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Tape 865 Finding Aid

INTERVIEWEE NAMES:
Sir George and Lady Abell   4700.0590   Tape 865.1   (Tape 1 of 2)
Philip Mason   4700.0589   Tape 865.2   (Tape 3 of 3)
Mr. John Stubbs and Mrs. Kay Stubbs   4700.0591   Tape 865.3   (Tape 1 of 4)

IDENTIFICATION:   Britons in Pre-Independence India

INTERVIEWERS:   Frank de Caro and Rosan Jordan

SERIES:   British Voices from South Asia

INTERVIEW DATES:
Abells:   4/6/1978
Stubbes:   4/9/1978

TOTAL PLAYING TIME:   1 hour, 34 minutes
Abells:   51 minutes
Mason:   16 minutes
Stubbes:   27 minutes

OTHER MATERIALS:   None

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Tape 865, Side A
Mason (Part 5 of 5) (865.2)
001   Mason quotes Skinner’s memoirs; it is clear that he always speaks with approval of many of the books
005   Mason agrees that she told him stories about their project
006   it is hard to suppose that a boy of twelve should not have been affected by suicide
008   husband said the daughters must be sent to school run by the missionaries; she should be taught to act like an English lady because she would one day be married to an English man
014   the second son and fourth or fifth child overall, James Skinner, wanted to go into the
services, probably inspired by the stories his mother would tell him.

James could not get into the country service as a commissioner because his mother was a native of India; he couldn’t enter the ranks either because he was half English.

He then went and joined a foreign disciplinary unit; when war broke out, he refused to fight for the British because he said that, with his father’s death, he had no ties to England.

When James approached one of the English commanding officers after being asked about foreign placement, James refused to give them any information and told the officer he was not willing to fight for the British.

The officer, being known for being stubborn, told James he would wait until things became better and re-offer a cavalry unit to him.

It was not uncommon to be turned down for commissions because your mother was a native of India.

James could not be awarded land because he was considered a British subject.

Mason quotes a famous Indian proverb: “The devil’s donkey belongs to neither the side of the stream nor to the house.”

Mason wanted to have another funny proverb while talking to Skinner one day, so he made one up; it sounded like a traditional proverb.

There are still people like Skinner around.

For 150 years, there was always an honorary Skinner member in the regiment Skinner was associated with.

Mason tells the story of an encounter he had with an old professor of his when he returned to England on his first leave from India.

People back home had no appreciation of India or the work the British were doing there; the easiest way to empty the House of Commons was to begin talking about India.

Mason talks about a current thesis he is reading and the criticisms.

It was very difficult for women unless they had an interest in something.

They discuss the feeling that the women held the British back; some believed the British would have been nicer to the Indians if the women had not been involved.

Mason doesn’t agree that women ruined the India experience; some women did not make contributions, but there were those that made excellent contributions.

An example is the soldier’s wife, who was very interested in the medical field; she began a maternity center for the wives and children.

There were always women that were contributing in different ways—some in the medical field, some by drawing or sketching, some in music.

Mason believes the feelings towards the women is an exaggeration; people are just looking to place the blame for an excuse.

End of interview.

Tape 865, Side A
Abells (Part 1 of 3) (865.1)

Lady Abell was from the Butler family and her uncle was the governor of the United Provinces of Burma; another uncle, who was a Montague, was governor of the Central Provinces.

When they arrived in India, they stayed in Bombay and received a summons from one of the uncles to stay with him at Jabalpur.
upon arriving, they realized they were in the middle of a governor tiger shootout; to everyone’s horror, Sir George shot and killed a tiger on his third day in India.

Lady Abell was not born in India; her father was never in India, but her family was very close and she knew her uncles well.

one may think that the Indian Army is a more continuing structure than the Indian Civil Services; the Royal Army was very hard to control in India.

when Abell was a subdivitional officer in [Dalhousie?] in his second or third year of service, people would come in asking for someone to go out and kill a panther or leopard that was killing livestock or a bear destroying crops.

one night, Abell went with an orderly to be up at dawn in attempt to kill a bear that was destroying the maize crop and passed a house at the edge of a village and found a man teaching his young son the drills of the army to prepare him for the army.

there were generations of British officers who knew how to treat the Indians, especially the Gorkhas; there was great communications and loyalty between the British and the Gorkhas.

there were great military types in the Punjab; they were more than happy to serve; the sick ones were sometimes corrupted and eventually were made into revolutionary armies by the Japanese.

one must be aware that it is difficult to expect all the troops of an alien army would, if they were caught, be prepared to be left in a cage instead of being granted freedom to fight against their own army.

Abell once went to the Andaman Islands; the servant given to him was once a murderer who was shipped to the island and became the governor’s bearer.

when the Japanese overtook the island, he became the general’s bearer; now, he is the high commissioner’s bearer.

Abell’s father wanted him to become a lawyer, but Abell was not very sure.

the influence for Abell to go to India was an Indian Civil Service member that had come to persuade a few men to go into the Indian Civil Service.

at the time, the policy of His Majesty’s government was to withdraw from India, and anyone’s career there could be cut short somewhere in the middle.

they were scared because it was hard to recruit troops and if they recruited unsatisfactory troops, it would do more harm than good.

Abell was very interested in going to India because he was very uninterested in going to the bar and was very prepared to accept the policy to get out of India when they could.

Abell was the first civil servant to go home to get married because, at the end of his time in Oxford, he was engaged and his fiancée was still at Oxford.

This was a hard struggle for the men because they were not allowed to marry first and they would be all on their own; it was a great test.

_A Young Man’s Country_ by Smith; Smith had been to Bengal and was stuck in a place “where the waters of the Ganges River was all around him” and he could not get out of his garden without getting into a boat.

Unlike the people in the Punjab, Smith wanted to get out of Bengal because he thought it was terrible and everyone was against him.

Bengal had too much population for its resources; the people were being educated, but there were no jobs for them; it was a very difficult environment for a young man to endure.

Abell had never been out to India before, but it was very familiar because of relations in the
country; in those days, one also had Indian friends
while at Oxford, Abell met a [Ramman?] who would eventually go out with Abell to India
and was posted to the same province
being athletic helped one adjust and become accepted; Abell played hockey and cricket
when you went to headquarters, you could not play cricket at all; there was practically no
cricket at all, except for in a few cities
games like hockey, football and cricket were helpful with a career in India because there
were no racial feelings towards the game
people attracted to India had to be intelligent and have a good degree because the
competition to get in was so fierce
Abell believes that some marks from the interviewing process stood for the appearance of
physical vitality to survive in India; half the year was spent in extremely hot weather
if you weren’t physically fit, your judgment seemed to suffer; you were encouraged to go
shooting and riding or play cricket or tennis, normally on Saturday afternoon or on
Sundays
as Abell came out of India after Independence, he was flying out and there was a question
of customs; a Muslim recognized Abell from his days of playing cricket
the first trip out was considered to be part of British life; the journey out had its rocky
moments though, especially for the Abells, who were on their honeymoon
when they went out, they knew what they were facing; they wanted to go anyways; Lady
Abell was the wife of Sir Abell and the sister to all the other ICS officers on the way over
it is strange that there were only 500 white members, yet you would only find a few in your
own province; you never really saw the others unless you had to go to Delhi to go to
headquarters
there was some excitement and anticipation about going out to India; they were really
looking forward to it
Abell felt sure he would have the same type of life in his early years in India that he would
enjoy; the only question of a married man was “What will happen if I lose my job?”, which
was inevitable
there was a definite sense of responsibility and no question of being bored or under
worked; there was always something to be done
Abell spent nineteen years in India and would always have his leave cut short
after your first degree and got into the Indian Civil Service, there was a year at either
Oxford or Cambridge to do Indian languages, laws, history, phonetics, etc.
compared with the strains of obtaining a degree, people would get bored
they were also taught to ride if you were unfamiliar with it
on the whole, preparations were very well done, though the language was normally taught
by an Englishman; sometimes the pronunciations would be a little off and peculiar
the other services did not have such preparations; everyone has further examinations when
they get out; the police had their training in India; the last years of university must have had
some influence on the work of the engineers
one of the reasons why the ICS officers had to be trained in England was because of the
question of the Indian members of the service; it was thought very important that the Indian
members come to England for a year after they pass their exam
because of this year in England, many of the Indian members seemed to feel cut-off from
their communities because they were members of the ruling powers; they would be the best
Indian friends because they worked together and went to school together and all had the
same problems

one of the chief social problems was that, no matter how much you wanted to be
everyone’s friend, you would almost inevitably be accused of having favorites; it would be
assumed that the Indian friends could get their sons and daughters into government jobs
because they knew you

it was a tendency for people to give close friends government jobs, more so in a smaller
territory than a larger one

there was always a special relationship with the local large landowners as well because you
wanted and needed their cooperation to avoid them working against the government

you couldn’t afford to be great friends with certain people in your district office, like the
lawyers

the real point was that you could not afford to be seen to have too close of friends, except
for a few who were from the more richer elements; it was better to stick with the officials
and to be as impartial as possible

you were not really told about these sorts of things while at Oxford, they left that for you to
learn from your first district commissioner

they liked for you to have Indian friends, but if a rich Indian made a large presence in your
company, he may be doing it for his own sake; you will probably be warned about him
taking you out for shooting and such, but he will think you are “in his pocket” and this will
prevent you from doing your job properly

it made a large difference if people began to distrust you; you couldn’t produce the results
you wanted without being trusted

if you were seen as impartial, they would give enormous support and peace in the district

the Punjab was a young province that had been plagued by wars for hundreds of years
before the British arrived; people still remembered what it was like to not have security

one of the things a young official had to do was to ensure the maps and ownership records
were up kept; it was essential that the people feel safe while tending their land and not have
to bribe people

the average value of land must have increased by 500 to 1000 times during the English rule
because irrigation was produced and security of knowing that, if it was your land, no one
was going to push you off of it

they arrived at Bombay then went up to a party with Susan’s uncle; they then went to
headquarters in the province and started off

at that time, Abell was sent as an assistant commissioner to a district

they had an old-fashioned district commissioner that was very keen on shooting and riding;
he kept the district “under his hand” and the people loved him because he was that, if he
was rude to you, he would be rude to the next person

you were then forced to really learn the land, especially when being thrown into a case and
are unable to understand anything; after a while, you would eventually figure out what the
case was about

you were allowed only the simplest cases; you had a reader, but you wanted to ensure he
was being honest because there was always the possibility that he had been given a “tip”
ahead of time
it was very hard work; you had cases to learn, exams to take, learn how to conduct the land surveys and up keeping records; you also dealt with revenue collections that were based on the crops

it was a strenuous time, but it was also fun

Lady Abell remembers being taken into the local hospitals and schools by the wife of the district commissioner; most of the commissioner wives felt it was her responsibility to be involved and concerned with the other British

they would generally tour together, mostly because it was just the two of you and you did not have to worry about the children

Lady Abell’s cousin came out to recover from her mental health illnesses for six months; when on tour, they would both go out on tour with Sir Abell; they would joke that he was a wealthy land owner because he had two wives

end of side A

Tape 865, Side B
Abells (Part 3 of 3) (865.1)

Sir George was reminded the other day of the relationship between the people of Tibet and the people of India

when Sir George was secretary, the Tibetan government sent a delegation, which was considered a conventional thing to do, to each viceroy once to pay their respects and a continuance of good relations between them and India

The Tibetans came to Delhi with their practices; their conventional clothes included a brown “homburg” hat with white trousers and a long black coat; their hair is kept long, wrapped around their heads and kept beneath their hats; the hats are also worn inside

eight Tibetans came to see the viceroy, who accepted them because it was traditional; they were going to present a silver teapot; they all had white shawls over their hands, which hide the silver teapot that one of them was carrying

after getting halfway across the room, the Tibetan dropped the teapot on the marble floor; they did not say a word but stopped, and the one carrying the teapot picks up the teapot and they continue on

the presentation would be followed by a luncheon, hosted by the viceroy

Sir George was present and was seated by one of the senior members of the Tibetan government; the problem was, Sir George could not speak the language; the man sitting next to him then turns, takes of the hat and asked him something in English

de Caro and Jordan then relive a story about showing an American film over and over to a group of Tibetans

while living in the viceroy’s compound because you were cut-off from the world

work was so heavy that you did not really have time to hear what people were saying about what was going on; one was not in touch with friends on the outside

no one really gave reporters anything that they came for, but you did listen to them; everything was silent and anonymous

there was a danger of leaking information using Indian staffs because they had to separate and decide where future alliances and allegiances were; one British officer brought his own, all-British staff; Indians did prove to be unreliable in the later stages however

this was an example of the tragedy of Indian education; you had highly intelligent Indian
boys and some girls educated all the way up to a first class degree; if they did not have influence or luck, they could not find a job

069 Sir George had a very gifted Indian under him that was a Hindu; they were forced to transfer him to another department because he could not be trusted with the work

075 if the regime continues, Indians are extremely loyal; when you began to leave, however, they acted otherwise because they would not survive in the upcoming organization

078 Sir George did have some Anglo-Indian staff; there were many Anglo-Indian officials, especially in the railways and telegraph systems; there were wonderful schools for Anglo-Indians as well, which gave them an advantage

081 Anglo-Indians’ position once Independence came was difficult because they were not servants of the English government, not members of British service but of Indian services when Independence came, they became servants of the new government; no one wanted them because they all wanted jobs for all of their Hindu or Mohammad friends most of the British in administrative positions in India opted to retire and take pensions; some stayed on and were placed into specialist jobs, like planning for the future; some engineers stayed; many army officers stayed

101 there was sudden desertion, except for those among key jobs, like Sir George’s

102 everything sorted itself out in time

104 the worst features of Partition was the attempts by the minorities to move over; there were massive slaughters of refugees

110 those in the Punjab were against Partition because they knew of the trouble that it would cause; they knew the country would be torn apart

114 the Sikhs had wonderful farms because of the irrigation and farming techniques; they would eventually move out of the area due to fear; they lost more because they had the most and best land

124 it is funny that a supposedly good political solution could cause half a million deaths

128 there were fifty-two languages found on India radio broadcasts

134 in order to hold together a country, you must be formidable at times because, if not, the country will fall apart into fragments

139 the people of the Punjab felt like they were their own people; they were a very militant people;

142 they had a great interest in the Indian army, but those that joined the Indian army came from the bare hillsides where no jobs were to be done at home

155 there were no European/British killed during all the massacres that were going on; it wasn’t anti-European

163 everyone was trying to offer solutions to the problem “How do you influence the world in the direction of peace without occupying their country?”

166 the British were lead into India by commercial and accidental reasons

173 the Russians were always concerned with the British lives in India because they were always threatening Afghanistan; Russians were always considered aggressive attackers but very defensive rulers

176 in England, too many people fear Russia investing in African countries; maybe they would lose money by doing so

180 end of Abell interview
Tape 865, Side B cont’d
Stubbses (Part 1 of 5) (865.3)

181 beginning of interview

186 Stubbs really went out to India because he did not see anything he really wanted to do in England; he could have joined a law firm or live the country life in India with riding and shooting.

192 Stubbs did not know very much about India, even though his father was there; he never really saw his father.

194 Stubbs never thought he would get into the service, nor did his father think he would.

196 His father was I.C.S.; in his day, most of the men in the service had to have a first-class honors degree to be accepted.

201 By the time Stubbs applied, it was not nearly hard to get in because of the circumstances going on, like the war and such; they were not as academic, except for some.

205 One of Stubbs’s friends was a double-first at Oxford.

207 Stubbs was born in England and came back right before the First World War at about age six, which was the general time to come back.

211 The theory was that English children could not live on in India because they would contract diseases and such; later on in the war, when they had to stay, they were perfectly alright.

216 The children did get extremely spoiled by the Indian servants; their children were required to say “Please” and “Thank you” to the servants to keep them from becoming spoiled; the problem was that there were so many Indian servants that would wait on the children.

224 Stubbs did not really remember his childhood in India; when he went back, some memories did come back to him and the language seemed to be easier to master.

226 The same is true with his sons; they used to fluently speak Hindustani but forgot it by the time they reached England on the boat; they remember odd things; they were seven and five.

234 Stubbs thought he would give it a try at university because he really did not think he would get in; while in university, he was not really sure what he wanted to do.

237 If he would have failed the I.C.S. exam, he would have gone into the colonial service; it was the kind of job that he wanted to do.

244 Most people, including his father, thought that the job would hold out during Stubbs’s term but it did not; most of the people going out were in their early twenties and not really thinking about such things.

260 Hearing different accounts of India did not really shape Stubbs’s idea or perception of India; he did read Indian history prior to going out.

265 Stubbs was fortunate when he went out because the Indians, having a strong sense of tradition, seemed to almost be expecting him because of his father once being there; any mistake he may have made while being a junior officer would be covered up for him by the Indians.

273 Stubbs felt that, having a highly respected father there before him, the Indians felt that he would be the same as his father; it was very much a family business.

279 An Indian once told Stubbs that he could not believe how you Stubbs was, although he had only been out there a short time; the Indian could not believe he had the position he did while being so young and insisted Stubbs was the elder Stubbs.

285 After the exam, there was a year at Oxford for preparation; you studied the language and Indian law.
288 Stubbs went out in 1930; Mrs. Stubbs went out when she was twenty-one and was married in November of 1936
294 they knew each other before because of their parents; he came home for six weeks, got married and prepared to take her back to India; in a fortnight, he spent six weeks’ worth of salary
305 Stubbs never asked for any advice from anyone before going out to India; parents told him what type of clothes to bring, which he bought in England
310 the funny thing was, he brought almost everything wrong; he brought an expensive topi only to find out that no one wore them and he threw it over board
323 Stubbs’s parents were still in India when he went out; they were there for three years with him, which was very nice
326 he was stationed in the division where his father was divisional commissioner; Stubbs did not like that idea at the time because he did not think it was a good idea to go where his father was a senior officer
330 Stubbs’s father refused to have anything to do with him while he was out there; it was the deputy commissioner’s job to look after the junior officers
333 he was able to spend holidays in the hills with his family, which he enjoyed; they would go out shooting during Christmas
338 Stubbs was in the same place as Philip Mason; they shared a bungalow; Stubbs would eventually succeed him
344 it was great fun being in charge; they would play polo and other sports, go to clubs; there were dances
350 you worked very hard, but you also played very hard
352 when the weather was hot, they would go and hunt wild boar with spears
353 on the weekends, it was odd for someone to go to bed at all; there was an occasional trip to the hills or to the palace of a close friend of the family
397 while staying there on the way out to be married, an elephant came up to the veranda of the guest palace, lay down before them and handed them flowers
407 the last thing Stubbs did in India was to visit his Muslim ruler friend, who was having trouble because he was surrounded by Hindus; there was an attempt by one of the rulers in Pakistan to have his Muslim servants revolt so he would go and join Pakistan; he had the Indian army come in to suppress his own servants
426 when Stubbs arrived, there was a Sikh battalion occupying the palace; the friend wanted Stubbs to go work for him and be his prime minister; Stubbs said he would like to do it in a way, but he was very unpopular with the Congress Ministry and told the friend he needed someone that got along with the Hindus
440 Stubbs suggested his deputy collector; the deputy collector would not take the job either
448 Stubbs was saddened because he felt that some of his friends had been greatly let down
460 the only person Stubbs still hears from is a young gunner who ended up commander and chief of the Indian army; his father and mother were both politicians; the brothers were brought up in England and attended public schools; his brother became president of the Cambridge Union, which was interesting because both boys ended up at the top
494 the brother that was in the army would go to the other brother’s political meetings and heckle him; the political brother would then go to the army brother’s meetings and heckle him
you have no expectations when you go out to India, especially because you are only twenty-one or twenty-two; when he was out in India, it was a complete different life; you could not join the life you had in England with the life you had in India while in England you had one life, while in India you had a different life; even though you kept in touch with people back in England, they remained to separate areas of one's life.

Stubbs does not know if anyone else felt the same way he did he was home in both places, but in different ways; when returning from leave in England, Stubbs would be excited to back “home” and to get back to work; after two or three years in India, he would long to go home.