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Creators: Rick & Julia Goldsmith
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Interviewee: Chris Green (speaker, male)
Interviewer: Marsha O'Mahony (speaker, female)
Camera & Sound: Richard Goldsmith (male)
Producer: Julia Goldsmith
Transcriber: Marsha O'Mahony
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Summary transcript with: Chris Green

Summary: Chris Green was director of the City of London Festival, director of the Poetry Society, and trustee of the Courtyard in Hereford. He was also president of the Hereford Lib Dems. He fought the constituency seat three times between 1979 and 1987.

0.00

CG: Relationship with Derek started because both are Liberals. Derek though out his life a committed Liberal. CG nominee for the 1975 elections. Derek Chairman then of the local Liberal association. Remained friends with Derek all the way through working and political life. Derek, as Chairman and President, was a great mentor to Chris. His politics was very definitely left of centre. He really loved his political work. He was quite clear what his objectives were politically. You can see in some of his images, he's got a point to make and he's going to make it.

MOM: Tell me about Frank Owen.

CG: He was a classic journalist and a very important journalist. He worked with Beaverbrook, he was quite good friends to Beaverbrook and he did a lot of important journalism. He was also a writer/historian. He wrote one of the best biographies of Lloyd George and he wrote another one, the Three Dictators. In Hereford, he was loved and hated, as politics was even more divisive then than today. I know that he partied well, there are stories of bills not being paid at the Green Dragon and disappearing off back to London and the Beaverbrook newspaper group. I don't know how many of them are true, but he was clearly a character.

Another character Robin Day who came to fight a by-election in 1959, and he really was a character. Great story about him from DE. Robin Day due to give tour across the county and arrived at Llangrove village hall and made his speech. Afterwards tweed-suited woman stood up and said she couldn't understand why you aren't a conservative. He looked her in the eye and said: Madam, you are a feudal anachronism'. Everyone laughed. When Chris was doing his tour of the county for election a very similar thing happened at Llangrove, possibly the same woman, and he told her the Robin Day story.

The big issue in recent times was the merger between Herefordshire and Worcestershire. In those days, there was quite a complex local government system and there were all sorts of difficulties. There was a campaign to try and get more unitary authorities throughout the land. For some people, it was felt that Herefordshire could never cope along, so it went for this merger with Worcester. It was immensely unpopular with Herefordian. They felt they were having their land taken from them, they felt they were having their paintings taken from them. The people of Hereford were angry and they were. That was a Derek line. He was very good at sussing out the right kind of language to use in a particular situation. He did know his patch well, but he was driving by an overwhelming sense of fairness and justice. His photos around the hop farms for example, that's him wanting to document the ordinary people of Hereford. And he was angry so much of Herefordshire was owned by people who didn't have much to do with the ordinary people. He was passionate about the need for there to be a different system and regime.

10.00

CG: The highlight of elections was eve of poll, when there was always a big rally in High Town and political parties would take it in turn to put up their speaker. And you would get a couple of thousand people. I mean it really was dynamic and exciting. An election was an exciting event and politicians were still trusted and believed to a greater or lesser extent. So, it was a different age. At these rallies, supporters would turn up with candles. It was a bit like a vigil. There would be an enormous amount of noise. Whoever was on the platform would get a lot of booing because a large chunk of the crowd was not on their side. It was pretty much a two-party thing then. Not much of a Labour presence then. The Liberal tradition comes from the old Non-conformist tradition. So, Hereford City was a strong non-conformist tradition. If you went down the Golden Valley, into Wales, there's very strong chapel-going communities as were who retained this sort of instinct. But those vigils were incredible. They used to happen in Ross too on a smaller scale. There are stories of candidates being hung by their feet out of upstairs windows from shops. The Tory candidate apparently that happened to. So, it was exciting and quite dangerous at times too. Derek loved the drama. Relished every minute of it. And had so many stories to tell about it as you can imagine. He lived and thrived on little bits of scandal, little bits of nonsense.

There are three or four councillors I remember hearing stories about and some of the stories were quite unsavoury and I'm not going to share them, but the sorts of things you would expect, sexual preferences etc. but Derek loved sharing them around, just a little bit.

When Robin Day stood in 1959, Jeremy Thorpe, who was a very young campaigner for the party, he came up and spent two or three weeks here working for Robin. And then the next time he came to Hereford was for my adoption meeting, which was 20 years later. After the formal adoption, we went for a walk around High Town. And 20 or 30 people came up asking him how he was, and he remembered nearly all of them by name. he had an extraordinary capacity for remembering people's faces and names. Despite everything that's come out subsequently about Jeremy, it's hard not to have a bit of fondness for Jeremy. He was quite a magnetic character. He'd walk into a room and it would go quiet.../

15.00

CG: .../he was very eloquent and very funny. During campaigning, DE's role was to look after Chris. Drove him almost everywhere. He also took almost full responsibility for all the literature the Liberals put out, helped to write it, took the photographs for it. Lots of political photographs then were pretty staid. DE read this very well and got action shots, candidates on the road. In many ways, I think it's fair to say Derek was ahead of his time in the way he approached things, the way he saw things. I think being a TV journalist was a massive help for him because he knew exactly what was going down well, media-wise. He wasn't one of those magnetic characters who could walk into a room like Thorpe. He was quite a quiet person. He loved his fun. Infectious laugh. He loved his gold. He loved his jazz.

When he was driving me round electioneering, spent a lot of time in the car together and therefore a lot of stories shared. Learned a lot about Herefordshire and Herefordshire people, some of it complimentary and some of it less so!

But within the local Liberal group, DE was the adviser and informer, the one who should always be consulted if there was a problem because he would know a way out of it. Another wise man behind the scenes was the solicitor Sam Beaumont. He arrived in Hereford with not a penny and became a millionaire from buying and selling property. And he and DE got on very well. Not everyone got on with Sam.

20.00

MOM: Did Derek get on with everyone?

CG: I don't remember DE having an enemy. I wasn't aware of one. It was impossible not to like him.

It's impossible not to see some of his politics coming out in this photograph. In had a belief in giving people, who perhaps were not noted and didn't get much attention paid to them, in

often not very rewarding jobs, to give them an opportunity to be seen and appreciated, and to be known for what they were. He wanted to be able to say things through his photographs that people couldn't say for themselves, and which he thought they were disadvantaged by their position, their poverty, whatever that may be, or just ignored. There were lots of stories to be told. He knew he had the power of the camera to do that. He was quite a modest man but quite proud of what he did.

GBS: Was there an active jazz scene in Hereford?

CG: There was jazz regularly at Pengethley Hotel, and jazz down in Ross and Leominster as well. It was quite normal for some of the better-known jazz bands to make it down here and do live gigs, Ronnie Scott on one occasion.

I think it's really important when people look at his photographs they don't view it just a trip down memory lane. The message is there was someone there taking photographs of life as it was then. We need people doing that now. We still have things that need to be recorded. It never stops this process. He showed how, in a humanitarian way, he brought out the best in people. I think that is really vital. He would have despised the selfie. Derek was there to tell a story through his photographs. And it is a story which we need to keep telling.