

From the archives: Kim Besly, 1926-1996

Nigel Norman

Kim Besly was a peace campaigner and a regular visitor to the women's camp at Greenham Common in the 1980's.¹ She did not match the stereotype of the 'Greenham woman'. She was in her late fifties when she went to Greenham and had little involvement in politics up until then. She had five children and was married to Charles, who went to public school and later taught at Fettes College ('the Eton of Scotland'). He had also fought in Burma, been wounded and awarded the Military Cross.

She had joined up with the WRNS ('they had the nicest uniform') and had served as a radar technician during the war, working on radios, transmitters and homing beacons in planes, small ships and ground stations. It was because of her technical background that the Greenham women turned to her for help after experiencing harrowing symptoms at some of the camps from September 1984 onwards. People had noticed big changes around the base, after the first Cruise missiles began to arrive in November 1983. The heavy police and military presence went away. They learnt of BISS (Base Installation Security System)² and the general feeling was 'they must be using something else'.

Besly wrote:

'A number of women are suffering a range of symptoms which are giving cause for concern.....(they) did not at first communicate their anxieties....after some time this came to be discussed and the women found that others were experiencing some odd sensations, too.....nose

1 A note on Besly's death appeared in *Lobster* 32. Thanks to Sarah Hipperson for her memories of Besly.

2 BISS was a microwave-based intruder-detection system. This was discussed in the *Guardian* in 1986, that article being reproduced at <www.mindjustice.org/victims.htm#7>. See also Armen Victorian, *The Mind Controllers* (London: Vision, 2000) pp. 201-203.

bleed, pressure in the forehead, temples and ears; earache; pain in the glands in the parotid region; swelling of tongue resulting in slurred speech; dizziness; bleeding gums; "sunburned" face in mid-winter; pressure in chest, palpitations, nausea; vaginal discharge; change in menstrual pattern.....impaired coordination, impaired memory, disorientation, profound depression unreasonable panic.'

Against a background of arrest, continuing harassment from bailiffs and unknown assailants, she continued driving up from Hampshire to support Cruisewatch and doing relief shifts for the peace campaigners.

She also led an investigation into the 'odd sensations' and illnesses at Greenham Common and eventually went on to speak about her findings to people in the UK and a five-week tour of Canada and the United States, which included public meetings and radio and TV interviews.

Readers of this journal may be interested in the archives which Besly and her husband have left at the London School of Economics and the Imperial War Museum.

The archives at the London School of Economics

There are five files at the LSE.³ These range from correspondence from 'Pensioners for Peace' (she went with them three times to the Soviet Union to meet the Peace Committees), Ex-Services CND (including obituaries for KB), and the WILPF low level radiation seminar of April 1989. It includes an autobiographical statement and information about her later work for nuclear test victims, power line hazards and food irradiation. There is a lot of correspondence from Jack Sheppard, Fenner Brockway, Bruce Kent and a short file from the journalist, James Cameron (1911-1985).

The core of the collection (and KB's work) is the 1986

³ File Numbers: BRODIE/1/3;CND/2008/8/3/;CND/2008/8/3/14; CND/2008/15/43/2;WILPF/2009/16/21. These are in the newly opened archive reading room on the 4th Floor of the Library. LSE Library, 10 Portugal St,WC2A2HD; e-mail <library.information.desk@lse.ac.uk>. The British Library has started a 'Sisterhood and After' archive, which also contains material from Greenham Common.

'Preliminary Report' entitled 'Electromagnetic Pollution: a little known health hazard, or a new means of control?' An opening covering letter is attached, asking for comments etc. And the title/contents page gives three sections: 1. Health Effects; 2. Riot Control/Anti-Personnel Equipment; 3. Greenham Common and Conclusion.

At first sight, it seems inchoate, with spelling errors and an unconventional referencing. It contains references to books,⁴ newspaper reports, scientific journals and the well-argued testimony of Dr Rosalie Bertell, who visited the Greenham camp in April 1985. It does contain useful information – the Proceedings of the IEEE (vol. 60, no. 6, 1972 and vol. 68, no. 1, 1980) generated numerous references to peer-reviewed papers in the literature. These deal with the biological effects of microwaves and the microwave 'voice' phenomenon.⁵ It records the efforts of groups like 'Electronics for Peace' to measure different levels of non-ionising radiation at different locations, with equipment either loaned from the National Radiological Protection Board or improvised from tools such as microwave-oven safety equipment.

It documents KB's efforts to track down the Greenham 'sickness'. She asked the women to keep diaries of illnesses and unusual experiences and sent out questionnaires. The results, 'analysis of women's symptoms', were summarised in a histogram towards the end of the report. It was a real achievement, given the daily struggles against evictions and harassment taking place at the time. It does, perhaps, point the way to dealing with the effects of electromagnetic weapons – which cannot be seen and have deniability built in to their conception. It is regrettable that of the 89 women who took part in the study, there has been no published follow-up in the medical literature.⁶

4 Paul Brodeur, *The Zapping of America* (NY: Norton, 1977) and Bob DeMatteo, *Terminal Shock* (New Canada Publications, 1985)

5 James C Lin, 'The microwave auditory phenomenon', *Proceedings of the IEEE*, vol. 68, no. 1, January 1980, pp. 67-73.

6 There has been a study of childhood leukaemia around Greenham Common airbase, following the release of radiation from a fire on a B45 in 1958: J. Bithell, and G. Draper, *Journal of Radiation Protection*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1999.

It has been reported that some of the Greenham women have died of cancer – KB died of cancer at the age of 69. This raises the possibility of an oncogenic dimension to these weapons, with profound psychological effects (fear of cancer). This perhaps explains the denial noted by KB: some of the women refused to believe that they had been harmed in any way and could not write it down. The threat was taken seriously by some women (who never returned to Greenham) and by the camp as a whole: they advised pregnant women and children to stay away (at the start, children had played quite happily among the tents and caravans).

There are a few allusions to the MKULTRA project⁷ and the TV programme *Opening Pandora's Box* in KB's 'Preliminary Report', (a final report was never published) which she used to show at her public meetings.

Opening Pandora's Box

*Opening Pandora's Box*⁸ was the final part of a series of programmes about the effects of electricity, broadcast by Channel 4 in 1984. It starts off with a simple explanation about ionising (nuclear bombs) and non-ionising radiation (RF, microwaves etc.). It moves on to look at the 'Moscow signals', which saw the US Embassy in Moscow irradiated with microwave radiation and may have led to the death of two US ambassadors and illnesses amongst Embassy staff. The staff were fed a cover story about a viral study and were not told

⁷ My guess about MKULTRA is that after the Senator Church hearings the funding shifted to countries with a more relaxed legal framework. The tricks, concern with drugs and hypnosis, continued, but there may have been a shift towards advanced electronics. For a classic statement of these types of projects see: Albert Biderman and Herbert Zimmer, *The Manipulation of Human Behavior* (NY: Wiley, 1961).

⁸ *Opening Pandora's Box* (original), BFI National Archive: 184904 Central Independent Television 1984-09-08 (BFI: 21 Stephen Street, W1; 0207 928 3232 for research viewings).

about Project Pandora⁹ which set out to explain what was going on.¹⁰ It seems that the true purpose of the 'Moscow Signals' was never tracked down. Similarly the Soviet 'Woodpecker' signal (coded messages to agents? anti-missile radar? weapon to shift mood and cognition of target populations?) and the US response – a 16 cycle-per-second pulse aimed at the ionosphere¹¹ – were not understood. It concludes with interviews with scientists (Robert Becker, Karel Marha, Ross Adey and Robert C Beck) who showed the effects of (disturbing) research into EMF and stress manipulation on animal (monkeys) and human behaviour. One scientist (Robert C Beck) pulled out of this research – he found it too frightening and in violation of ethical standards. He seemed to suggest that the work was continuing (1984) but it was locked in total secrecy. An updated *Opening Pandora's Box* would be useful.

Sound Archives: Imperial War Museum

In 1992 KB and her husband were interviewed (and recorded) by Lyn Smith of the Imperial War Museum.¹² There are accounts of KB's early life and how she got involved in the WRNS. They explain why she got involved in peace campaigning: she became aware of the horrors of nuclear war and feared for her children and grandchildren. She did not like 'the Yanks' dumping their nuclear missiles on Britain. There are some details of life at Greenham e.g. when the women,

9 I often wonder if this account is true, or if it was a cover story for tests on their own population. It seems more likely that the lax standards set for e.g. radar (and other military applications) in the Second World War gave rise to concerns about health effects. They carried out all sorts of tests on children, people with learning difficulties, psychiatric and cancer patients, prisoners and junior service personnel. See J. D. Moreno, *Undue Risk: Secret State Experiments on Humans* (NY: Freeman, 2000). It is possible that in the interests of 'national security' similar (irradiation) tests were carried out on vulnerable targets. The UK has yet to see published work along the lines of Moreno.

10 This seems to have led to a report, Ly H Petersen, Joseph E , Joseph K Kuos *et al*, 'Flash Report of Pandora/Bizarre Briefing'. Project Bizarre is discussed at <www.slavery.org.uk/ProjBizarreWeapImp.htm>.

11 This seems to be similar to the doubts about the HAARP project.

12 IWM 12685/7/1-2 Ms K Besly and IWM 12746 Charles Besly

holding onto the the wire got their fingers brutally hit by military personnel on the other side of the fence. It also describes how she got involved in the 'zapping' investigation and how it came to take over her life.

Her husband (Charles') testimony is also interesting. He was in the Second World War in India and Burma. He describes at one point how he slapped an Indian beggar – his deep remorse – and how he began to see the world in a different way after the event. Lyn Smith also asked him at one point: 'Do you really believe all this about zapping at Greenham – it is hard to prove and there is little in the press.' He replied, quite simply, 'Yes, I do.' He also said that often KB came back from Greenham 'shattered' and 'with blinding headaches'.

What comes across from the oral archives is the humanity and sincerity of KB .

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