. She taught herself ... Yes, she took over a health store in Willesden. It was after they came out of jail – a man said, "Come and live in my house until you've got that baby born". She wasn't allowed to have it in hospital because she was still living with my father ... She had a sister who refused to have anything to do with my father and I ... Eldest, (Boss!). Extraordinary thing was that she [*the sister*] was living with a man without being married, but she knew how wicked it was and was thoroughly ashamed of herself! He had a wife – you see – who he couldn't ditch. She lived in guilt – mother did it brazenly and openly.

Grandparents – the mother deserted the father leaving him with six kids ... Went on stage ... So Lilian had to spend all her savings on one occasion to bring the old girl back from South Africa. Lilian looked after her father in old age - she wasn't cast off by them. Her father – Orthodox C of E family, brought up in pub (bankrupts ...)

Q. Were you embarrassed at parents not being married?

T. Not the slightest – I used to tell the kids at school ... I don't remember getting anything adverse about it at school. I think I was regarded as being a bit different. I was a natural one to be bullied, and things like that.

Q. Some children react by rejecting their families.

T. Yes but the whole setup at Whiteway was like this ... Always six or eight kids about the same age. I suppose we just never thought about those things very much. Some were married, some weren't – that's all there was to it. I know my father came to some school concert once – the headmaster addressed him as Mr Wolfe – father said "Keell is the name" head said "Yes, yes, of course" and that was that!

Q. Did other kids from Whiteway follow in their parents' footsteps?

T. A lot of people who went to Whiteway went there not for any particular political reason – they went there because they liked the feeling of freedom and somewhere to live; there wasn't a strong philosophical bond with most of the people up there; kids – some followed parents; some became orthodox, in jobs ...

Q. You seem to have followed on ...

T. Yes, and my own children – we never pushed our ideas or hid them but both are very much of our way of thinking. Rich – Labour Party in south Wales; and daughter too but carnivorous! Rich – vegetarian – good school meals! Ann – awful school meals – Stroud! José (his wife) not vegetarian.

Q. Did people have (formal) political discussions at Whiteway?

T. Yes, yes! Used to have people come around and lecture to us. The bloke who built the house for us, in his later years everybody at Whiteway contributed for him to go on a delegation to Russia; and he came back with the light in his eyes – “Oh well, I can die happy, I've seen the new world.” Poor devil, and he believed it too. (Late nineteen-twenties)

Fred Charles Slaughter – had served 13 years in clink on trumped up charge of making bombs in Walsall. He was very socialist – well-known – a man with metal shapes asked if he could make up things in his workshop; he was then raided and charged.

Our house was burnt down two years ago – wooden houses! Made from big army huts (like many) bought after the First World War and reshaped. Since the last war some people bought up old prefabs – very nice houses based on that – very well-made places.

Q. Were you active in PPU?

T. When Dick Sheppard first wrote the letter to the newspapers we saw it at home in the *Herald* and both of us wrote and took the pledge – José lived in Nottingham when there was a camp there - that's how we met. I was in Edinburgh, very active in local groups – sold *Peace News* – rather embarrassing – just before the war. British Union of Fascists had their paper *Action* - they were against the war too! (Didn't want to fight Adolf). Used to stand right alongside of me – nasty situation – very, very rude remarks thrown at me at the time.

Q. You were a conscientious objector? Was it difficult?

T. Yes. Yes. I was self-employed so no comments from work; nasty comments from some people who had been friends who were in reserved occupations but jeered at us being pacifists openly. I was in practice on my own down here ... I might have done better if I hadn't been like that ... They gave me unconditional exemption - partly my own ideas, and family background! I would have thought far more to my credit if I'd fought my way out of a military family. (Story of a military friend conscientious objector and card discussions – Imperial War Museum. A tape was made of Lilian) [*This tape, made for the Imperial War Museum not long before Lilian's death in 1974, is [available to listen to online](#)*].

Q. Did you have much contact with people up in London – the *Freedom* group ... ?

T. Oh yes. *Peace News* people more; during the time my father was running *Freedom*, I was too young. When they moved the stuff down here because they had no premises there – a group of them in London accused him of stealing all the stuff. During the war it was called *War Commentary*. He was nominally the publisher of *Spain and the World* - not much physically to do with it – giving up then I suppose – he died in 1938. I knew some of the *Freedom* people – Vernon Richards. My mother worked up there for years – they had a shop in Bristol, they re-established in Red Lion St. Before this in Swiss Cottage – she lived in the big house they had there, and offices there. She ran the shop after this. During war - she gave up her shop so that she could devote the rest of her time to *Freedom Press* – from the early war for 20 years or more until she was 90! They had a big birthday party for her! And collection, as she was rather addicted to

continental holidays at that time. 1966. – it's come to so much (the collection) she said, that I'm going to go to America. We went with her. (We visited U.S. son-in-law). She stayed with her friends in New York.

She had a room in Tony Smythe's house – NCCL [*National Council for Civil Liberties*]. she decided to give up Freedom Press because the people there were very dedicated but there was no social life and she was just sitting there working away and no one talking to anybody. She got a bit fed up with that. (Early 90s) (Jack and Mary there !?![*This seems to be an interjection by Sharon when transcribing, and presumably refers to Jack Robinson and Mary Canipa.*])

I went to collect her from London but she had found two new jobs so wasn't coming home after all! One and a half days for Tony at NCCL and WRI [*War Resisters' International*] and would come back at weekends to her own flat in Cheltenham until she died at age 99.

I met her off the bus – she said you'll be glad to know I'm going to give up all this and spend summer in Cheltenham – (Thursday night). Friday night – she rang asking for help with shopping on Saturday – very unheard of – I went round there and she could hardly totter; she must have had a big stroke the day before. She actually gone to a dentist on the day after her stroke ... Some man had stopped, and taken her to and from the dentist after seeing her on the road. Anyway, on Saturday she insisted on getting her pension and shopping, but she could hardly get along, but she had to do it all herself – no handing over to me. She saw the doctor – brought her around here [*i.e. to his house*]. She lasted four weeks – hated being looked after – very cross with me because we had it all fixed up to go to Amsterdam to see a friend of hers. And we couldn't go and it was all fixed up. She was living downstairs; writing a letter to friends in Germany – which I never posted, it was too terrible.

She lived alone all those years after Tom died – he was 72; she was 62 then – so 37 years – another lifetime – on her own – doing just as she liked – no pushing her around.

She managed on the old age pension and a little money tucked away. But she said it was rather awkward living on so long, because she'd budgeted on only living until she was 80! Her sister from Edinburgh had left her her flat and some money. He persuaded the aunt to move, as mother was going up there every six weeks on overnight bus... (Et cetera).

She stayed on in the flat after my aunt died, but the ownership of the flat had never been transferred to her.

End of side one of tape.

(Practical complications over this after Lilian's death).

Q. Did you ever meet Marie Louise Berneri?

T. One of the most beautiful ... Met her first at her father's burial ... Saw a lot of her and Vero [*Vernon Richards, MLB's companion*]. Remember staying a night in their flat in Chalk Farm after some big meeting – the bombs were landing all around – German planes ... When she died mother was completely broken up.

Lilian and Marie were very close, and Vero like a son to her. At that time, she was up there for a fortnight at a time and just got home occasionally; later on she was more or less here as much as she was in London ... Oh yes, Vero used to look after her very nicely. Used to arrange these holidays for her and sometimes they would meet up abroad with his family.

Q. Did you ever meet Emma Goldman?

T. Good God yes.

Q. [*Judy*] I remember Lilian said that she didn't like her at all!

T. No – they ... Oh yes Emma was a very tough cookie. I was very embarrassed in later years – she used to come and see us at the shop in Willesden – I remember artlessly saying to her – the way children do – without any idea of financial reward – I was going to have a bike for my birthday ... I'd got half the money and it was that bike in that shop – of course she stocked up a few dollars towards it! ... It must have looked pretty bad!

She was lovely with kids – staying with some Glasgow people (anarchists). She was there for weekend (meetings). They were all in the room talking – some of the kids came in – the parents went to shoo them out and Emma Goldman said "No ... They're far more important than we are, they are the future!"

Q. (... Discussion of women not liking Emma Goldman)

T. José got along very well with her - she met her a few times. I know they had long talks on whether to marry ... This sort of thing. I remember running a meeting for Emma – it must have been one of the last ones before she went off to live in Canada. It was during the Spanish Civil War... up in Edinburgh. The way she dealt with the opposition was incredible and she was getting on for 70 then. There was a very strong Communist who objected very much to her approach ... She floored him. She was very short and stocky. Of course - my father arranged her marriage. She got fed up of being hounded from one country to the other by the police (France, US, Sweden) she thought she could get British nationality. – [*she asked:*] Did you know anybody? He thought around and remembered a fellow in south Wales (Bren Allen) – Jim Colton – (in later years discovered he was a Yorkshire man). Dad wrote and asked him; he said he'd be very honoured to but he hadn't got a decent suit – so they fixed this, paid his fare to London by train; he was introduced to Emma – so dad, C.W. Daniel (publisher of *Nellie Shaw*) were witnesses at the registry and went off and had lunch and said goodbye.

Q. In the Orwell biography [*by Crick*] it said that he sent his son out to live with Lilian.

T. No – with us. I... gross inaccuracies in it – e.g. "Whiteland Colony" ... Mother told us that Eric Blair [*i.e. George Orwell*] was at the sanatorium - it was only two or three miles away from Whiteway (Cranham). (Flecker also there when he wrote (*Hassall?*) - father headmaster of the school down here).

He was living there, he was inside a little outside chalet place. Mother said that he was down here and not getting many visitors – being a long way from London and it might be a good idea if we went and visited him ... Felt a bit diffident about it but a fellow from Whiteway was working there as a sort of maintenance man and he got to know him and asked him if he'd like some visitors – yes – so we went down there twice a week... He was pretty bad at that time. Incidentally, the first thing he always did when we got there was pour us out a large measure of whiskey against his germs.

One day he asked us if we knew anybody who would look after his little boy for him for a time – "I'd like him to get to know me a bit better before I begin to look too horrible." He knew he was on the way out and of course we looked at one another... And said we would have him. The funny thing was George Orwell was very definite and said "I don't want him made into a vegetarian". He was extremely orthodox about feeding - didn't want any funny ideas or anything like that! Anyway, we had him with us for three months - José would take him down there, the kid would play with his father outside and so forth. Adopted child of course. While he was with us Orwell's sister Avril came down

and saw us at the house and – some poet – Sir Richard Price? When time came for the kid to go home, he arranged for José to take him – up to island of Jura – two day trip – she went up and spent four or five days on island with his sister and group of four or five on the farm. Ricky was about five then. (Crick didn't interview them). After I came across these two or three ridiculous statements I couldn't go any further with (the book) – I was going to write a stiff letter... ([but] Horrible accident in France)

Somebody at Whiteway has put a lot of stuff together there. (Conversation about wine). The woman who inherited a lot of papers from Gassy Marin – looked after him in later years – we left her our house – she's got his records – he kept a lot about it – he was an anthropologist – he went off for a 10 year walk at one time – there were gaps ...! But he kept pretty accurate notes about everything.

Q. When you were living with your parents in London – were they living communally then?

T. No – they were when they first met, but mother had this shop in Willesden with this little house attached to it. I went back in for a year to do a pre-med at Regent Street Poly before Edinburgh. I went back – it seemed tiny. Little garden, couple of bedrooms – it must've had a spare room – one of the old comrades, William C. Owen – he lived there for quite a time.

Marsh House was the commune (during First World War it packed up) named after Alfred Marsh, who was at *Freedom* with my father – I still use a brush that was made in his factory (which he inherited). He made all the people that worked in it part-owners. Hairbrushes still work!

Q. Did people come to your mother for health advice...?

T. They did at the shop in Stroud. And I gather she did a fair old bit in helping people with unwanted pregnancies

Q. (Judy) She gave us a recipe [for that, when she was interviewed for *Shrew*]

T. "The six packets" it was called... If I was running the shop for mother, people would come in look sort of embarrassed and say – "Is the lady there? "No". I'd been primed – "What do you want – the six packets?" "Yes."

I think she'd forgotten what they were, and we recreated it between us. I remembered some, my wife who helped in the shop ... People kept coming – six twopenny packets.

Q. Did your mother have anything to do with other women active in the birth-control movement?

T. Not to my knowledge – my father printed Margaret Sanger, I believe.

Q. Did you know Guy Aldred?

T. Yes – my father did – not me – and up in Glasgow and apparently didn't approve of my father.

Q. Rose Witcop? His companion.

T. And Millie. I remember the name ... We used to meet all sorts of people ... East End comrades they were called.

My father set type – compositor – how he made his living before he took over *Freedom*.

Q. *[Rose Witcop's]* birth control clinic – Shepherd's Bush – but we can't find out more.

T. I knew him only up in Glasgow – it may be that I came across her – socials...

Q. What was social life like at Whiteway?

T. Very rich – particularly during the war when we were all thrown in on ourselves – if you wanted to book the hall for something – six weeks ahead! Not Thursdays - ITMA on the radio! Otherwise all sorts of things going on – play readings, Shaw, Ibsen, any old things ... Sometimes acted readings - actual dramatic society at one time, then a music group every two weeks – people actually made music – very good musicians up there. Gramophone Society – overcharged ourselves for refreshments in order to buy records, so much for belonging, decent machine – all the latest. Very enjoyable.

Q. Did you never feel it was too closed?

T. I had a lucky life – when at school that was a different atmosphere - cycling club ... I had a wide sort of life that way. And then I went to London for a year. During my childhood and young-manhood I had plenty to interest me during the war – a fairly full-time business just going on living really. An awful lot going on at Whiteway.

Q. People, although not married, did tend to live in monogamous nuclear families?

T. Yes – mostly. There were the usual little affairs going on here there and everywhere. A friend was going up to London on the train one day and she overheard some people talking about Whiteway. She found rather to her surprise that we all switched husbands and wives every six months! Every now and then the newspapers would remember about Whiteway, and there'd be a burst of articles – the usual lies.

Q. Do you have any of them?

T. Maybe some tucked away somewhere. Of course, the big time we had was during the time that I was at the training college down here – a lady up there wanted to sell her house. And some solicitor in Stroud said it would be all right: I can get you the title deeds to that land. Because she wanted to sell it to some bloke who could raise money through some RAF benevolent fund. He had to have title deeds – to get a mortgage. Dennis Hayes, the PPU solicitor, advised putting a caution on it - which means if anyone tries to register it at central land registry they will come back to you - so – caution applied. So they contacted us and the case was fought. I was secretary of the Colony and the official witness – I wrote a 40 page background of the history of the place – we went up there (including the press: "Freelove Colony Goes to War"). Gassy was there – heavy tweed suit, beard, long green coat, shock of hair – press took photos. We were on the train – people reading papers with our pictures – not a soul recognised us. But I did come in for a bit of stick from some of my fellow students at the training college – someone looked up and recognised me. We won the case hands down on sheer custom.

(Old girl lived with someone: supposed to be her uncle. She woke up one night in a thunderstorm terrified and said "I nudged uncle ...") And we were actually able to produce the book he'd signed 40 years before saying he recognised ... And the registrar said we'd recreated the old manorial system of landholding and done on the use/occupation basis.

Q. I understand some complicated rating system ...

T. Haven't heard of it.

Q. (Reference to alternative communities book)

T. You never pay rates on land; tithes – people refused – years ago – and they come and take things away – still got some of the old notices that used to be put up.

I can't see people who've spent £30,000 putting a house up on a piece of land they've had virtually given to them to use - when they come to sell that house they're going to say it's got 1/4 of an acre of garden around it.

Q. Do people still have to sign the book?

T. They're supposed to, I presume so. The transfer of land would have to be approved by the Colony because they have to formally relinquish the land and other people have to have it granted to them. At one time people had 2 acres, and then split up ... People didn't want so much land so there was land available for reallocation ... So I imagine the transfer is more or less automatic.

Q. What did people work at?

T. Most outside, a few at the bakery and a few used to work at craft workshops at Whiteway. Mostly people had to work outside – there was no way you could make a living on the land.

Q. So you weren't self-sufficient in any way?

T. Not after the very early years; even then they had a great deal of help from outside. Aylmer Maude – the man who translated Tolstoy - and Malcolm Muggeridge's dad used to help them out in the early days – all sorts of people like this.

Q. Did you know Mabel Hope?

T. She was often talked about; ... Wasn't she the one who went and... (Italy? Or out to live in California?) (Venetian night discussion) A great friend of mother's – heard her name a lot – like Bert Clapham.

Q. Did you know Monica Whately?

T. Again, a name around Freedom Group - I didn't know her ... We did have a lot of contact with Sylvia Pankhurst. Mother was in her more working- class oriented side of the movement. She was involved with Sylvia – she came to Whiteway and stayed for a time to write a book. I remember my father saying that she sort of looked around for a suitable father for this child that she wanted to have – Italian was it? [*Sylvia had a child with anarchist Silvio Corio*]. What are you? ...

Q. (Our explanations)

T. Mother worked damned hard all her life; when she had that shop in London she used to deliver her stuff around on a bicycle, with me stuck on the back sometimes.

Q. Was she one of the first people to set up a health food shop?

T. Well she took over one that was already running although it was pretty early on. There was a man called Ore [?] from Belfast - he had a shop over there and he wanted one set up in London and asked her if she would manage one for him – Monkton Hill? She had someone to help run the Willesden one. It was a way of making up a living but an idealistic one I suppose – doing good at the same time.

Q. Aims?

T. Introducing people to more wholesome ways of eating and things like this - that was bound to have been a conscious thing, knowing her.

Q. Did she drop out of women's things and concentrate on vegetarianism et cetera?

T. She was doing that to give my father to the movement, to run the paper. He had no other way of making money. That's the way she saw it. She was never a theoretician - not writing articles or books.

Q. But she did speak ...? (Give speeches)

T. Yes yes ... But she was basically quite a shy person ... Not a front man. "Why me?" sort of thing? Just part of your life, you don't think it's anything special.

Q. It's interesting that you've carried on with your parents' ideas ...

T. I don't feel I've carried on in a political sense, though I've not rejected them. I've been more involved in my own line of things as a nature practitioner that sort of thing. Of course our lives up at Whiteway were very much centred around the community when [José] would have liked more work done on the house - I was away making roads or painting...

Q. Back to Sylvia Pankhurst ... She and your mother get on quite well?

T. Yes, I suppose so, but when she was at Whiteway I don't remember her and mother together very much. She stayed with Gassy and then Bea Adams. When she was at Bea's, Richard Pankhurst was a small boy - it was suggested that he play with her grandchildren. He held his mother's hand all the time.

Q. (Discussion of us visiting Gloucester ...) Do you have an address for Alan Maxfield?

T. His house is known as 'Symphony', as it was never finished. He's quite an old man but he's got a lively interest in everything. We were meant to go and see him in the New Year... (But accident in France).

Q. Are you in touch with other Whitewayans?

T. In the States I looked up Betty Clark, an old Whitewayan - she's become a crank - health - in South California and is into all the weird health ideas imaginable.

I'm in contact with a girl whose parents were anarchist - her father was a son of Jeanne (Gassy's companion) they've got an old Welsh farmhouse - it's an open community - she's called Tessa Marin.

(Discussion of his family, son and daughter).

Q. No questioning of the nuclear family - strange - given their feelings about marriage.

T. They just felt it was no real business of anyone else's, that's why they didn't legalise it. (His view of natural groupings) ... Fact that I was an only child at Whiteway didn't upset me very much - you could always go into somebody's house ... in and out of each other's houses.

Q. Did some of the women choose to have only one child?

T. Didn't even choose that ... Far too busy ... Something went wrong ...

There was a dispute over land at Whiteway - fellow trying to get away with land - digging up the sports field and ill-tempered remarks being thrown about - "Look at him ... Just a bag of herbs that didn't work!"

Q. Is that what your mother did?

T. I've no idea. She introduced us to Rendell's pessaries when we first started not having children ... That didn't work. (Quinine and coconut fat ... mercury?) Meant to use them at the right time. It was all very unofficial - you could get done for that sort of thing ... Just helping people ... Word got around, but wasn't a centre for the Cotswolds.

Still eat Protheroe's bread ... I scattered his ashes in front of the bakery many years ago. He was impractical, took too much out of the place, built a magnificent place ... Woman bought it off him ... Then a man - Dennis Price - he's still running it now. Original recipe.

Q. Where are Whitewayans buried?

T. Miserden - up in churchyard - my father, Nellie Shaw. My mother's ashes - still at the firm ... I feel bad about this... But she lived for 99 good years. On dad's headstone - "He loved freedom".

You know how Colin Ward came into the movement - he was in the army as a conscript doing National service in Catterick. He got hold of a copy of *Freedom*, wrote to Red Lion; mother struck up a correspondence with him and he came down - ended up as part of the *Freedom* editorial group

[Alan Alban discussion]

Mother wanted to go to a French anarchist camp in south of France near Nimes - Alan Alban was there and a whole bunch from London.

Mother used to read the *Guardian* cover to cover every day - she cut out articles for me - then a viva to see if I'd read them properly. She was very mentally active right up until the very last weekend. Those last four weeks are best forgotten really.

Yes - we got it all fixed up to go to Amsterdam to see Annie Adama van Scheltema - Institute of Social History - I'd taken her to Annie year after year - long weekends - (Lausanne - Centre for Anarchist Studies - father's collection is there - we went there).

But mother could hardly walk and Annie couldn't walk down her steps - marooned with bad legs. When Annie was told she'd have to move - she had said, "When I leave this flat it will be in a box" - she probably had something tucked away - she wrote to us expressing her love for mother - we wrote back - we heard she was dead (she'd died on that day). Typical of her - very tough.

Annie and a professor [*this probably refers to Nicolaas Posthumus*] had started it before the war; during the war a lot of it was sent to Great Britain for safety (Max Nettlau's stuff and dad's) looked after by William Laney? Up at Harrogate, I think. After the war she managed to get the thing together again. In the war she had a terrible time during the Nazi occupation. All the stuff was crated up and sent off to Berlin (not just anarchist stuff). She was called 16 or 17 times to the Gestapo for interviews. Each time she took a case, thinking she was off to a camp. She found all the books had been put in a ship in some port in North Germany and were still there. Apparently during appalling winter conditions there - the troops who were in charge of the ship had made use of the crates as fuel and all the books and papers et cetera were in a soggy mass at the bottom of the hole. She got permission to get it back again - travelled all over Europe and the US - and built it up again. Now funded by the Dutch government; before war by a People's

Bank who had to give it to something socially useful. Her husband was a famous Dutch poet.

(discussion of future meeting ... His retirement ... He will be away the whole of September ...) [As far as I can recall, this further interview, which was to have included José, never took place.]

Q. Do you know Joy Evans?

T. Very well.

Mary Robert (Norman as she was then) - she used to run the school. She lives by furniture makers' sign. Mary and Basil were in a community in Holt in Norfolk - the place folded up and the people moved over to Whiteway and brought their houses with them!

Transcript ends

Anarchist Feminist History Group
Judy Greenway, Ame Harper, Sharon Roughan 1981
Judy Greenway 2022

Additional Resources

Lilian Wolfe interview with Sandy Martin from 1971:

<http://www.judygreenway.org.uk/wp/lilian-wolfe-lifetime-resistance-2/>

Lilian Wolfe interview in the Imperial War Museum can be listened to online.

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80000664> This brief and rather frustrating interview, intended as the preliminary to a longer one, was made in 1974, shortly before Lilian died.

Tom Keell Wolfe talks about the history of Whiteway in this 1992 article from *the Raven*: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/tom-keell-wolfe-whiteway-colony?v=1656504800>

Also on **Whiteway**, see Joy Thacker's *Whiteway Colony: the Social History of a Tolstoyan Community*, 1993, Whiteway, Glos., and Nellie Shaw's *Whiteway: A Colony on the Cotswolds*, 1935, C.W. Daniel, London - an account by one of its founders.

Reports of the **1916 trial** of Lilian Wolfe (then spelt Woolf) and Tom Keell can be found in *Freedom*, 1 July 1916, and in several national and local newspapers. See also *Freedom*, 1 September 1916.