

Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project

Interviewee: Phil Greasley

Interviewer: Mark Hutin

Place of Interview:

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Key

PG: = Interviewee, Phil Greasley

MH: = Interviewer, Mark Hutin

[time e.g. 5:22] = inaudible word at this time

[5:22 IA] = inaudible section at this time

Word 5:22 = best guess at word

MH: This is the Galop and Stonewall Housing Oral History Project. Today is Monday, the 13th of July 2009. It's 03:30pm. My name is Mark Hutin, that's M-A-R-K H-U-T-I-N, and I'm interviewing Phil Greasley and could you spell your name for me Phil?

PG: G-R-E-A-S-L-E-Y

MH: Thank you. And could you tell me where and when you were born?

PG: I was born in 1956 in Ashby-De-La-Zouch Hospital.

MH: Thank you. To begin with, could you tell me a bit about your background and your childhood, where you grew up and when you came to London, that sort of thing?

PG: OK. I grew up in Leicestershire and moved to Nottinghamshire when I was 12 and spent most of my teenage in Nottingham until I went to college in Middlesborough. Did my first degree there and then went on to do Master of Philosophy at Durham University. Lived in Newcastle-upon-Tyne for approximately four years and moved to London after that, in I think 1982.

MH: OK. So what was your first degree in? What did you study?

PG: Social Studies.

MH: OK. And what led you to study Social Studies? What drew you into it?

PG: I had a friend at school who was older, who was doing a Sociology degree and he told me a lot about it and it sounded a really interesting thing to do, and Social Studies is the course that I decided to enrol upon.

MH: OK. And so what Masters did you do? You said Master of Philosophy, but in what?

PG: I did my Master of Philosophy in Women's Employment. It was within the Sociology and Social Policy Department of Durham University and it was concentrating on the type of work histories women have and over a time period of their lives as to how their work histories were affected by, for

example, having children or not having children and their social economic status, how it varied according to life circumstances.

MH: So how did your career move on from that masters? Where did you go from there?

PG: I spent sometime in other universities and polytechnics as a research assistant and I entered the voluntary sector or charity sector in around about 1984. Again though as research assistant's or research officer's and eventually went on to a study of gay men in employment or looking for employment.

There's an organisation called Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights - LAGER, but the organisation at the time that I entered it, was [PG2 03:52] and everybody had to do all of the different tasks whether they'd be admin, case work and so forth. So although I'd been employed as a researcher, I also learnt how to be an advisor on employment role and other employment issues, and I stayed with LAGER for something like 15 years and eventually I mean it changed from being [PG2 04:34] and I became the Project Director and then it eventually achieved charitable status when I became the Chief Executive.

What was the last question?

MH: No, that's fine, that's absolutely fine. I was just thinking about LAGER, I'd be interested to hear a bit more about that because you were there for 15 years? So what sort of work were you doing and how did you feel things had changed over 15 years?

PG: OK. When I joined Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights as a researcher it was the mid 80's. It was either 1984 or 1985, I think '85 and it was a time when there was a huge amount of press misinformation about HIV and aids and from my own personal experience of friends I realised that people were actually being sacked on the basis that they were gay. I am talking about gay men at that particular time, although it is something that affected lesbians as well, just in the very fact, I mean despite the fact that it was quickly well known and it became quite different, quite difficult for HIV to be transmitted by lesbian sex just for the mere fact that they opted to have same sex relationships. The misinformation and stereotypes around HIV was so strong that even some lesbians faced discrimination on the grounds of HIV because of the social stigma around it.

MH: And so how did LAGER help? What did LAGER actually do?

PG: Well, it did actually develop and change quite a lot as the years went by because to begin with, it would give people perhaps fairly basic advise about their employment rights and in relation to employment role. As time went on within LAGER it is probably significant to say that in the early '90's it was one of the first organisations to get a contract with the legal services commission and it used to take industrial tribunal cases, if of course somebody had been sacked or if they'd experienced discrimination on sex, race or disability grounds and could take the tribunal whilst they were in their employment, but we used to cover the whole range of employment advise and information, so dismissals were just one part of it, but that's perhaps not a complex legal

process that we used to deal with, it was the whole tribunal process up until and including representation.

We used to employ a number of lawyers but those who weren't lawyers were often just as skilled and knowledgeable as those people who were lawyers and we would frequently work with solicitors and barristers in other organisations and on individual cases of discrimination. I always think it's significant that LAGER lost much of its funding in 2003/2004 spanning at that period, the time when the employment regulations on sexual orientation came into force. So although it's difficult to prove, it does seem beyond coincidence that once the law was changed to give specific protection for lesbians, gay men, bisexual people and by this time trans-gendered people as well, the funders probably thought there really wasn't a necessity to have a specific organisation dealing with these issues with the law in place, other solicitors and barristers could in fact deal with those problems.

MH: And how do you feel about that?

PG: It still left a huge gap because Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights didn't only deal with the dismissal, with discrimination, but that whole range of employment problems that people who were LGBT had and as far as I'm aware there's still nothing today which has exactly taken its place because many places won't give ongoing support to somebody who is actually in their employment, so quite a number of people are missed out on receiving that kind of advice.

MH: And were you there till LAGER finished?

PG: I was, yeah.

MH: OK. And then after LAGER what was your path between LAGER and starting out at Galop?

PG: Very quick. It was a matter of, I think I left, I think I'm right in saying I left LAGER almost the last day of April and started with Galop three weeks later.

MH: OK.

PG: I think that's right, in the May.

MH: Right, OK. You had probably worked with Galop prior to leaving LAGER and so you probably knew about Galop's remit and what it actually does?

PG: Yes. Sorry I'm trying to think back. Yes, LAGER was downstairs in an office so the proximity was very close.

MH: OK. Was that in Leroy House?

PG: Yeah.

MH: OK, I didn't realise that.

PG: Yeah, I'm sure at the time if Galop had made a hole in the floor they could have got through without going through the stairs.

MH: <Laughs>

PG: I think I'm right in saying that. We never tried it though.

MH: <Laughs> And I understand that you are the client services manager at Galop. You manage the help line and that sort of thing?

PG: Yes, I went into the job as a client service manager. Sorry, I meant to say that with Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights we also had a training arm as well.

MH: OK.

PG: And I think that is probably where the closest work came with Galop before I ever started there and where I probably got to know people the most because we would do joint training together. But the job didn't come because I was at LAGER it was all fairly advertised and interviewed.

MH: So tell me a bit about coming on to work at Galop, tell me a bit about that?

PG: When I first got there I don't think I was managing anybody but myself. I'm trying to think back but I think for the first few weeks at least I was doing the case work as well as managing my own case work, although of course I had the manager who was the chief executive of Galop, Tor Docherty was the chief executive at the time.

Although I had previously advised on employment role, there were huge amount of similarities with advising clients even though the advise was in the remit of criminal law and dealing with the police a lot more, there was still a huge amount of parallels, which probably applies to any sort of advise work about the way that you would help a client, the way you would advise the client, the information that you needed in order to help them further. So despite being a different subject matter LAGER was actually a very good basis for stepping into the advice, which was largely to do with criminal law.

MH: And can you remember roughly what the predominant issues are or were at that time for the organisation?

PG: There would be... I can't remember anything especially that was more one thing than another. There would be people who phoned because they reported an incident to the police but they didn't feel the police were really following it up and so this would be me or Galop following it up with the police, to see if we could get at least an update or what had happened to this person or why they weren't being contacted. There were enquiries from gay or bisexual men who had been arrested or more likely warned in relation to sex in public, in parks, for example, or public toilets.

It's quite difficult to remember because the law on sexual offences changed in the first few months that I was with Galop, so the advise quickly changed because there were certain... When I very first got there, there were certain offences which the law discriminated against gay and bisexual men or men who have sex with men and the sexual offences act was changed to make the law equal in every sense, that it would apply equally to opposite sex relationships as it would to same sex relationships.

There were quite a number of cases where people were experiencing harassment, possibly from their neighbours or people within their area on the grounds that they were or were perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans-genders. Harassment was certainly a large part of the work.

MH: And thinking of the wider political context and how things have changed during your time at Galop and around that era, I mean there's been a lot of change, hasn't there, in terms of the law, in terms of society's attitudes, a lot has changed especially in the last, well, ten years and in the last five years really, how do you think those changes have impacted on work that Galop is doing?

PG: Well, I think if we're back to the changes in the sexual offence, that was really quite a large change because one of the things that so rarely people, well, gay and bisexual men in particular just didn't realise was if they accepted a warning from the police in relation to sex in public or so forth, then that would more than likely show up if they had a criminal records check, particularly if they were jobs that involved exemptions from Rehabilitation of Offenders Act.

So for one thing that the offences were never [PG3 09:07] and I can remember dealing with cases where some people had an offence that was 20 years old and yet it came up on their criminal records check because they were in a type of job which was exempt from the rehabilitation of offenders and few people realise just how wide sweeping the exemptions are. I think most people realise that it is working with children that are exempt from rehabilitation of offenders, but probably not realising that even certain professions like accountancy are exempt from the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act.

Now, of course the type of offence they are looking for is fraud especially with money, but when you have a criminal records check then all the offences will come up and then it's for the employer to decide whether or not that is chosen to value from employment. So the change there was quite a big one, but then people had things on their record that were long in the past and it was quite a complex process if people wanted to have those offences wiped from their record cause they were no longer considered criminal acts after the change in the Sexual Offences Act.

MH: And in terms of, we talked about the criminal justice system and so on, but from an attitudinal point of view in society, do you think things have changed towards people's attitudes towards the LGBT community, in terms of what you were doing at Galop?

PG: OK. It's quite difficult to say because you're only really dealing with people who feel they've had problems.

MH: Of course, yeah.

PG: So it's very difficult to have an objective view. People don't ring you up or not very often and say, 'I've had a great time.' So I mean, I think I would say that I have to take both LAGER and Galop's experience together here and say that the attitudes of the police seem to change hugely. I mean the reports I had back in the '80's of the police couldn't be more different from those reports I had when I was working at Galop. Well, first of all, taking homophobia and transphobia seriously and the way that things did seem to completely

transform. I mean that's not to say that everything is perfect within the police, but if I'm comparing it with how it used to be and the attitudes that used to come out of the police, it is a total transformation.

MH: And what do you think has caused that shift?

PG: I think it's quite a number of different... I mean I think attitudes towards the LGBT community have generally changed in society. Obviously there is still prejudice within certain areas, certain people, but I think, one, when it's clear that the law doesn't tolerate discrimination, I do think that has an effect. So I think that's one area that's been important for change. So combining LAGER's experience and Galop and my own experience as well I think it has to be said, I think things were getting a lot better in the early '80's until HIV came around and I think that took things back a long, long way.

It would be argued of course that, that brought to the surface underlying prejudice that was always there, but I think when people were getting a lot more accepting of same sex relationships, I think that suddenly took things back many years, certainly not helped by the press hysteria. I mean I can remember an article in the Sun that talked about a reporter going to **heaven** **[PG4 01:09]** and asking for a pint of lager, and that the barman gave him a pint of lager and that his finger was dripping with blood into the lager, which just seemed the most unlikely thing that would ever happen in any bar, that a barman has a finger dripping with blood, never mind their idea that somebody may or may not be affected by HIV, but that is the type of thing that was just so common place at the time. So I really do think that took it back a long way and I think that had a knock on effect for lesbians as well.

MH: So how do you think the LGBT community recovered from that, cause we've got back that ground and have gone a bit further, haven't we?

PG: Yeah. Well, I think through a huge amount of hard work, campaigning, lobbying the LGBT community, to make sure that, well, OK, back to HIV to make sure that correct information did start to come out. I mean the government of that time, which was a conservative government, did eventually take action and started to issue guidelines on HIV and employment and that people shouldn't be sacked simply on the grounds of their HIV status, but I mean that didn't happen because the government suddenly thought it would be a good idea. That happened after a lot of work from different LGBT organisations and HIV organisations that sprang up to basically say this is an intolerable situation that is happening and something needs to be done about it.

So I mean I do think and a lot of trade unions started to take on LGBT issues and they made it clear that discrimination against their members was not acceptable, it had to because people were even going on strike or threatening to go on strike rather than work with somebody if they suspected them to be HIV positive. So there was also a huge amount of press publicity surrounding... I mean this is within the '80's and coinciding but not necessarily because of the HIV misinformation, but LGBT was synonymous with 'loony left' and certain local authorities would be pointed out as being 'loony left' and it was often LGBT issues, if they were introducing them into schools, for example, that would be reported within the press, often much distorted as these 'loony left' councils.

I mean a lot of it, a whole different source of misinformation was being put forward for totally different reasons or maybe they were related reasons, I don't know, but I do think it is largely because of the LGBT community and its supporters that began to push and to lobby for factual information to be put out to confront both the myths and stereotypes that were happening.

MH: And I suppose just thinking of section 28, that in a sense [PG4 06:20] against putting a, getting rid of the myths because you weren't allowed to talk about it, I mean what are your thoughts on that?

PG: Well, again section 28 was very much as a result of these wars that were going on of 'loony left' being associated with LGBT issues and it really was quite a victory that it was such a small change. But when section 28 was amended to forbid anybody intentionally promoting homosexuality, sorry, it's so difficult to remember but I think that was an amendment made in the House of Lords to the original drafting of section 28.

It's difficult to remember because section 28, in section, all sorts of things along the way, but once it became the onus for somebody to prove that a local authority and those within it were intentionally promoting homosexuality then that became much more difficult to take a case and I don't actually remember that any case was successfully taken. So that small amendment made a huge change to the impotence of section 28, nevertheless, the very fear of what might happen if a local authority or a school, for example, the very fear of being accused of violating section 28 was a huge, very negative thing in itself.

MH: I should imagine that would have funding implications with certain LGB projects?

PG: Very difficult to know. I mean the answer was certainly that was a fear and certainly lots of projects went under, but it's very difficult to know whether they went under because of fear of section 28 or just for other reasons, which affected the whole of the charitable and voluntary sector anyway. It's quite difficult especially to try and think back so long ago now.

MH: Well, thinking about the impact of Galop, if we come back to Galop, could you comment on what you think the impact of Galop is? First of all, the impact of Galop's work on yourself and then thinking a bit wider the impact of Galop on the community, the LGBT community, could you comment on that for me?

PG: I think over the years Galop's changed quite a lot. It started very much as a police monitoring group, which seems a bit odd, that a very tiny organisation could put itself forward as an organisation that monitored the police, the police being pretty huge. I think Galop matured a long, long time before I ever got there, a long, long time, so no credit to me whatsoever, but as it became an organisation that would criticise the police, if necessary, but worked with the police when that became a good way of helping somebody with their problems, I think it became an effective organisation.

I mean I think within Galop's history there have been quite a few examples of where Galop has worked with the police, to show the police how they can improve their relationship with the LGBT community and as the police became more amenable to working with the LGBT community and that Galop was a very good organisation for it to work with and I think even when I was

there, there was occasional remarks from police officers that Galop was seen to be anti police.

I personally and I would always say this to police officers if they ever said that, I felt that, that was really something that was quite unfair because I think Galop had quite a number of years tried to take quite an objective view with the police, if the police were genuinely willing to work with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-gender community, then Galop would make every effort to help the police achieve that goal and would work with the police, not against them and I mean I do think that Galop has been very successful of working with the police rather than against them in achieving gains for the LGBT community, that I would say is a personal view.

I mean on the other side I did have one or two people within the LGBT community who saw that it's been too closely linked with the police. I thought that was unfair because I think Galop had worked hard to establish the work with the police and the links with the police and I think to be taken seriously by the police. I don't see how you can possibly be an organisation that has a public face saying, 'we don't like you, we want you to listen to everything we say', sorry, I don't work like that on a personal level with people and I don't think an organisation can work like that, so I personally felt anybody who said that about Galop was either unfair or probably a little bit jealous of Galop's success.

MH: Well, thinking about, we've talked a bit about changes that you've witnessed, the positive changes with regards to the police, my final sort of topic area is around changes that you've witnessed more generally in the LGBT community and how you think things have changed during the last 25 years for the LGBT community?

PG: It's quite difficult for me to say because I don't know how I'd speak now as a gay man coming out at 16 or whatever. I mean I think I was 18 or 19 when I did come out. I was at college at the time. It wasn't the most difficult, it wasn't the most easy, but I don't know how it compares. I don't know now whether it's something... I think again it depends where people are and what situation they're in, so it's very difficult to make sweeping statements that make it sound as if everything is alright now because that could just be with age that things seemed to be more difficult then.

So it's very difficult to have an objective view about that and certainly some people have told me that if somebody is known to be LGBT at school they go through hell. So I'm just reluctant to say everything has changed so much, maybe my personal circumstances have changed so much. I work in the environment that is definitely positive for LGBT people. It's very strong on no discrimination previous to where I work now. I've worked for LGBT organisations, so it would be surprising to find a lot of homophobia in organisations that are LGBT themselves. So it's very, very difficult to make sweeping statements about...

Things seem a lot better. If I watch TV things seem a bit better in their portrayal and yet I'm reluctant to say things are perfect because they're certainly not. I mean it's not a bad thing, but you get an image if something manages to reach the papers about pride, you will still find the most colourful and outrageous image, but then perhaps people don't want to see boring people going about the streets in their boring ways. So maybe I'm being too

critical. Maybe you do go for the feather bowers when you're looking for a good photograph. It's one that's very difficult to be objective about when you are way within it yourself.

MH: Yes, it's true.

PG: That is non-committal as I could possibly be.

<Laughter>

MH: Well, to finish off, is there anything else you would like to mention, that you'd like to talk about?

PG: I mean in all there have been a lot of really good changes within the law, I think within social attitudes, but I have a feeling there will always be room for an organisation like Galop because I think there will always be people, there will always be pockets where discrimination exists and although we've talked about the criminal law and we've talked about police, we've got to remember that that's only one part of it because it's the people who commit the criminal acts in the first place that are the problem, so we shouldn't get too carried away with the police and people do need support. So I do think Galop has done a very important job over the years and I don't think it's finished and it will continue to be needed in the years to come.

MH: Great. Thank you very much.

<End of recording>