

Transcript of recorded conversation with Laurence Demarco and Dr Gillian Murray
(Abercorn on Friday 5th December 2014)

Laurence trained as a community worker and worked in Wester Hailes, Edinburgh from 1976 until 1990. He Then worked as a consultant from 1990 to 1999, before founding Sencot in 1999. Sencot continues to be an important support organisation for social enterprise in Scotland today.

How and at what point in your life did you become involved in social enterprise?

Well I was involved in social enterprise long before it was called social enterprise. From memory I would say the mid-1990s but to trade I am a community worker. I think social enterprise the ideal model of it is when the social enterprise is a community enterprise. I think the model is perfectly suited for serving a particular community, owned by the people who live there. So I was involved in that activity for many years. I went to Wester Hailes in particular in 1976. I worked there for fourteen years setting up community enterprises of various kinds so I was no stranger to them. When I was in Wester Hailes we set up lots of trading businesses which the community owned. We set up the Wester Hailes Land and Property Trust which still trades and owns a lot of property. I was without of employment in 1999 and with a few other people I set up Sencot and that was explicitly to connect-up social entrepreneurs. We realised that across Scotland there were any number of people like myself setting things up in communities and that their work would be more effective if they were joined-up and told each other what they doing. So I sent out a letter to 10 people and they sent it to 10 people that was the theory and within months we had a network of hundreds. That network is now probably about 4,500. I've been involved in social enterprise more than 40 years but it started to be called social enterprise I would say mid-1990s. Sencot dates from 1999. Since then it's made tremendous advances. I wouldn't say that the general public would understand what it meant, they'd be puzzled but the third sector has been transformed by it and it's beginning to make its way into the mainstream. Ask me another.

Well I'm really interested to hear about your time in Wester Hailes and those very early days. What was it like in Wester Hailes at that time?

They built a housing estate without any of the social facilities which people need to have a normal life. They built plentiful of car parks but nobody had cars. There weren't buildings that could be used for the community. The most dramatic thing we did was we learnt the skill of putting up buildings. There were surplus classroom units from schools across the Lothian region and elsewhere. We developed the skill of dismantling them and re-erecting them in Wester Hailes. I think in the day we had about 12 to 14 transportable classroom units operating as community bases. I worked then for the Lothian Region and my job was to get alongside the local people and help them create the missing facilities in the area. That was very successful, there was a real appetite among people to get involved, to do for themselves. Inevitably the dynamic was adversarial. It was – the community's good, the council's boo– bad. So we played that dynamic quite consciously. The council had done everything wrong to make this place inadequate, we are going to do something about that in spite of them. To a large extent it was perfectly true. These remote local government officers all building little empires didn't really care about the community, and how it got on and things.

One of the problems was Wester Hailes as we knew it, in terms of the various departments of the region and district and central government, I think it worked out it was 32 different names it had. The social work department divided it into bla, bla, bla. The planning department divided in into bla, bla, bla. The transport department... so we said "this is Wester Hailes, that road, that road", and we made a map, a plan which contained everybody's house and we sealed the local identity. Fifteen, twenty years later when they went to dismantle it -the local government, which they did quite deliberately- they went to blurring it all again. It was West Edinburgh, Wester Hailes was wiped out as a name. Wester Hailes, you said to me what was it like, well I really enjoyed it.

Another important thing, the buildings was an important breakthrough. The Manpower Services Commission was a job creation [scheme] from the government. In those days before all these big national private sector companies that run them now, there was a local organisation -Wester Hailes organisation- that ran the job creation scheme. Over fifteen years we knew every family involved, and if you go fifteen years that's a full generation, so we knew their dad a lot of them. So these were local people employing local people to do local jobs, they had a tremendous social capital benefit in terms of a feeling of glee. That was taken over by Reed Consulting which is a national company. So the job creation enabled us to get buildings. The buildings was a huge thing. People said to me 'where did you get the budget?' Well there wasn't a budget. Building was put up on the green grass in the middle of Murrayburn Place; but what about the money? There wasn't any money. People came out of their houses and went in. The electricity got cut off sometimes, so we got it back on again and the roof leaked, but there was an amazing community activity around these buildings.

Then we setup the neighbourhood strategy, we divided the whole area into twenty two neighbourhoods. They each had a council, the neighbourhood councils. That was very successful. Alongside that I got more and more interested in trading. The local chip shop was going bankrupt so we took it over. Then we opened another chip shop and then we opened a hairdressers. So all over the place were these wee trading enterprises. It was too centralised, if I was doing it again I would have it less centrally controlled. So that gave me a flavour for the power you got when you have your own money. So when we spoke with the local authority about doing some of this, they said "no". We said, "well we'll do it anyway". "What do you mean you'll do it anyway?" "Well we'll just do it". "How can you just do it, you've not got a budget for it". "We'll take the money from...". In the Wester Hailes Community Workshop, which is all knocked down now, at one time there were thirty to forty organisations there, headquartered there. If one ran out of money they just went next door. "The printer won't print on this one, we can't pay, it's twelve hundred quid", "hang on, have you got twelve hundred quid the now", "well I've got twelve hundred quid but I need it by... because that's when we pay...", it was totally informal. Nobody signed a paper to say I owe you. You could almost say that we had own economy and there was a general acceptance that you had to pay it back or the whole thing tumbles down, but everybody knew that.

Can I just ask was this people who had previously been unemployed? What age were people coming and getting involved in the community enterprises?

If you're a normal person with a normal job you couldn't you had to go to work. The Wester Hailes Community Workshop which was a series of huts in a big square with an adventure playground in the middle. The adventure playground was inspirational really, having children in the middle of it playing, and falling, and crying, that was inspirational because it somehow put a seal of approval on everything to have children there and knew each other's kids anyway. The Workshop opened during office hours and in the heart of it was the Venchie Café and that became a hub for the whole area. Whether or not café's make money they've got a tremendous social benefit effect. So all these different organisations, the café and the adventure playground became a hub of community activity. Local government officers presiding over their department arriving there knew that we were not subject to local government culture. We had our own culture and quite soon we had our own economy as I said. So if somebody wanted to do something you didn't ask for a grant to take kids to North Berwick for the day because they'd want a business plan. So you just said, "how much is that going to cost?" "Three hundred quid." "Right, hire a van, let's just do that". Once people get that feeling of "we can do what we want here if we're organise". So I was trying to say I was trying to get on to social enterprise right, so the idea that you traded for an overarching social purpose but your trading was a means to an end, was not new to me at all. So when I picked up the term social enterprise, I thought to myself, yeah I think that's going to come. In that way it was insightful and Senscot started – do you want to talk more about Wester Hailes?

Well maybe the last thing I'd like to touch on in that area. Did you feel like you were very much embedded in Wester Hailes or were you looking at what other people were doing in Strathclyde, or?

Looking back, we were over embedded. From your perspective, I presume you're an academic person, aren't you Gillian, yes?

For my sins, yes.

I felt antipathy towards academe, I don't feel that now. Whether I felt intimidated, I don't know but I felt that they used a language that was purposely unapproachable by normal people and I thought they were too divorced from reality. My influence in Wester Hailes was probably too much and I made a fairly deliberate decision to 'keep away from' but not only that we kept away from other people doing the same thing which was a big mistake. Now, Senscot's job is connecting people up nationally to all sorts of things. Twenty years ago I wouldn't have agreed to talk to you, "what's the fucking point in that?" Now I do see the point in that. We don't have to invent everything again, some of it can be kept and learnt from. So we were far too embedded in Wester Hailes. When we were invited to visit another community, we went but we'd be hostile. Why would it be hostile? Now I would do it differently in that respect. I would be making bonds, links, all across Scotland and further. So that was an insightful question.

Looking back do you think the work that you were doing, the kinds of jobs you mentioned, the chip shops and hairdressers, those kinds of services would they have only worked in Wester Hailes, do you think every community needed to look at what they needed? How did you negotiate what people in the community wanted and what got done?

There's a great lack of middle-class skills. You needed to find a surveyor who was willing to give his time for nothing, his skill, his understanding; and an architect, we had actually an architectural practice, a branch practice of a firm in Edinburgh. Several architects trained in the Wester Hailes architectural unit. What I'm trying to say is there aren't architects living in Wester Hailes. I sort of went off. Earlier on you said who are these people? And I didn't answer that properly. The people who were collecting unemployment benefit, or sickness benefit, or for whatever reason, it could be a single mother with a disabled child living in the high flats, she's probably got enough money, just, to live and nothing to do with her time. So she'd arrive with her blind child and after sitting through five meetings without saying a word, a year later is the secretary of the group, that would be a typical anecdote. But, you've a huge lack of middle class skills like you and I take for granted. So they couldn't brief an architect or an accountant or a lawyer, wouldn't have the confidence in the main. So the Wester Hailes community workshop provided a core of middle-class skills.

Now how would the people that lived there decide on what businesses could work, what would pay and whether they would pay or not the biggest determinant is probably who you've got running them. How it was decided who the various, I don't remember how it was decided. It would not be a spontaneous bottom up. Mind you having said that quite early on we started developing workshop units, I think we ended up with about fifty various sites. Into the workshop units came some local people, there was a woman who was an upholsterer who employed two upholsterers, she took a unit. Lots of the tenants were from outside the area as well. It just happened that they took a unit there. It's not as if there's a lot of entrepreneurial flair waiting to get a unit, there isn't. Now that I'm involved with promoting social entrepreneurialism or social enterprise, we know we've got to start in schools and we do have the Social Enterprise Academy. The work in schools is very impressive. We've got very young primary school children running a wee trading enterprise. Everyone in my family, when I was at a family gathering, fifty people in the room, were all talking about business, every one of my family had a chip shop, or a restaurant, or an ice-cream shop and the culture of my childhood was entrepreneurial. People would be saying "you know where there's a gap for a chip shop the corner of Irondale Street", these were people who were instinctively looking round for opportunities to make money. I blended that personally, with the other side, the social/community side and then you end up with a social entrepreneur [laughs]. So where were we, you bring us back to where you want to go.

I think that's given me a really good idea where you started out. Then you mentioned you had a period that you were unemployed at the end of the 1990s, why did that job change, or what happened, were you made redundant, or?

That's an important question. A lot of people said "how could you possibly work for the Lothian region because you're fundamentally, in your attitude, you're anarchistic". So I resigned because a very supportive boss that I had, that understood what we were doing, left. There are lessons in that. So now I'm unemployed, but I had just setup the Wester Hailes Land and Property Trust which was doing quite big deals, so for at least a year I was paid by that. Then it got so big that it needed a full-time Chief Executive so it drifted away. Around about 1990-ish, I cut loose from that but I was still getting a small job with them or a job with others. I was technically a consultant from 1990 to 1999 where I did lots of one off jobs.

Were they still based in Edinburgh or were they all across Scotland?

I lived in Edinburgh, I lived in Stockbridge all during that time. The system put the stink in for me, I was seen as uncontrollable, wild man, it's an amazing reputation but that didn't bother me. I wasn't looking for work from the system. I did lots of things that I quite enjoyed doing but there was no security. So I thought I need to setup something that will pay me a wage then all my efforts will be to get resources into it. So what does 'it' need to be? I conceived of Sencot, with some others, which was spot on really – and I still get paid. So what your question sorry?

Let's talk about the start of Sencot then. You mentioned that you saw it as a small gap in the market almost. What was that gap that you were trying to fill with Sencot?

So you're unemployed and you understand a bit about the system. Where is money out there? Who's got money out there? You've got the Lottery - a huge, huge resource for our sector. Who controls that? Is that the government? Not really but sort of. So who would give us some money to get started up? No one. So Sencot for the first six months, I didn't get a penny. Rodney Stares who wrote that [A historical summary of Sencot] he had a small room in a building in Manor Place and the room next door to him became vacant and I took it. He found that Gulbenkian [The Gulbenkian Foundation] would give us 5 grand. So year one I earned nothing for six months and then maybe a grand a month. Year two the same. Year three I got a salary. No employees yet, part-time on the IT stuff. You're unemployed. Where does money come from? What would they be wanting to fund but most importantly what do you want to do, Laurence, what do you want to do? I like the whole idea of social enterprise.

In your life time, the biggest change has been the dominance of neo-liberalism, the American way of life, everyone is motivated, all change is driven by money. No, let's wheel it back the pendulum a bit the other way. The human being is motivated by other things than that. There's an equally strong impulse in people for community; equally strong as greed. So let us be quite explicit social enterprises are trading enterprises for the common good. We'll be quite clear about that. We'll not be shy in any way. I was, and am, captured by the basic ethic of social enterprise. That's why I got so vehement about the Code. The asset lock is paramount. That's what takes it out of the private sector and into another sector. You can have all sorts of other hybrid models, of course you can, and that's wonderful but it's not a social enterprise. I say a social enterprise is asset locked. You cannot take dividends, you cannot pay dividends, and if it winds up any assets left have to pass to our sector.

So anyway what was the gap we were trying to fill? The first gap I was trying to fill was in my income, obviously, but designing in my mind, supposing we setup something that connects up people like yourself all over the place. Through a weekly bulletin create the fantasy of there being a massive network of us who believe in these things, who do these things, and recognise core values in each other. Let us just continually replay, lets describe this fantasy culture, it does exist but it's more fragmented than we all pretend it is. So that's what we did and it was very, very popular with people. Sencot has essentially got three objectives, the network's probably a fourth one. It connects people up, there's another one which I forget, and the third one was we'll listen to what people are saying and we'll help create with other people the infrastructural gaps. So what does social enterprise need in

terms of infrastructure to thrive? It will need this, it will need that. So we systematically set about making these things happen. Senscot's unusual and I think very effective philosophy is, we'll not seek to own any of these things, we'll not seek to have an empire that's powerful, we'll avoid that, we'll avoid being powerful because then you don't make enemies. We've been very effective.

Next week there's the launch of SCRT, the Scottish Community Reinvestment Trust, which is a new intermediary to help build the financial infrastructure of our sector but Senscot a year from now will be nowhere near that. It is a brand new scale, membership owned. It's the way we operate as we gather people together. SCRT has been two years in the making. Gather the right people together, have meetings, evolve the idea together collectively, try and bring in an appropriate CEO, Pauline Hinchion's going to run this one for the beginning and cast it adrift and off you go. Some of these things that we've setup, you get them facing the right way then you say 'cheerio',. We try to do new things - some work - some don't. Some maintain their core values - others don't - and wander off into swamps [laughs].

I suppose a little bit more about how you practically went about gathering people up in order to build this network that you did through Senscot. Was there any particular area that was very enthusiastic, were the people of the Highlands the first to come on board, which areas of Scotland 'got it' right away?

We started off having meetings. So in the central belt, Glasgow and Edinburgh. The tenor of the meetings would be probably a speaker, thirty people assorted, I wasn't very happy with the way that was developing. I knew there needed to be face to face meeting, we're not gonna get away with writing a bulletin. It's the relationship which makes things happen. So the meeting then became a much more light touch helping to foster regional gatherings of people, we called them social enterprise networks [Sens]. That's bubbling, bubbling. Even more energetic are the thematic networks. I was reading yesterday the creative network, the Arts ones got 80 members. The Sports one's got more than that. So people in the sports field can see that social enterprise trading could be a means for them to be self-sufficient as we move away from a grants culture. Similarly, Arts. Health's another one, there are 4 of them altogether. So the meetings became regional Sens which are about 20 and thematic Sens. That in my opinion should float off and become another separate organisation but Aiden who runs it says, "well how we gonna get your salary because all the money we get is for the Sens the government pays us to do that. Nobody will pay anything to produce a bulletin" because it's marginally disruptive, the bulletin, tends to be a bit critical of government sometimes. So my pure image of Senscot wouldn't have anything it would just be a bulletin, set things up and move on to the next thing. What's next? But there's no security in that our trustees said to me, "we want security". "Is that what we're here for, is to build something secure?"

Over the years, the past decade, we've helped create a series. I would argue that whether SCRT up and away and it'll prosper or it won't, depends on all sorts of new factors. My instinctive mode is to be right, I'm alert, I'm optimistic. What does the sector mean now? What should it be doing now? What new thing do we need? Do we need to bring people together? Do we need to disperse people? So we have a bulletin that connects people, that promotes a culture and we respond by setting things up, that's my understanding of what we're doing. Does that make sense?

Yes it does. In your mind has the kinds of activities that social enterprise does has that changed over time? Have people become interested in using social enterprise for different kinds of purposes? How has that changed during the course of your work?

This is a difficult subject for me in a way. I think that the central core of social enterprise we will use all the benefits of the business culture for the purpose of social justice and looking after our planet. That has the potential so that the East Coast Railway Line shouldn't be run by Virgin and Stagecoach it should be a social enterprise for the public good. I think that has an applicability to a whole range of societal functions. Looking after old people, looking after tiny wee people, should all be social purpose ventures. It doesn't make them less efficient but will have a humanity running through them. The overarching purpose here is not to pay dividends to investors it's to look after children, or look after old people. So there's no tension between how much you give them to eat and your profit. I see that being applicable all across society.

My background though, as an Italian café owner it's not universal that, it doesn't apply to everything. There are certain human functions that are better if a single trader or a self-employed person does it. It's just instinctively better. It's a more appropriate way to do it. So if I was setting up the Sencot café I would get someone in who I'd watched and I liked the way they operate and I discuss values with them. I'd say look, what is it you're in this for? Right OK would it be compatible if we did that, right you run the café. At the end of the year did you make any profit, right can you redistribute some of it?

You asked a different question, over the last decade has there been a shift in the sorts of things that social enterprises are taking on? Every day through the email, we have a common email at Sencot, I will receive notice of something that has started up, a wee partnership has developed in Aaron between them and them, they're going to do that, and can we get them any help? Well we could get them help from him and someone else's is doing something. We're doing that all the time as a constant. I would say it's still a bit trendy middle class. The walled garden in Perthshire that wants to grow herbs, I don't have terribly much patience with that and there's not enough from the housing schemes of the East End of Glasgow, there isn't enough because culturally it doesn't exist. So culturally, well-off people take to social enterprise.

I want there to be lots and lots and lots of small ones. I want the social enterprise in Burdiehouse to be the Burdiehouse Social Development Trust which runs its own and knows its own area. Unlike us in Wester Hailes we should have got connected but we didn't. I would ask Burdiehouse to get connected, say look, "it's none of our business but I can tell you 3 people who do it better than you", "what do you mean?" "I'll give you the names of three people in Scotland who are doing what you are doing but are doing better", "what do you mean better?" "Well they're making more profit, they're serving more people", "really?" .

In the social enterprise world I wouldn't charge you to copy what I'm doing. You come, copy anything I'm doing, I'll help you setup in your area. The idea that I go into your area and recycle your waste, your waste's an asset for your community. What am I coming in and stealing it from you for? So I would say this is what we do and we gather the glass

together, and we separate into brown and green, then we sell it onto them, but don't go to them, they'll... I'd pass that all on to you for you to do what you like with it. It's a different ethic altogether, isn't it really? Its open source, like come and use anything you want but pass it on. It's a contradiction of typical capitalism. You're saying, "no, no, that's one way to run the world, good luck yes but we're not doing it that way".

You mentioned previously that when you were working in Wester Hailes you were kind of answerable to the local council but Sencot is much more answerable to maybe the government on a national level of funding?

I would like to say we're not answerable to anybody but we are, ultimately central government. Our turnover last year just tipped over £500,000. £350,000 of that would come from central government. They're not grants, they're all contracts, technically. I don't think they're tendered competitively, 1 or 2 of them are. So we've no relationship. The individual networks have. People says Sencot's a network, it's not. They're all setup, they're very different. Some choose this legal format some choose another. I think 7 or 8 of them are now legally incorporated and they will have relationships with funders because they've all got workers. So Dumfries and Galloway Social Enterprise Network will have some relationship with Dumfries and Galloway Council. Sencot as far as I'm aware has no relationship with any local authorities. Whereas the Edinburgh SEN, which is quite a successful one, Lindsay, the Glasgow one is very successful they will interface with the local authority, but we have nothing to do with that. I'm glad to say that they all get together regularly and share experiences. We don't impose, we say look our guidance, not even guidance, we've got no relationship formally with them so what we advocate is that you've got to be a social enterprise. You don't have local government officers on your network. "How will they feel?" "I don't really care how they feel, they're not social enterprises." "Oh that's a bit, you know, they're very helpful to us", "it's up to you". So most of the SENs will not have anything but social enterprises on them.

You mentioned that perhaps social enterprise today isn't getting to the same kinds of people that you managed involve in the community enterprises in Wester Hailes. How do you think it could go a bit further and get to those people? I suppose I'm making an assumption here that those people still exist but would you agree with me that there's still a need to get to people who are unemployed or?

I would agree with you but let's look at this. The ability to say I can be self-employed, I can conceive of something. I'm working with a young woman now, she's thirty odd, she's got all the skills and the ability to setup her own charity doing the work that she does but she's working for someone else who's frustrating her. I said, 'well what are you waiting on?' If I tried to analyse what it is that prevents her taking the leap to setting up her own thing, that's what we're talking about just now here, is her confidence ultimately. If I took her hand and said "for the first year I will mirror you, any question you have, if you want to talk about what format you should be we'll talk about that...". So the ability to set up your own thing is much more middle class because of the confidence, good school, private school, bla, bla, all your peers are lawyers, they're professional people. If you come from a housing estate where employment's not very stable in your household, how you going to go and set up a social enterprise, you're not are you. What I've advocated to Firstport is you should have talent spotters, it could be different people in different areas. In Muirhouse there was a very

alert priest, Father McAlister, he's probably dead now. I would have said to Father McAlister "Right Father, every year I want to find three people a year, bright sparks, youngsters, they've got imagination, they've got a bit of bottle". So these people exist but like the young woman I was just describing to you they just need a small push at that early stage to get them started.

Do you remember a specific person who you formed that kind of relationship with?

I hope there have been many over the years. Just to sort of keep the conversation going, I've also made the mistake of projecting onto a person of what I wanted them to be. What I hoped or imagined they could be and therefore I've pushed people into a failure situation because of my own persuasiveness. I wouldn't do that as readily now, I would still err on the side of pushing too hard [laughs], I think I would. I've experienced how much liberation there is in being your own boss. When I'm speaking to youngsters and family, I say "follow your own bliss, find something in life that you really love doing and then for the rest of your life your work will be a pleasure" and I still feel that very strongly.

Do you think that's the best way social enterprise can help people?

No, I wandered off social enterprise there when I was saying that just now. There's no doubt that the Senscot Annual Ceilidh and Conference, 150 people, there's a spirit of people enjoying what they're doing. There's no doubt about it. You see conversations round tables really animated. In social enterprise the wages are not great, I don't want them to get great but people have got a tremendous satisfaction from their work. People who argue that third sector wages should be the same, "why shouldn't they be the same as the private sector?" because we get a huge compensation from what we do. We get great joy. I have no pension, I've got state pension, I have no assets -this is a rented house- but I've had a great pleasure in my life from my work, I still do. Some people will not be able to make that decision, you shouldn't be judgemental about it. Some people go for the safe. I said the other day to my family, "what did young Michael do?" "Well he's working for a firm of consultants in London, big bucks", "does he like it?" "Hates it" [laughs]. So what deal has he made with life, hates it! When we set up Scotland Unltd it was chaired by Jeremy Oppenheim who was a partner with McKinsey's, I got to know him quite well. He said "we cream the brightest graduates from the best universities and keeping them is difficult, one of our most potent tools is pro bono work. We offer them a wee juicy cherry now again, so and so is looking for a pro bono work". Whereas they go to this firm that's already making a lot of money and they help them to make more money and they do that again and they get a bonus. Pro bono work is just doing something to help somebody out and they really find that very satisfying. The girl who worked with us, Bernadette, she went to Brazil and she's working with kids who live on the slum heaps in Brazil, that's from McKinsey's. So what it is I'm saying is that it's just a powerful human motivation to get involved for the public good as it is to make money. It's just as strong. If it wasn't just as strong we'd have blown each other up. I think we would have.

So I'm interested in this relationship between social enterprise and the market, and social enterprise and State services. How does social enterprise position itself, is it trying to replicate State services, is it trying to replicate a market function, where does it fit or where should it fit ideally for you?

I'm trying to question myself if I understand your question. I'm not sure Gillian I fully understand what you're asking there, try and help me a bit more.

So should a good social enterprise - should it seek to replace a State service?

Are you speaking personally?

Yes.

I'm a social democrat and I believe that we should have public services of a high quality. I can see a role for the market to the society, my ideal society but I'm not really very keen to be honest with you. People are critical of Sencot's bulletin because it's a little bit too hard on the private sector but I don't really have much time for it. I was there – saw what it was like .

No, I think I get where you're coming from completely. So do you think the goals of social enterprise have they changed over time with the kinds of initiatives that you see springing up do you think they're trying to address different social problems than previously, or are they trying to address the same thing?

You're talking as if social enterprise was something fixed and definable, it isn't really, and it's very vague. You've got the Code, that I suppose is very purest, it's a kind of benchmark, idealised, asset locked. So when you asked that question, are you talking about Scotland? In Scotland has social enterprise as we use the term changed the type of things which it's addressing?

I mean are people interested in addressing unemployment, are people interested in improving housing, are people interested in improving child care facilities, has the focus of people energies in social enterprise has that changed?

Under, just below the radar there's a huge interest just now in alternative food projects every day. Growing food, distributing food, food banks, there will be hundreds that have grown up in the last couple of years at grass roots level. The number of sports of organisations that are trying to move into social enterprise, hundreds, every day on our website, we're so and so. You've asked a specific question. Culture as well, people are going into it, people are trying to find a way to become sustainable in the new world. Does that answer your question?

Yes. I think what I'm interested in is, you mentioned that I'm maybe thinking of social enterprise as too set, I think that's interesting. I think you're probably right [laughs]. So where do all these organisations coming to you, where are they picking up their motivations. You mentioned food and food banks and these being a popular one just now. Where are they getting that energy from, is it because of a need that they see in their community, or is it a personal interest, how are we seeing this relationship between people's motivations and what they choose to focus on?

There's always been all these arts and crafts groups. There's always been all these sports clubs. The vibe out there is become a social enterprise and you'll be sustainable. Where did that come from? It's current. It's not past. This is current what I'm saying to you, where is that coming from? This spreading consciousness that their field can become sustainable through a kind of social enterprise. What is a social enterprise? Can you imagine them at parties all over the country, what is it? Well you run it like a business. That consciousness is growing I would say out there. We see a lot of people that want to grow food, the so and so food growing group, dozens. Now nothing else comes to my mind at the moment particularly strong and bubbling.

It's an interesting question you're quite right, is social enterprise something, is it something tangible, definable? All the mapping attempts - Senscot's been linked to most of them. We've never had much enthusiasm for it. We've never initiated one. Incidentally we're coordinating a Social Enterprise Strategy Group, Jonathan Coburn from the Social Value Lab's writing it. I was speaking to him yesterday, what would I put in a social enterprise strategy for today for ten years forward, what will it be? That's going on at the moment if it's of interest to you. There'll be a draft before Christmas he said. Is social enterprise something that you can map? I don't think so really. A preschool playgroup, that's a social enterprise. Is a Brownie Cub group a social enterprise, why not? Not trading, bob-a-job. It's very difficult to get a hold of what it is. So Wester Hailes people opening a chip shop that's fairly clear. You know what I mean? So many things tail in and out of, so you come out with five criteria, you need to be trading, you need to have a social purpose. It's called a voluntary code of practise because you know when you're writing it that it's kind of vague, it's not anything much defined. In your position archiving the history of the social enterprise, John Pearce's book, *Social Enterprise in Anytown*, he more than anyone has written the history of it; where it evolved from, the roots. Personally I'm not drawn much to theory and pie charts, I don't think they capture much of reality but it's important that somebody does try and do that otherwise we're all talking forever vaguely aren't we.

I think that's interesting in itself though you mentioned that social enterprise suddenly kinds of fades in and fades out. Would you say that a successful social enterprise needs to be a long lived thing or can a successful social enterprise be a very short lived thing that just exists for a moment then dies down but it's fulfilled a specific need?

Social enterprise grants, this chap wants to set up a memorial in a field where some battle took place, thirty people got killed. So he wants a memorial to that battle in this field behind his house. I said "that's not a social enterprise, I said" "why not?" I said "for heaven's sake he wants to build a cairn in a field behind his house" I lost that argument and he got the grant, why shouldn't it be a short term thing. I mean with respect you're trying to afford a definition to something that's not. This woman she's a shadow minister for social enterprise, she said if Labour win the election she's going to define social enterprise for the purpose of grants. She's not, her officials are going to tell her, no, don't go there, aren't they?

I've just got two more questions for you. The first one, is political support for social enterprise a help or a hindrance?

The first reaction is that it's a help definitely. Politicians are always going to use you, so you're trying to use them, so you know the name of the game. So far we've used them more than they've used us I would say. That's my personal critique of what's happened. John Swinney has got a great ride out of social enterprise but he's been very helpful to us. When the schools of Scotland had some kind of competition as to who is the best, they gave prizes to something like 15, 20 schools and John Swinney stood on that stage for 35 minutes and he gave them a plaque framed and he got a photograph with these kids, patient, patiently. So he has been explicitly identified with social enterprise, it's helped his image but he's looked after our back. He was the guy in charge of the till, he was financial secretary, still is. So we've had good funding. Scotland's got an exceptionally well developed infrastructure for social enterprise. We've had many visitors in the last year, Sweden, Norway, they've all been amazed at the support for social enterprise in Scotland.

Why do you think that is?

It's the answer to your first question, has political support been plus or negative, it's been plus. Everything we've thought of they've funded, there has been a few they've said no to. In fact, Jonathan Coburn asked me yesterday, he said to me "some people are saying to me there's too much intermediary support", and I said "do you mean the likes of Senscot?" "Well not specifically, but yes" I said "yes there is too much". I would like to see stuff out there in helping people who have not got our skills. I'd like to talent spot people who've never had a prize in their life, never had a grant in their life, just a few hundred quid to get them started. That could have a tremendous effect but that needs people out there you see, but you can't be. So you need someone in these housing estates that works there who you trust and he'll phone you up now and again "oh I've found a right one here, it's a girl called so and so" and we would have someone to send out and work with that girl for a few weeks.

So my last question is are you optimistic about the future of social enterprise?

A very quick answer is yes I am optimistic. I think it's a very powerful idea that fits with the time we're living in. My grand view of the world is that we sort of swing, during my life time especially the last thirty years, since Thatcherism really, we're talking about since the nineteen seventies. There's a real swing towards money is king, money rules, I've seen it in my own family and I think it's going to drift back and I think social enterprise fits into that drift back. So I'm optimistic, but what should social enterprise do to be taken a bit more seriously? The problem is I don't want Barnardos, big organisations with fund raisers getting thousands of pounds, I want lots of wee things. The woman that opens the church hall in Morden, Betty who's 82. The vast majority of the third sector organisations are small, no staff, all volunteers. So if social enterprise becomes too serious you run the risk of Betty becoming scrapped for something efficient.

I'm a great advocate of local democracy but I don't want it to replace voluntarism, I want it to be voluntary, I think that's the real core of society. In Wester Hailes the neighbourhood strategy, 22 different neighbourhood councils, we went round every door, folk came out and they went to the meetings. They weren't very enlightened discussions in the early days because most people didn't speak but they were out there. I want to tap into that. If social enterprise becomes mainstream and they've got all these professional chancers who've majored in social enterprise. I don't know how but I'd like to cling to this kind of

amateurish side of it because I think professionalising stuff moves it away from people. So the girl that's been spotted in Muirhouse by the local priest or whoever she's potentially anything she just doesn't know it yet. So if we can spot her and have somebody that's trained to talk with her. So I'd like the new generation to be taken care of but that can't be planned in central government offices it's not your normal business support systems we're talking about, men in suits going about the place, that's no good for that girl.

What kind of person, what kind of role does that girl need, who needs to be in place to help her?

Going back to quite a few years to the Sencot Exchange, you'd phone up and you get Pat, 'I've heard you'll help me, I'm trying to setup a...' 'yes that's what I'm here for, what have you done, what are you trying do...' that was very successful. That little girl needs somebody who understands her culture, is completely at home and relaxed in her culture, can walk into the local café if there is one but is also completely relaxed in the culture of Coopers & Lybrand, now there are such people. The growth of our sector depends upon this architect who's made enough money turning towards us and saying "I help you out" "Well if you could we need somebody to spec up some work without charging us." "I'm your man, what is that you want?" "We want concepts for this. We're trying to put a building there." The feasibility money would cost you thousands but if professional people that are OK and willing to face towards that and help out and that's what we did in Wester Hailes, every profession we could call on.

So does social enterprise need social mobility in order to...?

Social mobility?

Yeah. Does it need to draw on people who are working class and have been able to gain professional skills to kind of go back there?

Yeah, they're paying back. Social mobility means to me someone who has started pretty lowly in life and you're saying such people are often willing to come back and they are. I've said to people, "well look Bob I'm really grateful to you for doing this but why are you doing this?" "You don't know my story do you?" I said "no I don't." "Do you want to hear it?" "Yeah I'd love to hear it." Then they tell you a harrowing story of being poor and where they grew up. That's burned into them. There's some people who walk away from that and try never to think about it again and others, well I'm OK now, I don't have to cling on to the wall, I'm gonna go back and help a bit. Some people will do it. There's huge amount of good will out there. It's just there to be tapped. They're not daft they're looking round for someone they can trust and believe in. It's a great help that you've not personally become rich off what you do because people look at that. I mean the idea that you drive up in a Barbour and a Land Rover – what? You're joking. You ask very good questions, I'm not quite sure if I've thought a lot of them through. The last question was am I optimistic about it, yes I think it fits well.

I've covered everything I'd like to talk about and that was really helpful for me to have that discussion. Is there anything that you think I've missed out? I'm aware that I am a novice in this field compared to yourself.

Well no you've surprised me by spending as much time looking into the crystal ball as to where it's going as you have been trying to record the history and development of it. It's been a much more personal discussion, which I enjoy, than I would have anticipated. I have no memory for when we did what, I don't know why but I just don't have that kind of memory. I have enjoyed chatting with you. Have you missed anything out? No I think it's quite... what is social enterprise? Well there's no such thing as social... Will this idea that people increasingly trade for social purposes, will it get bigger? Yes it will. Just from what I'm looking at privately I don't think this purest model that we advocate, I don't think that will endure because you're asking people to be poor. Not poor but you're asking them not to be wealthy.

In America they don't even ask that question. A social entrepreneur in America is someone who's made his pile, Bill Gates, and is now going to cure the world of Malaria – oh god! We're not as bad as America but there's a small bit of that, especially in England. Scotland has a very different culture of social enterprise than it does in England. They've got much more contaminated by these American outfits at Oxford, various other places. Schwab, Ashoka, they've come across with the American culture which is that rich people own everything. In Scotland there must have been Jimmy Reed, the Clydeside, and before that Keir Hardy, Wheatley, there's a tremendous tradition of. I saw black people in America who were defeated in a way that white people are not defeated in Britain. In Scotland anyway, I've seen poor people who've got a great pride and dignity. I saw black people when I visited America and I'd never seen, of course slavery, the history of slavery what must that do to you? So the American assumption that everyone in the world wants to be wealthy, it's spreading in Scotland but it's not finished us off yet. I think that the social enterprise epic, the kind of, you know I get a good salary and I enjoy what I do, that's enough for a lot of people. It's enough for a lot of people.

I'm happy to stop the recording there if that's alright with you?