

THE PECKHAM EXPERIMENT SLG

ORAL HISTORIES

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INTERVIEWEE'S NAME	Henrietta Trotter & Christopher Trotter	DATE OF BIRTH	05/09/28
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INTERVIEWER NAME	Lucien Sone Ebongue, Jordan Minga, Tommie Introna, Laura Wilson		
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TRACK 01 [00:00] Henrietta Trotter [HT] talks about how Peckham has changed from a predominantly white suburb to a racially mixed area. Her sister lives in Kingston, Jamaica and is a doctor as is her niece. The 1975 song *Dr Honey* by the Jamaicans was written about her sister. **[02:00]** Introductions from Tommie, Laura, Lucien, Jordan and Christopher. **[08:05]** Henrietta's first day working at the Pioneer Health Centre [PHC] was on the 1st January 1948. Her title was 'Student Observer'. **[09:07]** HT talks about her husband who was part of the Iona Community. The Iona Community had heard of the PHC and so he was sent to go a find out what it was all about. She met her husband at the PHC. **[11:00]** Peckham was chosen as a locality because it neither a poverty stricken area nor too wealthy. **[11:50]** HT talks about the doctors' motivations for starting the centre. **[12:45]** HT talks about the rules for attending the centre. **[15:00]** HT worked at the centre for about 16 months. **[16:05]** HT was involved in trying to start another similar centre in Coventry. After HT married her husband lived with another PHC doctor outside Coventry and applied for the licences to build a centre with surrounding houses. The Labour council at the time denied the licences required. After that HT moved to Scotland. **[18:00]** HT knew quite a lot about the PHC before she arrived. During the war she was sent to a boarding school where Lady Eve Balfour and George Scott Williamson were both governors. Lady Eve Balfour founded the Soil Association with Innes Pearce and George Scott Williamson at the Pioneer Centre. HT's father had been a diplomat but when she was born he was a farmer. She grew up in Marlborough, Wiltshire and was born on a farm 3 miles from the town. She went to Downe House School. **[21:45]** HT talks about what her job involved at PHC. There were staff at the PHC but they did not organise anything. The staff watched and made notes. HT worked on the 'social floor'. Children would get tickets to track their activities. **[25:30]** Encouraging a sense of autonomy. In the early days there was chaos: over time a community spirit began to emerge. **[27:15]** What was the atmosphere like? Always caring and friendly. **[27:49]** PHC could not exist to day for 'health and safety' reasons. Talk about the way the children used the gym – discovering your own capacity. **[30:40]** The centre

opened at 2pm. When Henrietta started to work there, there was a school run by the parents at the PHC. Henreitta helped with running the school. The children chose what they wanted to learn – you didn't teach them you helped them. **[33:00]** HT talks of not really knowing the wider area of Peckham that well. **[33:30]** HT travelled by bus occasionally but more often would borrow Mary Langman's car and her husband would drive in. The doctors lived in Bromley. A woman named Cherry Orchard organised the catering. **[34:50]** HT talks about the work of Robert McCarrison and the food that they ate at the PHC. **[42:30]** HT tells a story about working at a school and discovering the food wasted at lunch time. She changed the system to make sure there is less waste. **[45:45]** HT suspects that the doctors would prescribe/ advise members to have healthier diets. HT suspects that war time rationing might have had a positive effect on children's diets. **[49:00]** HT did not look after the children on the farm but she thought they just go on with it. HT doesn't remember the building being very noisy. **[54:00]** What would the Peckham Experiment been like had the area been more multicultural? **[55:00]** What would the Peckham Experiment be like now? Do we need PHCs now?

This Oral History was commissioned through the South London Gallery's Young People's Programme as part of *The Peckham Experiment: A Centre for Self-Organisation*, a Heritage Lottery funded project led by the Art Assassins, the SLG's young people's forum who are working with the Pioneer Health Foundation, the Wellcome Library and the Science Gallery at Kings College, Peckham Vision and the Wilderness Wood to investigate the heritage of The Peckham Experiment. For more information visit: www.southlondongallery.org



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