

## **Terry Willet interviewed at home 30<sup>th</sup> August 2012**

### **Jon Newman interviewer**

Jon: Ok Terry Willet thanks for letting me interview you today. Could we start by you telling us about your accident, how did you end up in a wheelchair?

Terry: Inspecting a coal mine in 1963 and unfortunately the roof caved in resulting in me breaking my back, I was on a mining management course at the time and had actually volunteered to go in on Easter Saturday to inspect the coal mine ready for the normal working routine to resume a few days later and in the process of carrying out that inspection I had my accident and ended up with my back broken.

Jon: And what was the initial treatment that you received?

Terry: I was taken from the colliery where I had my accident, once I was brought to the surface I was taken to the colliery and I was taken to Mansfield general hospital just for one night, but it was pretty horrific now when I think back about it, the treatment, they obviously weren't used to spinal patients at all, and it was quite an unpleasant experience. But then I was taken by ambulance to Sheffield to the specialist spinal unit and the first thing that struck me was that "Oh these people know what they're doing" and I was handled in a better way and a more comfortable way and ended up in bed completely for 10 weeks and nursed in a special position and in a special way and then was gradually rehabilitated to get me as fit as possible, they obviously realised I wouldn't be walking but you're never actually told that at the beginning, you're just told "Well we'll have to wait and see, all individuals are different". Obviously the ward was full of wheelchairs and there were disabled people in beds all around me so over a couple of weeks you pick up really the sort of direction you might be going in, but you just live in hope that you're going to get a lot better than you might think.

Jon: What was the physiotherapy regime at Sheffield like? What sort of things did you start off doing?

Terry: It was actually very good and it was in those days one of the leading units in the country to get the best results as regards to coping with your disability as regards physical ability; and handling yourself and becoming independent is the ultimate aim and as I say, a lot of work on the upper body in the gym, in a swimming pool, first in a remedial pool and then in a swimming pool. Then of course you're introduced to sport in general and that's the direction that ultimately worked out for me and changed my life again really.

Jon: Was sport presented as just another form of therapy? At what point did it become sport for its own sake rather than sport as therapy?

Terry: Initially, the sport was for getting you as fit and as able as possible and to basically give you something to occupy your mind, because I was one of the least of the time spans of people regarding rehabilitating (I was only four and a half months which is quite a low figure compared to some people that can be in hospital up to a year) but depending on your level of disability and how you cope with it the sport is used to get you motivated really and to give you something to occupy your time. But then of course they bring in the competitive side of it, that's where I went because I'd been a little bit sporty as an able-bodied young man, swimming and football and all the obvious things. My main sport was long-distance cross-country, well that was obviously out of the question but then they led me in all sorts of directions: there were wheelchair marathons just beginning in those days, there were wheelchair track events and slaloms and all these sort of things so I actually had a go at all of these various things that were offered to me and seemed to click really it just seemed to be something that suited me.

Jon: So you mentioned that there was a gym at the hospital, were there also sports facilities? Were there tracks or anything like that?

Terry: No, nothing like that, in those days it was very limited, they made the best of what they'd got, we'd got South 2 which was the gymnasium and then when we'd finished all the gym work and the work on the floor and on the benches and things they would clear everything out and we'd use that for wheelchair basketball training and there was a board at each end of the room, it was very small and nothing like a basketball court really but it gave you the initial idea and then when the weather was fine, also the car park outside, that was more like a basketball court, we had a car park outside that was marked as a basketball court and a badminton court and when the weather was fine and sunny we spent a lot of time out there.

Jon: So what was the name of the hospital that you were in?

Terry: The Lodgemore spinal unit, Sheffield, in those days it was only one of four or five actual spine units of course there are a lot more now but in those days there weren't; I'm talking about 1963, April the 13<sup>th</sup> 1963 was when I went to Lodgemore.

Jon: And what sports were available there?

Terry: The emphasis was on archery which was very well participated in, the physios seemed to like people to do archery; wheelchair basketball was very popular, that was one of the most popular, but we did actually do field events. We did a bit of everything, even though we hadn't got a 400 metre track there were quite a lot of paths around the hospital and there was a very big sports field outside the wards because the wards were on one corridor and at the end of every ward you could go straight out onto this sports field which was very handy when the weather was reasonably fine, so quite a range really. Swimming was introduced; initially there was just a small remedial pool but then when they got one a little

bigger, I think it was about 20 metres or something, we actually even had a go at playing water polo; we put a basket ball ring on a board and somebody mounted it at the end of the pool, anything at all to keep us busy and occupied. So there was a real range. Snooker was very popular which surprised me a little bit, it was very popular with the people who weren't all that athletic but they wanted some competitive sport that they could get involved in - and actually Lodgemore ended up with some of the top snooker players in the world.

Jon: You talk a lot about this competitive element; presumably initially you were competing with your fellow patients?

Terry: Yes, initially, but then every year we had a sports day and each of the spine units: Southport, Pinderfields at Wakefield and ourselves would have a sports day and the teams from those units would come over and compete against us, so that was a real big day as regards competitive motivation and whatever and obviously that went on for years and years but then ultimately you were asked if you wanted to go on to the national games at Stoke Mandeville.

Jon: In terms of your own development through that local league and then the nationals, you left the hospital towards the end of 1963.

Terry: Yes.

Jon: Did you return to the hospital as a sports centre?

Terry: I went up to the hospital to the sports clubs every Wednesday afternoon, it was the gym and everything to do with the facilities that we had got, what few, were open to anybody that wanted to come and take part on the Wednesday afternoon sports afternoon. And also the physios and OTs and the medical staff all approved of it and supported it because it motivated other patients that were following on and probably newly disabled patients and they could see how capable you were becoming and how fit you were getting and also introduce them to sport and basically even though they weren't capable of competing initially, once they were fit enough and strong enough most of them couldn't wait to have a go at one of these sports that they'd been observing, so it worked really well.

Jon: So it was as sort of mentoring really.

Terry: Yes, and we were encouraged to talk to the patients, to go on the main ward for admittance and to try and motivate them, but be careful what you say but we were led in the right direction and enthuse about the sport and what you did to get to the level you got to now.

Jon: You were clearly very enthused by sport and saw it as a way of coping with your circumstances. Presumably there were some people who just weren't interested?

Terry: There were actually, a good percentage just didn't want to know, all they wanted was to feel that they could probably become as independent as possible but to get back home. And a lot of people had got to get back to work as soon as they possibly could because benefits and things in the 60's were nothing like they are now and you were on a very basic income and if you've got a family, let's remember that some of them were people with families and children and so forth and they'd got to get back and get to work as soon as possible, so that was their ultimate aim. The ones that were able and could afford, and that came into it, whether you could afford it or not, luckily because mine was an industrial injuries accident I was getting quite a reasonable income in benefits and pensions because I had my accident at work and there were quite a lot of others that were in a similar situation because in the 60's a high percentage of the people on the ward were from heavy industry jobs, ship building and steel works and coal mining and all these heavy industry things; there were ordinary accidents like tripping over the doorstep and breaking your neck in the swimming pool but a lot of them were industrial accidents so they could actually spend more time rehabilitating and getting us fit as they possibly could and then they could go back to work if they wanted but they weren't in any great rush you got more time so we were really very privileged, the few of us that were like that.

Jon: So you returned to your parents' house?

Terry: When I came out of hospital, yes, after four and a half months I went back to a colliery house in Edwinstone, my father being the under manager of the colliery house and I went back there, they'd actually put a ramp at the front door where there were three steps but it wasn't ideal because the toilet was upstairs in that house and I couldn't go upstairs at all in those days and my brother use to come and take me up, everyday he'd pop up over and carry me upstairs and leave me on the toilet for 10 or 15 minutes and the bring me back down again which was a bit awkward for all of us and a bit embarrassing really. I'd got a commode but obviously I wasn't very keen on that so it didn't work very well but for a good six months to a year that was the house that I had to manage in but luckily after about a year I'd been introduced to walking or standing with callipers on and elbow crutches and I'd become quite confident on the elbow crutches, even though I was paralysed from the waist down, I could get from A to B and I could walk one hundred yards if necessary in my own way and actually I got to where I could actually go up steps and stairs, but not those stairs at Edwinstone, West Lane, because those were difficult stairs, but normal straight stairs with a handrail I'd got, after about a year, where I could actually get up them so then I was a bit more independent then. And that was all to do with the sport giving me the enthusiasm to get as strong and fit and get my arms really built up and of course all the various sporting events I was doing were all contributing towards that.

Jon: Tell us about the sports that you started off with, what were the big ones?

Terry: The ones that I really clicked on were swimming, initially, and wheelchair basketball, they are the two, I did lots of others but they're the two that I really felt that I might be able

to make some impression on and they were the two that I actually went to the first national games, for me, in 1964 down at Stoke Mandeville and they were the two I was competing in. I had a go at other things while I was there, field events and all sorts of thing but the main events I was there for was swimming and basketball, the Lodgemore basketball team, and there'd probably been about eight or nine teams in the country then and we were all playing off and Lodgemore were one of the top teams so it was very competitive and really that was a brilliant outlet for energy and basically physical ability, you could really rough it up if you wanted to in those days and a lot of that I thought was great sport.

Jon: How has wheelchair basketball changed from the mid 60's to how it's played today?

Terry: It's changed out of all recognition really because it's the same game basically, but for instance the wheelchairs we were in were Ministry [of Health] heavy chrome wheelchairs that weighed 45-50 pounds in weight. While today the new chairs, some of them weigh 10 kilograms and this sort of thing, they're just so light, so manoeuvrable. The ability of the athletes is much greater now than it was then because obviously it's far more professional and they train far harder than we did, I find that hard to believe because we trained hard but they actually do nowadays because you've got professional coaches and you live, eat and sleep it, whereas some of us were working and then just going to the sports club whenever you could get up there and also in the evenings and weekends playing in tournaments, so we weren't actually full time professionals like nowadays they are - and basketball has just changed out of all recognition, there's no recognition to what it was in the 60s and obviously before that it was even worse than in the 60s.

Jon: Same levels of aggression though?

Terry: Oh yes, now that's one thing that is the same, but now you have to harness it in a very subtle way because of course you've got professional referees nowadays and they're watching every move and of course it's supposed to be a sport of no contact, that's always amused us all because there's a lot that goes on off the ball and of course there's a lot that goes on with the wheelchairs but it has to be very subtle nowadays whereas in my day you could actually decide if somebody was roughing you up you could return the compliment and rough them up and it sometimes got quite physical. Some of the instances that I've seen with fights breaking out... you can't believe it really, but two paraplegics lining up to try and take a swing at each other, and actually I have it where they've actually pulled each other out of the chairs and ended up on the floor fighting, well that's going to the extreme, but there was a lot of rough and tumble went on and elbows in ribs and fingers trapped on the rim of the chair. It could get quite fiery at times and people really losing their patience and losing their temper with people. The referees, I mean quite often people were sent off, you either just committed such a bad foul and you got sent off immediately or you got five chances, five warnings, five fouls (if you got five fouls you were off anyway). No, it did get quite interesting. Once we got to international level the same thing went on but different nations were using different pieces of equipment, different wheelchairs and this sort of

thing, and I remember one instant, it was the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh, we were playing the Australian team, they were a very good team, in the final and some of their older players, good players, very good players that had been playing quite a while, were playing in what we call 'travaux', big, heavy, like armchairs on wheels with the big wheels at the front, and they were very manoeuvrable – they weren't anywhere near as fast as the ones that some of us were using, but they were like 'hit men' and 'stoppers' and our main 'front man', Cyril Thomas, the GB point player that was scoring a lot of the baskets, obviously their coach told of their guys in a 'travaux' to take him out and this guy was roughing Cyril up; he'd taken [the skin off] all his knuckles off and cut his knuckles ('cos these travaux could spin on a sixpence, with these big wheels at the front they could spin and of course you've got a lot of weight and they're big and bulky chairs and big strapping blokes that were in them) and Cyril had got blood pouring from his knuckles and he warned this guy, Mather Brown, he said, "You do that again" (and Cyril was about six foot four, he was a big guy), he said, "You do that again and you're in trouble". Well of course Mather Brown tried to do it again and caught him again, well Cyril did no more and he jus – Bang! [Punches fist into hand] That was the end of Mather Brown, but of course Cyril was off straight away. Anyway we still won the gold medal for the game so that was alright; it all worked out in the long run.

This was him deliberately taking his knuckles off; as Cyril was pushing and trying to turn Mather Brown was just spinning this big heavy chair which had got sharp corners on it and taking his knuckles off. They were trying to take him out of the game but it backfired on them. It ended up with both of them out of the game, but it really motivated the rest of the GB team when Cyril laid Mather Brown out and he had to go off and of course Cyril followed him. But Cyril sat down as proud as Punch – and especially when we won the game. That was the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh... I think it was 1970.

Jon: You first went to the games at Stoke Mandeville in 1964. What did you know about the place before you went there?

Terry: We'd been told that Stoke Mandeville was the home of disabled sport and that it had all started there, the rehabilitation, the sport introduction and the nursing methods that were being used by all the spinal units had come from Stoke Mandeville so we were very curious about the place and when we went down there we realised it was a very big hospital and they had far superior facilities to ourselves. I mean in those days, in the 60s they were still using a car park as the basket ball court, but it was much better surface and it had got fencing all round, whereas ours was just a random car park that they'd painted lines on and put the boards up. But Stoke Mandeville facilities were far superior to ours and of course when you went to Stoke Mandeville all the other teams from all the other spinal units in the country were there so it was a much, much bigger gathering of athletes and events than we were used to up at Sheffield and it was quite an eye-opener. And to stay in the dormitories, huts at they were in those days, ex-Ministry huts just off the car park, it was a fantastic

experience. It was a bit basic to say the least but thank goodness I was a young man and took it in my stride and loved every minute of it.

Jon: you went back every year?

Terry: Yes, every you qualified for the Nationals; it wasn't particularly difficult to get chosen for the nationals, the standard that you'd got to reach was pretty easy; once you'd got yourself up to a certain level you were more or less looking forward to going to the Nationals without any great worries, it was when you were trying to get in the International team, that's when you really had to knuckle under and get the results at the Nationals and then once you'd carried on after and proved that you were going to maintain that standard obviously then you could hope that you'd be picked for the forthcoming Internationals wherever they might be, either in the world or anywhere.

Jon: When did you first think that you might have a chance at the international team?

Terry: My first games in 64 I hoped that I would possibly get in any of the teams that were coming up that year. I can't remember where they went in 64 but I hoped that I might get selected but I didn't. I was very close, so I was told afterwards, for swimming. So I thought, right I've not been picked but I'm going to a real effort to get better for next year and hope that I can get the standard necessary to get in the International team, and luckily I did; I went to the nationals and did extremely well and was full of confidence and was training hard, two or three times a week at least and got selected to go to some European championships in 65 after the Nationals in June, went in July to a place called saint Etienne in France to some European Championships and of course that was even another level and a real eye-opener. Well by then I'd started fencing on a regular basis, I'd been introduced to fencing at the unit and gradually got more and more interested in it and found, I think because I was a bit of a rough diamond and quite capable of taking care of myself, fencing just appealed to me, the sabre, because it was basically two individuals fighting. I mean you've got to abide by the rules, but you're literally just fighting and you really want to, not hurt your opponent, but you want to hit them.

So by then I'd started focusing on basket ball and fencing. So when we went to Saint Etienne we actually won the European Championship basket ball and I was in the GB team as a newcomer, but obviously going quite well and also I was in the GB fencing team and was in. I think it was two of the teams that won gold medals, team events. I didn't win any gold medals in the individual events but I think I got a silver in the sabre, which I was over the moon about. Individual silver and then two team golds in the fencing and then we also won the basket ball, so I came back on cloud nine! I thought this is the life for me. Once I'd come out of hospital I'd got my life sorted out; I was married and we actually owned a small riding school. So me wife was running the riding school and when I was there I was helping out and doing what I could with the riding school and fetching and carrying and that, but a lot of the time I was training and sport was becoming basically my ultimate lifestyle, that

was it, I was dreaming of becoming a professional sportsman and doing nothing else. I was going in that direction.

Jon: What was the first Olympics that you went to?

Terry: That would be 1968 in Tel Aviv, Israel; and the reason we went to Tel Aviv was, I think it was Mexico, it was decided that the altitude of Mexico where the [Olympic] games were going to be was not suitable for disabled athletes – or maybe the true story was that the Mexicans didn't want any disabled sport or hadn't got any disabled athletes in those days and probably didn't want that side of the games. But anyway we ended up in Israel which was a brilliant trip, that really worked out; it was a fantastic experience to go to Israel, couldn't dream that we'd ever go a place like that – and then to go and compete and do really well as well – came back again feeling ten feet tall and as proud as Punch.

Jon: What was the selection process to get into the GB team?

Terry: It was pretty well organised. The coaches for the various sports would put in their recommendations to the selection committee at Stoke Mandeville (it was all geared around Stoke Mandeville, the governing body) and the coaches would put in their selections on results mainly but also on – we realised you had to blend in with the team, you couldn't be an individual, you'd got to be a team player - and so there was emphasis put on the way you conducted yourself with your fellow athletes because most of the time the people you were in the team with when you went internationally or to the Olympics, they were actually normally your opponents, so you had to gel with them and fit in. But they would put their results into Stoke Mandeville from the nationals and from all sorts of tournaments through the year would be looked at and then they'd discuss selection, like if there were nine places available they'd decide which of the athletes that the coaches had recommended they'd chose to go to the games, and that was the selection procedure. It seemed to work quite well, very well in fact. We were not light years in front of lots of the other nations, but we were way ahead of lots of the other nations. The only nations in those days that were our equal were the Australians, the Americans reasonably so and the Dutch, because the Dutch had taken disabled sport very early on and had put quite a bit of emphasis into their sport. The other nations weren't far behind, but we were quite a way in front as regards physical ability and equipment so we had a slight advantage really.

Jon: Was the sport a friendly communal thing to do while being competitive as well?

Terry: Even though lots of the people were your competitors, once you'd been abroad with them on an important trip and you'd been in the same team, still competing against each other most of the time, apart from the team events, it seemed to give you a bond and you made lots of good friends and acquaintances. There were a lot of people in the teams; the men's' team with their team captain and the ladies' team and they've got their ladies' team captain and the you've got an overall team manager, and you've all worked as a group, but

the ultimate aim was to do as well as you could for yourself and also mainly for your country and for your fellow team members. It really did mean that you built lots of very good relationships over the years, even with the other, foreign countries, lots and lots of other people in foreign countries became quite good friends and acquaintances and it was surprising how close you got really with some of the other nations, which was a fantastic experience in those days.

Jon: What were the moments you were most proud of in the various games?

Terry: Right at the very beginning, back in 1968 when I went to Israel the GB basket ball team got the bronze medal in wheelchair basket ball. Now we'd never had an Olympic medal before 68 in basket ball, so it's probably not as high as we would have liked, but to have got an Olympic basket ball medal for the first time for the GB team we felt was quite an achievement; so that was what I classed as the first big medal that really meant a lot to me. I had had medals before, I had had team gold medals and things like that, but it was just the fact that basket ball was the focal point, a lot of the other athletes would come and watch the basket ball, everybody was watching the basket ball results and Israel was a very good team, America were very good and other nations as well and, as I say,, that was the first one that really made an impression.

From then on I just carried on and competed at world championships, Olympics and Europeans and got lots and lots of medals and quite a few gold but then we came to the 76 Canada Olympics in Toronto and for me that was a red-letter year. I was in the fencing and I was in the basket ball (but the basket ball by then I was starting to be on the fringes of it really, I will admit I didn't give it 100%, my mental focus was on the fencing). I was in the basket ball team and we didn't get a medal at all, but the fencing went great guns, because I was in sabre and epee and I actually got the silver individual medal in sabre and I got the gold epee individual medal; now that was the pinnacle of my achievement up to that point. Again, I'd had lots of team golds and we actually got team gold in the sabre, but the teams' good and very, very pleasing to do but individual is just you against everybody else – and I stood a good chance of winning both gold medals; I could have actually won – I think I should have won the sabre, it was only my way of tackling it, I just didn't play it right in the final. To get the silver individual sabre and to get the gold in the individual epee was the ultimate for me. I'd arrived and I knew that I was on the top tier, never looked back from then really, I was just raring to go and couldn't wait to get to my next tournament. At that time I was world, European and Olympic champion, for about three years I think it was. Anywhere that I went in Europe, competing in competition, you just knew that people were saying, "He's the world and Olympic champion, so you're going to have to be on your best form to beat him". It was a fantastic experience; I just felt ten foot tall and so, so proud. And when they played the National Anthem when I was on the top tier of the medal-giving ceremony, well I was just stunned actually, I couldn't believe that I'd come so far in such a short time. And it gave me so much pride and self-confidence. I like to think that I hadn't got

big-headed or cocky, but I was just...I felt capable of my own ability, not only in sport, it rubbed off, basically as an individual I felt that I could tackle things that before I would have hesitated about. Really I think it was the making of me, I really do.

Jon: How important was the coaching in fencing?

Terry: Well, without the coaching we'd have got nowhere, I don't think, you'd have just fenced and that's it. We were very lucky in Sheffield - and in Stoke Mandeville just the same 'cos the top coaches from Sheffield were the coaches for the international team anyway so they went with us everywhere - we were very lucky to have the best coaches and we all had a coach in Sheffield that we all said was the best coach in the world by far and we all got on with him so well and his name was Les Veal and throughout the world he was renowned as a very, very good coach and a lot of the other nations were a bit envious I think. He'd actually been an international able-bodied sabre fencer but he could put his hand to any weapon, but he was such a brilliant coach and put it over in such a professional way and a way that we could understand. He was a hard task master; you had to put in the hard work that was needed and the training but quite frankly we were very, very lucky with our coaches and with Les Veal in particular. For me personally Les Veal made me what I am as a fencer, without any hesitation. I didn't know the first thing about fencing but he was just a natural coach and a brilliant guy.

Jon: Fencing is one of the sports where there is a lot of common ground in coaching the able-bodied and the disabled?

Terry: Yes, we used to train at the able-bodied clubs and with them. We trained at the Sheffield Sword Club at the University gymnasium which is huge and its on a very big scale. It worked very well; Leas Veal had been a coach there anyway so they all knew him – he used to coach the able-bodied as well. But he encouraged the disabled to fight the able-bodied and vice-versa and what we liked was than the able-bodied fencers some of them were world class fencers and they would have to sit down to fence us and actually that did them the world of good because it tightened up their defence and made it, they could fence without running up and down the piste. If your able-bodied you've got the chance to back off and run away - I don't mean run away as 'run away', but you're backing off down and having a bit of a breather and drop your weapon and think, right, and then back in again. But you can't do that when you're fixed in a frame and you're fencing your opponent, you're within hitting distance all the time so your guard and your protection and your parry and riposte and all the things that you've got to do have to be spot on. And of course we were fencing people that we'd got so much respect for because of their ability, but it was surprising some of the people that we could probably be the equal of sitting down because it brought them down to our level. But they loved it, they didn't feel it was like they were fighting inferior fencers; they were actually training and coaching themselves in a slightly different way which just seemed to work a treat.

Jon: What were your final games?

Terry: I had competed as I say right from 1964 in the National Games, then getting in the Internationals from 1965 and every European, World and Olympics from then onwards, but once I got to 84 for the Paralympics at Stoke Mandeville I was actually very involved then in the business and spending a lot more time actually working because that was something that needed to be done because I was married and whatever, so I was starting to, not phase it out, not for many, many years, but not to be a full-time professional athlete and to try and mix the two. And so by 84 I had started that process and consequently turned up in 84 at the Paralympics... the emphasis was I'd already been told very near to the games that I'd actually be lighting the Olympic flame so that gave me first of all so much surprise and then pride that I'd been chosen to do that great honour and I just felt so proud and my mind was just full of lighting the Olympic flame, I must not mess that up, I've got to do it in a very professional sportsmanlike way and all the arrangements that were going on about that... and of course I was already on the Exec Council at Stoke Mandeville and had been for a few years, so I was spending a lot of time at Stoke Mandeville actually helping on the council to organise the games ... so my training had suffered quite a bit. Also Les Veal had passed away a couple of years before 84 and it meant I hadn't got the input from Les that I'd been having. All the knowledge he'd given me I'd still got but obviously things were progressing and things move on and I wasn't getting any younger, for one thing. And if I tell the truth – and I'm not very proud to say this – I think I was becoming a bit stale, my mind was thinking about other things rather than focusing 100% on the sport and consequently, it was a bit of an embarrassment for me, in 84 I didn't win any medals – well I did actually but they don't mean a lot to me. I qualified for all the finals with my weapons, epee and sabre, which was an achievement in itself, because by then there were lots of fencers from all over the world, dozens of them, in different pools, and I fought my way through the preliminary pools and was going great guns, but once I got to the finals I just hadn't got what it takes or wasn't prepared to put the initial effort in to just get the results that in the past I'd probably achieved. Anyway, there were people who were coming along who were very, very good and obviously being coached very professionally and very well so I just ended up in the finals but didn't end up with any medals at all, which really shook me. Luckily I think we got the team silver, which was great to have a silver medal, but compared to some of the medals I'd had in the past and particularly the individual ones, it didn't really mean a great deal – which is probably not a nice thing to say. It was nice to win a medal but it wasn't what I felt if I'd been 100% I might possibly have achieved. But my life by then was changing and, as I say, lighting the Olympic flame and the pride that was giving me was taking quite a lot of my thoughts and time and effort.

Jon: Tell us some more about that. You helped design the chair that you used to light the flame.

Terry: We wanted it to be as normal as possible, as like the able-bodied as possible. We'd got the 400 metre track, the flame was to be at the end of the 400 metre track all the teams were lined up on the sports area, on the track, of course Prince Charles as the patron and all these big influential, well-known people were there, it was on the television and so-forth, and I was to come in one end of the track, push one complete circuit of the track, then up onto the flame base and light the flame and that was it. I rehearsed, trying to carry the flame and push with one hand, but on a tartan track going round an oval, you can do it but the chair goes all over the place. I thought, somehow I've got to have my hand up, how can I hold... anyway I hit on this idea, ('cos I'd actually got a business by then selling wheelchairs to other disabled athletes and I was quite used to working with wheelchairs, part of my job by then) and I sketched out on a piece of paper for the engineer from Stoke Mandeville that they'd lined up to do all this sort of thing, like a holder for the flame then the pipe for the gas would come down my arm, down my sleeve of my tracksuit, so I could hold the flame, the bracket for the flame, there was a pole, and I welded it to the top of my front castor meaning that if I twisted... [Demonstrates the movement] The flame was in its holder and I'd have my hand up there, I could push with one hand, but if this rod, this tube, was welded to the top of the right castor, where I'd got the flame on the right, I could actually turn the front wheel of the chair. So what I did, I was pushing round the track and I could actually turn the flame in the holder and that was turning this rod which was turning the front wheel – which was all I needed to go round nice and smooth round the track and up onto the base to a light it and it worked a dream. It looked quite effective really because it was a narrow tube, (but the pipe down my arm and the gas bottle stuck at the back of my tracksuit, obviously you couldn't really see that, but I was thinking if anything goes wrong I'll probably go into orbit here or something like that) but it worked a treat and of course when I put the flame onto the Olympic flame that lit [it]. And there was a guy underneath the Olympic flame that was turning the gas on and off and he just said, "Well, when you're ready". And I just said, "Right then, I'm going to light it now." And it just went "Bouffh!" and I thought crikey, I just hope this doesn't have any effect on this gas cylinder up my tracksuit. But it worked a dream and I think it looked quite reasonable. That was just a fantastic experience, to sit on that base at the side of the flame just before I put it into the Olympic flame itself, I just felt all the years of hard work and all the training, it just eclipsed everything. It was just the ultimate. And then afterwards, you know, everybody wanted to talk to you and ask you about this modification, and Prince Charles was asking me to demonstrate it to him and I was cocking up on the back wheels and twisting the tube and just showing how it all worked and it just made me feel so, so proud. But as I say, that became the emphasis of my 84 games.

Jon: '84 was the first Paralympics in Britain and almost by accident and Stoke Mandeville had very little time to prepare for hosting. How did it feel as an Olympic venue compared with some of the other places that you had already been to?

Terry: Stoke Mandeville was the governing body of the sports, so everything was run from there world-wide, but when the Americans messed up on the Olympics it looked initially – because there was only about three months before the Paralympics – there were all sorts of stories flying around but we never really got the true story, but something went wrong financially, which is a big surprise for America, anyway with three months to go we'd all got psyched up with training hard and everything hunky dory to go to America, when we were told the Games are off, it looks like there won't be any Paralympics this year. Well, I mean, that was shocking, really shocking. Anyway, at Stoke Mandeville we decided, and I was involved in that discussion being on the Exec Council, that we would probably step in, or look into the possibility of stepping in, with only three months to go and have the Paralympics at Stoke Mandeville, Aylesbury. Speaking as an athlete, we all thought, "Oh, Stoke Mandeville, it's all right, it's great that we're going to have Paralympics, but what a shame that we're not going to America. Obviously the trips were a bit special. But then we thought, well, it's the Olympics just the same. Let's just hope, from the athletic point, that Stoke Mandeville can pull it off. Well, it was a fantastic achievement for them to do what they did. Everybody locally was involved; schools and all sorts of facilities were used. And as it worked out, it worked out very well and yes they went off as Paralympics just the same, the same flag, the same flame; everything was the same, the oath and everything; everybody was competitive, just the same as they would have been at any Olympics, so quite frankly it was a resounding success I think. And we thought it was quite a good thing for this country because it did get quite a bit of media coverage – nothing like today – but there was quite a bit of coverage in the newspapers and some coverage on the television – and the television of course, up until that point had been a bit, "Ehhh... disabled sport... it might be just a little bit distasteful or a bit awkward, you know. We can't be really interviewing disabled athletes because we don't really know what to say to them." There was still some of that attitude that was out there with the general public and the media in particular. But I think that helped break down that barrier and make the media realize that it was sport for real, not just playing at it or 'having a go', it was real competitive sport and I think it opened a few eyes and changed a lot of things. And it's progressed since then to this current day where, well it's just amazing, the disabled athletes are just athletes; disability is irrelevant, you're just an athlete, you train the same, you use the same facilities and luckily you get the same recognition now as an able-bodied athlete, which is fantastic. That was Sir Ludwig Guttmann's ultimate aim, that we would be, the ones that wanted to go down that route to sport – just sportsmen, but not 'disabled sportsmen' as such - I mean we are disabled, you accept that, it's very important, but integration, I think it was all about integration from the word go.