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Tape 866 Finding Aid

INTERVIEWEE NAMES:
Sir George and Lady Abell  4700.0590   Tape 866.1   (Tape 2 of 2)
Mr. John Stubbs and Mrs. Kay Stubbs  4700.0591   Tape 866.2   (Tape 2 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
Stubbses:  4/9/1978

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 10 minutes

OTHER MATERIALS: None

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Tape 866, Side A
Abells (Part 2 of 3) (866.1)
002 they started with odd jobs in two different headquarters; they would kindly send them to a hill station in the summer because a young wife was not supposed to be in the harsh summer climate below
006 they then went to subdivision, which is where you were on your own
007 they lived in an enormously old house, which seemed to date back to the mutiny; the curtains were about twenty feet tall; they spent all the money they had putting carpet in and preparing it for living; it only had a tub
012 after living there for five weeks, they were told to move somewhere hundreds of miles away in a week
013 they then went to “a very old-fashioned district” on the west side, not very far from Prussia; it was fascinating because the people there were looking out for themselves and the laws they followed were their own
017 their legal court was a council of elected elders of the tribe; if it was civil trial, they would probably decide the whole thing; if it was a land dispute, water dispute, bride/groom issues,
or murder, the electors would make up their own minds about the case and then send it to
the deputy commissioner; the commissioner or high official would then decide on the
punishment

it was almost unheard of for anyone to lie to the local courts; they would tell any lie in the
book to a British magistrate; they would almost confess straight away in the local courts
because they would not lie to their own people

Sir George remembers being with one of the chiefs; a man came up, covered in blood and
confessed to murdering his wife and wanted them to take him away; he completely ignored
Sir George

the assistant commissioner was the commander of the local border police; it consisted of
young local men that needed money to keep them on the straight and narrow; they were
paid equivalent to two or three pounds a month

there were some areas where the populations were very small and very little occurred; there
would be some months that the border patrol would not be needed at all

if an inspecting officer was coming, they had to provide some evidence of activity; they
would get their friends and lock them up; if the inspection took a while, they would admit
to being locked up to pass inspection and they were ready to go home

the district was about 300 miles long and 50 miles across; across was considered from the
Indus River and the mountain frontier shared with Balochistan; there were various tribes
land varied from very irrigated land to land that was only useful when the rains came to
bare hills with almost nothing to live on

the Balochi people would either live in caves or out in the open; their main concern was
trying to plan possible raids on different tribes

there was a regular police force in the plains; Indian Police force consisted of English and
Indian officers like the I.C.S. and under them were provincial officers that were all Indians
in many places, if the police officers were good, the police were splendid; if the officers
were “slack”, there was a danger of corruption

everyone spent their lives in search of uncovering corruption to discourage people from
taking bribes; when a country is really poor, some degree of corruption is unavoidable
in a sense, the purpose of inspections was to frighten them

a good part of India is poor; there aren’t any real industrial towns; communications were
bare minimum; if the population was very poor and sparse in a certain area, the government
would not spend a great deal of money on it

the government had made many improvements in irrigation, which was gradually
increasing wealth for farmers and those in agriculture

education provided with living somewhere near the “centers of population”; if you were
not, you received a primary education that was not considered to be of the highest quality
property is the perennial problem; there is also a large gap between the fairly wealthy and
the extremely poor

the main struggle was to develop a solid agricultural system because everything depended
on it; there was no other way to make money in some districts except through agriculture or
the military

great efforts were made to have credit available; there was an attempt to introduce
cooperative banks into the smaller towns and villages to provide an alternative to the
money lenders

in Sir George’s district, there was a successful program called “The Consolidation of
Land”; it was an attempt to get peasants to exchange land to allow a family, whose land had
been divided, to consolidate all their land holdings to one area to produce more revenue; land in small plots was useless, but consolidating increased value
the only way the program would work was to get the trust of the local people; the people learned how to trust the officials, who were poorly paid
one had to be totally honest throughout the process because no one will trust someone else who is in it for a profit
Sir George was once a settlement officer; his job was to do a complete reexamination of all revenue records in the whole district; every acre and tenant/owner was recorded, and a new record was made
if there were any changes in the record, it had to be discussed
in the process, you would also assess the land revenue or taxes paid to the government; the tax had stand for about forty years after settlement
it was very interesting work and spent almost all your time in different villages
most districts in Sir George’s province were mostly flat plains; the difference came from canal-irrigated land and un-irrigated land that depended on rain; if you did not have irrigation and there was poor rainfall, you were poor by definition
while in the Punjab, which was only about sixteen years, there was a visible improvement in the quality of good land; where there were good water sources, plenty of good seeds and hard workers, there was a good possibility of a decent living and improved each year
you could walk or ride from one village to another; the villages were homogeneous
one would get know which tribes were industrious and which were idle; the differences and boundaries were visible when riding
it was an interesting life but you would become a bit of an agricultural expert
ordinary British would learn how to try criminal cases, settle revenue disputes and land issues, how to ensure that law and order prevailed in the district
you did not see much of the urban population; district headquarters would sometimes be small
when arriving in a large city like Delhi, you were bound to feel that the administration was concentrating all on agriculture and sent little resources to other areas that also deserved attention
health care was improved in urban areas; because of the many wars, the money was not available for such things as welfare
Americans could never understand how the British could be in charge of a country in such poverty; after being there a while, the Americans would realize that it was a never ending battle and unsolvable problem; all you could do was to improve the things you’ve come across
although the money was increasing quickly, it wasn’t there to improve all things; India is not very different today than when the British were there because money is still a problem
the number of children in a family had also grown because of improvements in such things as health care; Sir George would even go around and preach about birth control in the villages, which made the Indians think he had gone mad
there was such a concentration on agriculture because the population came from agriculture; some Indians argue the British should have concentrated more on industry
education was good, but was only available to a limited number of children; in the villages, there would likely be a Hindu widow teaching, which would not be as good
the health system also seemed to be very well; there were some of the best surgeons
two of their children were born in England
there was a little village on the top of the mountains in the area behind the Indus; when Lady Abell was at the deputy commissioner’s house there, she was told she had malaria it was an awful journey trying to get her back down; they came down by car but the rains had just started; it was dangerous because of the threats of being stuck because of the flowing rivers however, it was not as dangerous as traveling by French railways she delivered a baby three weeks later
India has English cemeteries scattered throughout the country; when one became ill during the mutiny, they had to be carried hundreds of miles on a stretcher, and usually died before arrival now, the conditions and medications have kept the British alive very well in very unhealthy surroundings; malaria was always a serious threat people would also wear more sensible clothes they would wear topees, but people do not wear them anymore; Lady Abell never really wore one the topees looked ridiculous, but were very light and excellent for riding they never had the convenience of modern sanitation until they were stationed in Delhi; there was always a sweeper who took care of those types of jobs for a warm bath, they would heat the water outside and then carry it in and pour it into the tub there were a good number of servants and they were very good; they had double the number of servants in Delhi because Sir George was the secretary to the viceroy the servants were good, but tended to be very good if you were in the Indian Civil Service because you were fairly permanent; the servants tended to stay with you one fellow that came out with the Abells was immediately met by his father’s old personal servant when they reached land; the servant had somehow found out he was coming; they had an extraordinary relationship some of the servants were deeply devoted; they were very good with the children it was a privileged life, with amazing responsibilities; Sir George would not have missed the opportunity for the world it was tempting to believe the servants could not get along without you; the whole of his generation was committed to the fact that things would not be better in their own districts, which was very true most of the population is poor and does not have that much invested in independence the Indian members of the ICS has done a wonderful job since the British have left; this was the major difference between India and the other colonies they had been to; the Indian service members had been properly trained when they first came home, a lot of people from Pakistan and so on would come and stay with them or visit them; it is growing less and less the prime minister of the Punjab when Independence came insisted on making the executers of his will two British people; this made an awful model of them because they would inherit his money then have to distribute it to his relations, which was a nightmare they would sometimes be asked to be the guardians of some of the children from school it was a lovely relationship because they end up with so many friends and offers to go back Sir George has never wanted to go back because of his role in the diminishment of power and his role in Partition; he was once accused of being against the Hindus and for the Mohammads
if you were involved in those types of things, you would always feel a need to prove your impartiality by staying in both places for the same amount of time. As the years pass, there is not a feeling of a great deal of shame; there would be no other way for such rapid progress unless another country had large amounts of wealth to poor into India. It is hard to put to good use such a large sum of money; any way you split it, there would always be about 500 million people desiring a piece of the share. Private industry seemed to bring the most money to India, but also seemed to be taking great profits out; an example would be the amounts of money the British invested in Calcutta, mainly for industrial development but many people depended on that money every month. In a country of that size, there is a large need for a large army, whether it is dependent or under foreign rule; this is a large expense. The educational people and those in the medical profession also seemed to be very idealistic; they had huge opportunities and the materials to work with seemed to be endless. If you were a good surgeon, you would work yourself to death because you could not keep your hands off the dozens of different illnesses. Those in the irrigation department could also see the large number of benefits. Job satisfaction was tremendous; you were paid well, but there were huge responsibilities. The police knew that while at times it was hard to maintain peace, the security of millions depended on them; if the communal differences grew too much, it was very difficult to prevent bloodshed; they spent their lives in attempts to stop and prevent those times; they would also pray that the time they could not stop it was the time they had to leave and the British were ready to go. The personal ambassador of the American president was sent out to India during the war to observe the political problems; Abell was sent around with him when he arrived in Abell’s providence. Like every newcomer, he felt the poverty was a disgrace to the administration. Abell let him choose a village and go to talk to the people; they collected about half the village; they did not want to have anything to do with the ambassador in the beginning because of the current land dispute; they wanted to know if Sir George could provide a solution. Sir George then asked if they knew there was a war going on, who was it with; he then asked which side America was on: there was a pause, looked at the head man, and said “Who am I to say with whom or against whom my king should fight?” The head man thought that was the safest thing to say; Sir George thought it was a good joke, but the ambassador did not seem to enjoy it as much. The American effort on the Burma side was tremendous and were well known; the northern villages were far removed from the war and, because they did not think they would be invaded, cared very little about the war. It is difficult to assess the state of affairs in a country as large as India. On the whole, concerning the relations with the British people, relations have been very well; many of those that go back out say they were greeted with warm reception. You tended to be secluded from the rest of the people; there would always be a large area reserved for official houses; there were reasonably comfortable bungalows; there was no running water however. There was electricity in most of the districts, which made a considerable difference; when
they first arrived there was a thing called a [punker?], which was a fan with a rope attached, which was pulled by people outside the room in order to have some sort of draft.

headquarters in each district were not that bad, but you spent a lot of time away from headquarters in either a tent or inspection bungalows; inspection bungalows were small places put up all around the district for the officials to go around and conduct business.

inspection bungalows were more cost efficient than the tents; they were also more fun.

children usually went back to Britain around age seven; they could not survive the heat.

with the children going back, wives had to shuttle back and forth.

they kept one child out until he was about eight and the other one was six.

Lady Abell was not affected too much by the hot weather, but she did take the children at any opportunity to the hill stations when they were younger.

normally May, June and July in the Punjab were the most unpleasant; the rains would then come and by September it was nice again.

sending the children off was a terrible hardship and a great expense; European children just did not do well in the climate; education was another difficult area.

the children tended to get very pale and become ill because the many opportunities for disease.

after the war and near the end, air conditioning was introduced, mainly to the vice regales.

you went to India for the unsettled life: moving from station to station; there were compensations, like moving to a better district or more responsibilities.

the Abell’s were lucky because the winters in his district were very similar to those in like Switzerland and very enjoyable; you would have blankets on your bed, a fire in the fireplace; it was very tolerable for six months and intolerable for the other six.

Sir George went the headquarters in the Provincial Government; he then became the governor’s secretary; then came Delhi, where he was the number two man under the viceroy; he would later become number one under viceroy when Independence came.

life was very political, with endless negotiations with different peoples; the goal was to prevent splitting India.

a united India could run itself with great efficiency.

end of Side A.

Tape 866, Side B
Stubbses (Part 2 of 5) (866.2)

001 you never got bored; you would always feel you were doing something worth-while.

003 Mr. and Mrs. Stubbs were the only Europeans for miles; in those days, they were the only two people that would speak English to one another; they were perfectly happy and absorbed in the life.

008 the life was very healthy because you were always active; there was a lot of riding; Stubbs used to do all of his work on horseback.

011 lifestyle would not suit everyone; they both enjoyed it and were sufficient in themselves and did not require other people.

017 it is very important, especially if going according to Kipling; he said that, for India, life in an Indian station is either made of marriage or breaks them.

020 this was true; they were normally separated for up to six months a year, which seemed to cause problems and there was no alternative.

026 Stubbs is sure there were some British that could not take to India; in his service, most of his friends were the same and equally keen.

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many of the British army officers and wives had a terrible time; the wives had little to do in those situations and were only there for a short time; this goes with the fact that a British soldier seemed to have a horrible time because there was nothing for him to do.

The amazing thing is that the discipline rarely allowed them to break out; when it did happen, the Indians would take every political advantage they could, for something would sometimes happen concerning the soldiers and the Indians.

If you enjoyed outdoor life, India attracted you; India appealed to the gentleman that liked to have a “state of his own”; most of them never had the opportunity of having a country-state of their own; the tradition was based on the English squire’s desire to look after their tenants.

Inspiration for the British public schools was based on the idea of having responsibilities that accompany special privileges.

The English gentleman with the large country estates looked after his tenants; this spirit was also held by those that went out as district officers or colonial services in India.

They were expected to take over their own districts and run them with this ideology; they were not expected to ask what to do or what not to do; they were expected to take responsibility and look after the people.

They were expected to deal with every situation that came along, whether they were trained for it or not; everything that occurred in your district was your responsibility.

The government respected that outlook; if Stubbs disagreed with what the government said should be done in the district, he would get up and speak up.

You were expected to run the state to the best of your abilities yourself; you should not be continually asking for advice.

This ideology appealed to the men that were brought up with those ideas; people of that type, however, did not always come out to India.

The idea of the British officers serving in India were from Indian families was very much untrue; they were not all public schools either.

Everyone seemed to adopt the same standards.

There were also a lot of Indians, who were also very good and also adopted the same standards.

*Under Two Flags* is a book written by an Indian officer that served under Stubbs that gives a great description of the times when Stubbs was a district officer.

The author served the British government in the ICS, and then later under the Indian government.

The theme was that the tone and standards set by the Indian Civil Service was almost too high for the country.

It is a fair picture from a nationalist Indian of the British civil services.

The service made the job feel worthwhile; you were at anyone’s beck and call; you were at the disposal of all those having a problem or in trouble; they came from any sort of thing, from lawsuits to marriage issues to illness.

It was very hard because you were expected to be someone’s mother and father; you tried to do the best you could.

They were in eleven districts in seventeen years, all of which were in the same province; Stubbs never went into the secretarial aspect of the service; he was always a district officer when you started, you began under a district officer; the first things Stubbs was told was to learn the language.

He had a court and was third class magistrate; he was given unimportant cases and court...
staff that were not allowed to use English

133 Stubbs then went on tour with his district magistrate and learned from him talking to the people and inspecting officers; Stubbs would go and do survey work with the village accountants

137 the whole Indian administration was based on the land; every inch of India had been surveyed and mapped; everyone’s holdings were recorded

142 the primary duty was to ensure these records were up-kept, or you would continue to have disputes

144 young officers had to learn everything they could about the land records because they went through the whole district

149 the reason why the land records had to be maintained was because that every dispute came down to a dispute over land

151 you would learn the language then go out into the field and collect data from the villages around you; you would then get out a map and ask who owns which field and they would tell you who the owner was; this was how you checked to ensure everything was properly recorded

154 going out also allowed you to see which crops were being planted and that those records were also up-to-date

156 you would then go and inspect the police stations and such; you inspected the local revenue official and their offices

160 you would hear cases and then go around and hear disputes; you would properly inspect the area health facilities, checking for any epidemics and dealing with accordingly

163 you had to look into the register of bad characters

167 any local disaster required for you to go out and arrange for relief, especially in the terms of crop disasters

178 there had to be some basis for the relief; if left to the locals, it was a question of who could bribe who

181 Stubbs would have two horses, going out and surveying ten miles of damage on one horse and then change horses and do another ten miles

184 when dealing with crop damages, one had to survey the damage

186 when there was a plague, your duty was to get everyone vaccinated and clean up villages; you then had to chase the district medical officer down and ensure he was out there doing something about it

190 every time there was a festival, you had to ensure the current rules were maintained to prevent riots

197 a common problem was having the Hindus playing religious music while the Muslims were praying; someone would throw a brick or yell something at the temples

202 as the political situation changes, the conflicts got worse; no political situations meant there was nothing worthwhile to capitalize on

Remainder is inaudible as sound gradually fades out due to machine malfunction