

# EVIDENCE OF US

## SLG ORAL HISTORIES

<b>REF. NO.</b>	SLG/OH/003/001		
<b>INTERVIEWEE'S NAME</b>	Liz Sibthorpe	<b>DATE OF BIRTH</b>	9 October 1948
<b>DATE(S) OF RECORDING</b>	26 October 2017		
<b>INTERVIEW LOCATION</b>	Southwark Tower Store, Tower Bridge, London.		
<b>INTERVIEWER NAME</b>	Ben Messih		
<b>RECORDER</b>	ZOOM H4N		
<b>TOTAL DURATION</b>	00:34:28	<b>NUMBER OF TRACKS</b>	2
<b>ACCESS</b>	No Restrictions.		

**TRACK 01 [01:00]** Liz Sibthorpe [LS] moved to Sceaux Gardens [SG] in 2010, didn't know there was a lunatic asylum there **[01:20]** 2011 LS walking around gardens behind her flat; noticed that builders pile of earth opposite flat **[01:57]** Southwark Council selling off buildings to University of the Arts, London [UAL]; council relocation to Tooley Street. Buildings converted to student accommodation **[02:27]** LS approached pile of extracted soil, a tiny spoon on top of the soil; marked C&H, recognised as a mustard spoon **[02:45]** spoon is what initially caught LS interest in Camberwell House Lunatic Asylum [CHLA] **[03:25]** LS continued digging that evening; found coins, pieces of clay pipe, buttons; took items in to find out what CHLA was and why those objects were there **[04:00]** LS always enjoyed finding things, lived in Yorkshire, fossil hunting at Whitby; mud larking on Thames foreshore **[04:28]** 'these old things, even tiny domestic objects, tell me about the people that used to live here' **[04:43]** found out about CHLA in book on Camberwell history by Mary Boast **[05:08]** found pieces of domestic pottery, identified CHLA logo on these objects **[05:33]** LS continued digging, 3 or 4 weeks, digging through the extracted soil, finding small things: coins, beads, suspender buttons, McLean's toothpaste tubes **[06:52]** recovered glass medical needles which LS disposed of **[07:03]** construction company moved on site and the former site of an Age UK office; Harris fencing up, accessed pile through gap in the fence by night **[08:30]** had just uncovered a 2 shilling piece when a security guard interrupted LS and sister, but did not stop them; shortly after, builders moved in and LS couldn't continue digging **[09:15]** continued researching to discover history, psychiatric hospital closed in 1955, objects all predate that **[09:50]** two parts to CHLA building – Alfred House, was a naval school for junior students, and the main building (incl. old Southwark Town Hall), which had been the hospital **[10:26]** continued searching, end of summer in 2011 LS donated to the Cuming Museum.

**TRACK 02 [01:05]** Discovered CHLA had been very progressive with introduction of art and gardening; head of gardening tool, container for 'Windsor & Newton' watercolour paint **[01:45]** LS entered 2016 Camberwell Society essay prize **[03:00]** made links between objects and the people who lived and worked at CHLA **[03:15]** a progressive asylum - market garden, flower beds, art classes, put on plays for locals, progressive treatments e.g.: water immersion, CT

treatments; a 'kindly atmosphere' [04:10] A hospital for both private patients and paupers [04:33] men and women kept separately, but were unusually allowed to mingle in the grounds [04:44] poorer patients often died within a few months, owing to malnourished state prior to admission; other illnesses or came from workhouse [05:20] LS interested in why objects were where they were, 2016 had found other objects further to the East – clay pipes, pottery, oyster shells, coins, bottle tops [06:30] initial donation made prior to Cuming Museum fire, uncertain if items had survived and unclear how to find out where they were [07:15] around 7 October 1943 bombs dropped around Sceaux Gardens, items suggest rust and burn residue; found down in a drain, not where you'd expect to find spoons, coins, rings; potentially swept into a singular area together by bomb damage [09:10] large number of buttons found, certain things removed from patients to prevent self-harm, such as rings and suspenders [10:40] lots of padlock plates discovered perhaps indicating an area of storage for patients' belongings [11:45] gardening items found, links to leisure activities [12:45] a tiny led or tin soldier 2 cm tall, potentially a German or Prussian soldier, found nearer to Alfred house; potentially a toy belonging to one of the naval college boys [14:12] a little doll with jointed arms and no clothes except for a large bonnet [15:30] people ate oysters like we might eat fish and chips now. [16:05] In 2013, neighbouring buildings demolished for new UAL student accommodation, laying electricity cables provided opportunity for more digging [17:30] Along Thames foreshore, you find oyster shells, as with single use clay pipes [18:25] clay pipes with fine stems and small bowls are oldest; older pipes are smaller; tobacco more expensive [20:00] CHLA building facades are as they were in the 1700's, now student accommodation, 'filled with inmates of a different kind really' [20:45] Gardens still a large grassed area, Sceaux Gardens residents introducing order into the garden again through a vegetable growing project which has a therapeutic basis in addition to tackling food poverty [21:30] Sceaux Gardens bringing back what was good with the hospital [21:50] LS titled essay 'the Mustard Seed effect' because finding out why items were there all came from finding a mustard spoon on top of the pile; the mustard seed being tiny and growing into a large plant, [22:40] discovery of mustard spoon grew into a much bigger project, so much more to find out.

This Oral History was commissioned through the South London Gallery's critical heritage programme, *Evidence of Us*. Through long-term intergenerational projects, *Evidence of Us* seeks to position people as experts in their own heritage by foregrounding local knowledge and supporting otherwise under-explored histories to come to the surface. For more information visit: [www.southlondongallery.org](http://www.southlondongallery.org)



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