T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

Tape 855 Finding Aid

INTERVIEWEE NAMES: Colonel and Mrs. C.A.K. Innes-Wilson

COLLECTION: 4700.0585  Tape 855  (Tape 3 of 4)

IDENTIFICATION: Britons in Pre-Independence India

INTERVIEWERS: Frank de Caro, Rosan Jordan

SERIES: British Voices from South Asia

INTERVIEW DATE: 3/29/1978

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 33 minutes

OTHER MATERIALS: None

RESTRICTIONS: Copyright retained by interviewee and/or the interviewee’s heirs

NOTE: Copyright and property rights are assigned jointly to Centre of South Asian Studies at the University of Cambridge and Louisiana State University and A & M College Libraries and its successor agencies.

INDEX

Tape 855, Side A
Innes-Wilsons (Part 3 of 5)

000  air conditioning and train travel
004  if it was hot weather, you traveled with a bucket of ice in the middle of the compartment
007  beer helped with the heat
008  their terrier would paddle around in it
009  when traveling with children, they would bring their Beatrice stove to cook child’s food
011  in Pakistan, Alec shared carriages with Pakistanis first class, one in particular was the editor of the Civil [?] Gazette, which was anti-British; they had an interesting chat, it turned out he was chairman of the Indo Press Association and he had just come from a meeting in Delhi and that as a routine they made speeches condemning Britain, but their off-the-record opinions were different
028  Pakistani peasants were protected by the British justice system; in Pakistan the Muslim factions replaced the estranged Hindus, so the Pakistanis wanted “their Hindus back, please”
Alec went into the Survey of India after three months in India and he became a “pseudo-soldier” by wearing the army uniform when necessary. He was ordered to serve in the Ordnance Survey; everyone senior to him was ordered to retire from the army who was in the survey. The principle task of the Survey of India was mapping India according to standard scale, which took a long time (mapping it, re-mapping it, triangulation, publishing, and printing). He eventually went into the publishing side of things, he was in charge of the printing when he finished in India, he was the principle administrator. They were very scientific.

The original mapping occurred in the 1870s, so the re-mapping emphasis of was on the engineering development and irrigation; they mapped large areas at large scales with close contouring at 1-2 foot intervals for irrigation maps. In the 1940s, they began to rely more heavily on aerial surveys for mapping, especially in Pakistan.

Alec spent a lot of his earlier career in camps doing fieldwork (October-April); their summer headquarters was at a Hill Station where they did calculations of their fieldwork and made up for being in the field for six months. Story about male elephant who took one of his luggage-carrying female elephants away; she returned but he came into the camp chasing after her and threatening to destroy the camp, so Alec shot the male; it turned out to be one of the largest elephants ever killed on record.

Discussion of people who hunted for sport and covered their houses in tiger skins, elephant tusks, hippo heads, spotted deer skins, and antlers; they weren’t keen on hunting and gathering trophies. Hunting was a matter of machismo, but they thought it was macabre.

They lived in the jungle on survey and became sympathetic with the animals; the people who enjoyed shooting were the ones who sat in their offices in Calcutta. Bengal Army men would go up into the Himalayas and come back with the heads of mountain goats and sheep.

The different Indian regiments were composed of different folks, depending on which communities they were drawn from, i.e. the Bengal Army men were more country whereas the Bombay men had another type of character.

To the outsider, the different British regiments looked similar. The Gorkhas officers had different attitudes (devotion) towards their troops. Some regiments were more prestigious than others, i.e. the Indian Calvary. Scouts on the Northwestern Frontier who were taken from the Indian regiments and placed into regular forces on the frontier; scouts were very efficient.

Alec enjoyed camp life; he was the only Englishman; it was exhausting work. When he first went out, he was instructed on plain tabling, which is what the Indians did. The second time he went out, he was doing triangulation; he had malaria most of the time and thought he was dying, so sat down to make his will.

They were called Class One Officers, who were either British or senior Indians promoted up from the Class Two Series (the backbone of the Survey of India) which was made up of Indian graduates and experts; he always thought Class Two was demeaning.
people’s initial training through the universities in engineering, mathematics, or regular degrees like botany; then they were trained in their respective departments upon arrival he sailed from England in December 1928 and arrived in India in January 1929 he didn’t go on leave until 1934; things had changed in England he meant only to stay in India four or five years, but changed his mind once he was there had he known there was a war coming, he would have returned to England to serve as a soldier again hill stations were very different from camp life; the one they went to was north of Delhi at the hill stations, there was a very social climate other hill resorts such as Shillong in the Khasi Hills; there are also pine forests; Shillong is not as steep as the Himalayas, so the Brits could have their golf courses they stayed in Indian hotels when they went to hill stations night life: tea, dancing, dining clubs brought British folks together, so that it wasn’t like moving to a new place each time because they would meet people they knew before in army socials after 1930, they allowed Indian club members there was, however, discrimination in the business sectors story about 1930 resistance to club integration within army regiments, but the commanding officer of the cavalry regiment said that if his officers couldn’t join the club then his forces were not available for hire (hunting, etc.) in Calcutta, there was discrimination against Indians for club membership in Bombay, there was a mixed club, the Willingdon Club politics of membership integration; older men were more tolerant than younger men clubs in army stations were assets to the community; the whole family was welcome whereas the civilian clubs such as the Saturday Club, etc. did not allow children single women joined clubs; Mrs. Innes-Wilson spent most of the war being called one of the “abandoned wives” before the war, people did not marry until they could afford to, which meant there were more single members of both sexes after the war, the character of the clubs and the community changed the main headquarters of the Survey of India is in Dehradun; Mussoorie, a hill resort, is situated about 20 miles (32 km) north of Dehradun Mussoorie was the center of Sir George Everest’s activities and engineers Everest was Surveyor General of India in the 1830s and his claim to fame was that he observed a meridional arc of [11.5 degrees] from north to south (the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, the southermost point of the Indian subcontinent) and worked out the figure of the earth; he was engaged in an argument with French scientists as to what kind of spheroid the earth is

Tape 855, Side B
Innes-Wilsons (Part 4 of 5)

businessmen claimed they didn’t need maps to find their way around the Duke of Wellington was a map-minded man who came to India and insisted on mapping his campaign the Survey of India was likely the oldest department of the government the social importance of clubs
a lot of army men became masons
conversations in clubs tended to be about people, food, clothes
tailors were remarkably clever
men were always accompanied by their personal servants
his best friend in India was his personal servant, Mohammed
they still correspond
he almost left when Alec and his wife married, but decided to stay
Mohammed was loyal and trustworthy
story about seeing Mohammed beating a man on the head in a railway station because he had said something offensive about Alec
since Mohammed was Muslim, he was contemptuous of those in Delhi who were killing Muslims; eventually Alec sent him on an airplane to Pakistan and later joined him there
list of servants: cook, cook’s assistant, sweeper, gardener, washer, waiter, night watchman, horse groomer, grass-cutter, bearer, and a nanny
bearers and nannies moved when they moved, but other servants stayed in their home village/town
Muslim servants never brought their wives and families with them to work; they went on annual leave to tend to familial business
in Madras, they supported the servants and their families because they were Christian
story about Mohammed getting caught cutting wood in the Reserve [?] forest; he sent his brother as a replacement and had to go underground and wait until Alec went to camp before he rejoined him
there was no dishonor in having the police after you, they assumed that Alec was against the police like them; “avoiding the police was a national sport!”
more about the clubs; sports like squash, swimming, tennis, golf (not so much games like cricket, and football which were more important in army clubs)
going to Calcutta as an administrator; piles of paperwork
Calcutta no longer the headquarters, but their offices are used as circles
in 1947, when the riots and massacres were occurring, the headquarters had moved to Delhi
servants wore uniforms of sorts; i.e. servants serving dinners wore uniforms, white clean gowns with a sash and a belt; they bought saris for their servants
they considered their servants good people; looking back, one was very inconsiderate of his servants; they would always find ways to accommodate even in trying situations
hotcakes
internal economies among and between servants; they borrowed materials and recipes from each other
recipes were never written down, nor were ingredients weighed
there are some Mongolian food ways in Calcutta because of intermarriage of different cultural affiliations
a story about arriving at a seemingly derelict bungalow, the cook made them a four-course meal out of practically nothing
Mrs. Innes always carried a Beatrice stove, tins, spoons, etc. so they could be independent if necessary; a man was incensed when she wanted to cook for herself and didn’t think he was capable;
small talk about the weather; story about changing seasons, someone being on safari; Jordan discusses their interest in postcards that might have come from India, many depict servants; Innes supposes he has seen those;

there are characters in India; supportive of British, he didn’t see that change after the war; he thinks Indians in general were underpaid;

his generation had more care for the Indians than the generation before; they did all they could to improve their lives; the lowest grade people were the ones who carried equipment around and did menial tasks; what they were paid, pay rates; they were the nicest people; they would go back to their villages in the summer

He hasn’t heard about Americans spoiling the market, they may have, but there weren’t that many around; many American in Delhi around Independence; word got around in America that British were leaving and good business could be had;

One man he was friendly with, Carl Zimmerman, they went to Bombay; he thought he could get business by stirring up resentment for the British, but people weren’t resentful; American press came over; one man was a photographer for Time and he was adept with his camera; he took photos of Gandhi with Lady Mountbatten;

British press was there also; when Gandhi was assassinated, a reporter from the BBC was just about to interview him; he made sure Gandhi was dead, then ran to his van and sent the news around the world; they were worried, they didn’t know who had assassinated him, if a Muslim had done it, there would have been mayhem, but it was a high-caste Hindu; they take a tea break;

Jordan asks about the cohesiveness of the British community in India; most in the ICS were concentrated in the capitals; there wasn’t a community in that sense; departments tended to form their own communities; he was separated from other British by great distances; Calcutta and Bombay communities were different from ICS communities; Delhi and Calcutta were totally different; different services at the same station; normally the ICS was heavily outnumbered; viewed the army with slight contempt; in the political service were many army officers; a junior administrator in the ICS;

Church brought people together, Catholic or Protestant, so did membership in the Masons; he isn’t a Mason so he can’t really comment; he came in contact with other British soldiers quite a lot; they couldn’t afford to travel far, the enlisted men had a restricted life; his bearer was a big fan of them and would come back with their rations; some Britons behaved themselves, some didn’t;

he took soldiers by train to Bombay in 1929; he collected about fifty people whose papers were all in order and were perfect; then he collected a group of Scots whose papers were in disarray, they were mutinous and had a bagpiper with them; he collected another regiment of gunners that were more mutinous; [private?] service members were apart from other service members, some learned the language without trouble; during the war they had British troops with the survey
dangers of life in India; when he first got there he was expecting a snake at every corner; he only occasionally came in contact with them; small snakes, kraits, were deadly, there was one in his slipper once; a huge cobra in his office one day; mentions big game, tape cuts off