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Tape 876 Finding Aid

INTERVIEWEE NAMES:
Major Christopher York 4700.0596 Tape 876.1 (Tape 3 of 3)
Sir Charles Dalton and Lady Daphne Dalton 4700.0597 Tape 876.2 (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:
York: 4/26/1978
Daltons: 4/27/1978

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 35 minutes
York: 33 minutes
Daltons: 62 minutes

OTHER MATERIALS: None

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Tape 876, Side A
York (Part 3 of 3) (876.1)
006 pig sticking was a fairly luxurious event because there were not that many pigs available in the area; they only killed one
009 they would stop every day for lunch where there were two marquees erected; there was a six course lunch, with a different type of curry every day for ten days
013 they would either go riding, pig sticking or shooting
014 they would then move to the guest houses, which were located above a cave
017 York brings out some of his photographs
027 below the guest houses was a large reservoir, where they would frequently shoot for a whole day
030 the rest house was only big enough for the resident and his family; the guests and the staff each had a tent with a bathroom added on
they shot about 160 ducks on the lake; the cave was fantastic and beautiful
all of the caves were in the Nizam’s territory
the train returned the same way it came; this was how the resident lived
the Nizam trusted a man called Keys who was a very good resident; the Nizam was known
to be a very mean man
the palace was built on deep cellars, which were filled with gold and precious jewels; it was
rumored that each room in the cellar was filled with a different stone
it was standard practice for officers to borrow money from a money lender; York’s
corporal left India owing more than his total income to the bank
an example would be when one wanted to buy a new polo pony; the trouble came with
repaying
the local banker was the only rich man in the community, apart from the shop keepers who
were always well off
York was regarded as being holy because of a mole that was in the exact place of the
highest caste Hindu’s mark; they would do for York what they would not do for others
York found out only because someone told him
the cavalry never seemed to be outdated; everyone had a cavalry
the thought never crossed their minds, especially in India; in India, a cavalry was necessary
it was when they returned home that they began to realize that tanks were on their way
in 1939, the Indian cavalry was still very strong; York assumes they were eventually
introduced to machines and such
horses are still needed in India because they are so much more useful than vehicles in some
circumstances
seniority is a very big deal in India; everything had to be done exactly right
every caste thinks those below them are unworthy of their attention; the “untouchables” are
only kept for certain jobs and make certain things
the British tried not to change things until they had persuaded the Indians that it was a good
ing thing to change; the British never tried to force the Indians too fast
there was a long period in which the widows were allowed to be killed after their husband’s
death; the British did eventually have to put this practice down by force
the British never interfered with religious practices; the British also never seriously
interfered with their inability to be honest
no Hindu is ever honest; in India, you never do anything that is dishonest to your family but
anyone else’s family is “fair game” (including the British government or British army)
British officers would eventually get out of debt, York assumes, but he is not really sure;
York never got heavily in debt
the colonel, the story goes, owed much more than his annual income; the thing was to go
home and take out a loan to pay the regimental banker because of the lower interest
you would not have a lot of British contacts outside of the army in some areas; other
stations, like Delhi, would have opportunities to meet politicians and such
there was a large British civil force in India in those days, as well as a large business
community
if stationed in Bombay, you would meet an enormous number of business people; if
stationed at Calcutta, you would meet both the civil service and the business community
York’s regiment did move up towards Delhi, but York had come home by that time; York
missed the political and civil side
there was a district officer for every part of India who was English; he was the Indian Civil Service.

there was the Forestry Service, who lived in the various rural districts; one would meet them from time to time, but probably never get to know them.

mess life in India varied greatly from that in England; in India, you would have many friends and, if you were not busy on duty or sport, you would have lunch or dinner with someone who may be ten to fifteen miles away.

York would be able to get off every weekend while he was courting and stay with her parents; they would go and have a large meal and dance all night.

in some places in India there would be no night life, but in other places there was.

where York was stationed, there was not very many people to visit with because they did not know anyone and no one wanted to know them.

where ever the army was, there would always be an officer’s club; there would probably be a men’s club as well.

the Sargent’s Mess was always a very social place; the wife would be promoted as well when her husband was promoted to sergeant; she would not talk to the private’s wives any longer, unless it was in a patronizing way.

York tried to learn Hindustani, but he was not very good at it; he had a teacher who would come in the evenings, but he was always too tired from playing polo or something.

all York can remember is the Hindustani phrase to get a bath ready.

there was very little contact with Indian troops, except on maneuvers; what they did see of them, however, was very impressive.

the Indian soldiers were always a high class.

York was never on a maneuver above brigade level because they were detached in the south; the nearest large formation was in Bangalore.

you got a tropical kit before you left for India from the regimental tailor; the regimental tailor copied what the London tailor had made for about one-tenth the price.

you were given a list, to which the regimental tailor added to before he gave it to you.

there would be four pairs of regimental britches thick and four pairs thin, two pairs of field boots, one pair of polo boots or long boots, one pair of camp boots (ordinary lace-up boots), Wellingtons (both formal and casual).

they never really wore full dress; the only time York wore full dress was when he returned home and was to be presented to the monarch; it was his father’s full dress.

York’s father was in the same regiment as York, as well as York’s son; York’s son was there for seven years and his father was there for about same.

at one time, this was very common in Britain; York is not sure how much longer this will be going on because the squires are being forced out of business by taxation.

they had bought the topees in a second-class hill station; they always wore them.

there were two sorts of topees: a dress topi and a working one; the working one was thick, whereas the dress one was more like a helmet.

York returned because of boils and stomach ailments; he could not return because they could not figure out the cause for the trouble.

sickness was a problem in India.

India suited some people, while others “took to drink”.

York does not really know if it took a certain personality type to succeed in India because he only came in contact with those in the military; the soldiers that became generals were...
not of any particular type

York was only in India for two years; his circle was very limited
every officer commissioned in the British army was expected to serve some time in India,
with the exception of household cavalry (Royal Horse Guards and Life Guards)
the strength of the regiment was generally abroad because there was not enough men to go
around; they kept more soldiers abroad because a war at home was less likely to occur
recruits would be brought in and trained; then the recruits would go out and assist a
regiment abroad

until it was time for one to go abroad, the English posted ones were always short of men
while the foreign ones were kept at war strength
every regiment had a sister regiment at home who sent them recruits; this was done only by
the cavalry because the infantry had more than one battalion in the regiment
York refers de Caro and Jordan to someone else who would have information; they then
discuss the different people York knew/did not know
what you had at home was always working fairly hard because half was on leave while the
other half was on permanent duty

end of York interview

Tape 876, Side A cont’d
Daltons (Part 1 of 5) (876.2)

beginning of Dalton interview
they were once invited on a crocodile shoot; they did not get to shoot one however; they
look at pictures of the area in which they stayed
the idea was to shoot the crocodiles before they got into the water; they were laying out in
the sun on the bank
crocodiles are difficult to shoot, having to shoot them in the head for the most part
there was a tremendous dinner given by the host, who was a local squire; they were given a
delicious Indian meal
suddenly, a whole English meal appeared, which included roast beef, Yorkshire pudding,
and Christmas pudding; the bad part was that it was the hot weather time of the year
they nearly died from the terrible indigestion they all had that night
Lady Dalton’s father recruited many of his troops from [Mecud?] in Lady Dalton’s younger days, everyone wore topees; it was considered mad to go out
without one
the topees were comfortable; one could go riding and such with it on
topees were extremely light; they were covered in khaki cloth; they were really
comfortable (even the troops and officers wore them)
when going certain places, you had to have an armed escort in the car with you
there was a rifle factory that used tribesman labor; they were manufacturing rifles to shoot
the British soldiers with
there was a ball held at the viceroy’s house in Delhi during the time that Sir and Lady
Dalton were in Delhi; it was during the winter and was a fantastic gathering of people
the Indian princes wore the most beautiful clothes and jewels by the ton; all of the officers
were in full uniform; every different Indian regiment had a different color in their uniform
the viceroy’s house was lined with body guards up and down the stairs; the viceroy
agencies wore a dark blue tail coat with pale blue facing; you knew exactly which agency
Lady Dalton’s childhood bungalow had very thick, mud walls; it was called “26 Park Lane”

one would usually buy a topi once you got out to India because you could not get the “right thing” until you actually got out there

the winter was fairly cold; the summer temperature reached about 120°

the Residency was a creepy place that everyone would visit

Lady Dalton talks of the Delhi Horse Shows

Lady Dalton once stayed with the Finance Minister to the Indian government; Sir Richard Topman

India is such a large subject that one had to pick out a few topics

Lady Dalton went with a friend on a journey past Kashmir to the edge of Tibet; it was considered to be very extraordinary task because they went alone

end of Side A

Tape 876, Side B
Daltons (Part 3 of 5) (876.2)

two sons married two beautiful Persian princesses; the question of heirs and inheritance did not really matter because there was not much to inherit at the end

the king spent money like water and behaved terribly towards his wife, who was a very charming woman who was keen on riding

the wife would love to go out riding in the morning

there was a parade that occurred once a year that reminded Lady Dalton of feudal England, where someone had to provide a certain number of troops

the parade was a fairly light-hearted affair in a way because most things produced were not really able to go to war

there were camels pulling carts full of guns; there were a few properly trained troops but the main body was very feudal

there was a requirement for able-bodied fighters; to do this, you got them on parade once a year except for a small group of well-trained state forces

the parade was a real eye-opener

train travel incidences were enormous; every considerable journey was undertaken by train

the trains were very slow and you could not get anywhere in just one day

the trains were organized so that you slept in the train; in India, one would judge the distance of a trip by how many nights you slept on the train

as far as the British were concerned, there were three classes of travel: first class, second class and third class; British officers were only allowed to travel first class, having their fares paid for them if on duty

when traveling for leisure, British officers had to travel first class because the soldiers were in second class; under no circumstances could anyone go third class, which was all Indian

there were bedding rolls that included blankets and the things one would need for the night; this was separate from the rest of the luggage, which was generally bulky

there was always a bearer that went with you; his responsibilities included putting the bedding roll in the compartment and making the bed ready for the night; the reverse occurred in the morning

one would never do for yourself because it was unthinkable
to keep cool, buckets of ice would be put in your carriage; it was be renewed and refilled every day; this kept the temperature reasonable.

This method was preferred by York; the air conditioned compartments would always cause conflicts between those in the compartment: no one could agree on how cool to keep it

there were no restaurant cars; the train would stop so that you were able to get out and telegraph or telephone ahead for a meal to be prepared for you at the station’s restaurant

the frequent stops are probable the cause for the train taking so long

the stations were the most extraordinary places; everyone seemed to be camping at the station, literally tripping over bodies

everyone would be shouting; there were a large number of vendors; one would eventually grow accustomed to all the different languages and shouts

if you were a Hindu, you could only drink water from the Hindu water carrier; one could be excommunicated for drinking from one of the other vendors

the Indians were very small minded, and York reasons that they still are

the Frontier terrain was very rocky; India was very inhospitable, except for hiding

the Dalton’s bought mainly rugs home from India

a [yacdon?] was a thin, narrow leather box; one would always have two, one for each side of the mule

dalton mentions again how to measure a journey (by the number of nights on the train); they would eat at the station or have someone bring the food in to you from the station

when the Dalton’s first went out to India, there was no air conditioning

there were three windows on the train; a blue glass window was for the glare and the hot weather; there was an ordinary glass window; the third was made of wire mesh

you were allowed to choose which window you preferred; the mesh was for when it was so hot that one could not breathe

you ate dirt and grit from the moment you left on the train to the moment you reached your destination

India was not dirty in the sense of hygiene but in the nature of the country; there were enormous amounts of dust from all of the desert travel

travel was better after the rains because there was little or no dust

there were long carriages and no corridors on the train

there was never mixing of the populations; an Indian never traveled with a white man

the servant would come every time the train would stop at a station; there was no way he could get to you unless the train was stopped

the servant stayed in a compartment behind the master’s coach; he had to get out and go to your window

there were about five or six compartment per car; the lower order cars tended to have more compartments

the lower classes did not get beds and things; the seats were wooden

the servants wore uniforms according to the owner’s preferences; the servants of those in the British army tended not to dress very extravagantly

the servants were mostly dressed in white coats and white trousers; if one wished, the servant would wear a type of regimental belt

good servants were always clean and beautifully laundered; the servants would never wear shoes however

it was considered an insult for the servants to wear shoes in the master’s presence; the
servants also did not like the shoes
the higher in the social and financial scales, the more elaborate the servant’s dress would be
one of the best things about life in India was the washing arrangements; one would wear a
different set of clothes every day, sometimes several a day
clothes were washed every day; one never had very many clothes because the cleaned
clothes would get back to you the same day
the washers were very rough on the buttons and such because of their washing methods:
hitting the clothes on stones in the river
the clothes would come back starched and ironed wonderfully
it was literally “same day service”
if you were an important person, you kept your own wash staff
when threading the cotton, the servants would put the cotton in between their toes
the servants were very skilled in making things
people were advised before they went out to India to not have expensive uniforms made for
them in London but to have a good example of what they wanted
this would be used as a pattern for everything else, which was made on the spot; a suit
could be made for a fraction of the costs in India
you took the minimum with you when you went out
the same was true for boot making
Lady Dalton still has a pair of riding boots, which were made in India
the Indians were very good boot makers; they were very good with working with leather
the man who worked the leather was a very low caste
the sweeper was the man who emptied the buckets from the house and swept the floors; he
was “untouchable” because he was the lowest caste
above him was the man that worked the leather, because leather came from the cow; the
cow was sacred and really should not have killed according to the Hindus
the fact that the cow was sacred meant that the man who worked its hide was very low caste
the teacher was a very high caste
the Indians adhered to their caste system very strictly; Dalton supposes they still do
according to Lady Dalton, the very low classes were taken up by missionaries and made
into Christians, etc. but were still considered to not be all that good
the missionaries gave them a chance to get out of their social caste, but they were still not
considered very much
sweepers were converted to Christians and thought that, because of this, they would be
lifted out of the very low class; Lady Dalton does not think this worked very well
the senior cook did all the shopping out of the bazaar, where he visited every day; he would
come back and produce a book that one would go through and order your meal
the book was an account book that the cook would produce; the bearer would be present at
this session, supposedly on your side and nudging your elbow
there would probably be an argument with the cook, on the basis that he spent too much
money on one product or another; you would then take out the difference on his bill
the difference would then show up the next day in some other form
you would order your meal; most of the cooks spoke enough English to understand what
you wanted
most of the cooks would have never touched any of your food, so they would not have a
clue as to what the dish should taste like when you offered suggestions (like more salt, etc.)
the cooking was very good and very high class
the cooking was done by “rule of thumb”: the cook would watch his father do certain things for certain situations
Sir Dalton served three years in Egypt before going out to India; the same thing with the cooks happened in Egypt
the cooks in Egypt were at their best during a sandstorm on a primal stove
after the arrangements with the cook, one would go and inspect the kitchen and cook’s boy or kitchen aide
you would examine the pots, turn them upside down and look inside, and working area for cleanliness and then you would walk out and were through for that day
Lady Dalton once had a female sweeper
Lady Dalton was going to have a party and wanted to roast some nuts; she gave the order and walked out
later, Lady Dalton walked to the back of the house and found the sweeper with the dust pan full of nuts
in a more civilized place, such as Delhi, one would ask people from different bungalows in the station; you would all meet and go to dinner
suddenly, one of the guests would recognize their own silver or own plates; if the host did not have enough silverware or plates, the bearer would go to one of the guest’s bearers and ask for what was needed
nothing was ever lost and was back in the proper places by morning
there was an amazing camaraderie
Lady Dalton once had an older woman accuse her of stealing her cook; at the end of the conversation, the older woman replies, “If we memsahibs don’t stick together, I can’t think what will happen to this country!”
when returning to India, one will find their bearer on the key side of Bombay
the Daltons were given the name of a very good bearer and wrote out ahead, telling him they were leaving for India; he was waiting for them on the key at Bombay
the bearer told them the ropes, for Dalton had never been to India before; everything was very well organized
one day, their bearer told them he had to go home; the bearer never came back
the Daltons then learned that the bearer had gone back to his old master and had never planned on staying with the Daltons; he belonged to someone else and never told them
one would pay a retaining fee to the bearer when they home on leave; it was about half pay
the bearer would probably go back to his village for the time because some had wives and some did not; most of them did not, however
there was a servants quarters some little distance from your bungalow, but within the compound; this was where the servants lived
it was a modest building but the servants would think they were very well off because it was more than they were accustomed
the cook was a Muhammadans, so he would not touch any food that was considered “unclean” from his religious point of view; he could not eat any European-type of food
the cooks would steal sugar, salt, and flour but would not eat the prepared food
the dishonest servants would not mind at all to help themselves with your stores; you gave your stores out every day and the rest would stay under lock and key
the bearer would look after your interests entirely
the Dalton’s did not have any high caste Hindus as servants; most people preferred the Muhammadans over the Hindus for servants

Lady Dalton’s step father had been in India all his life; he would not have had a Hindu servant and would never have had a servant that spoke English

the point of view was that it was much more private to have someone who could not understand you; he could talk to his brother officers without having to worry about information getting out

her step father preferred Muhammadans

Lady Dalton compares Muhammadans to Hindus; then talks about cooks and where the best ones seemed to come from

the Hindus and Muhammadans were very divided in Lady Dalton’s step-father’s day; the Northerners were more of the fighting races and more attractive

it was not common to have both Hindu and Muhammadan servants in the same household; although they agree to differ, they do not fraternize

in the North, you did not see many Hindus at all

the traders were mostly Hindu because they seemed to be better at it

the whole government would go to the hill stations during the hot weather at the beginning of the war; after 1942, however, they decided to stop this practice and everyone sweated it out in Delhi

there were rituals in Shimla that Lady Dalton supposes they still do

it was there that Lady Dalton was born

when there was a limit on gas during the war, people would get around in buggies

on one occasion, the Dalton’s had some people stay over but they were short of beds; they hired more beds

the next morning at breakfast, the guests would tell them about the bugs in the bed and their lack of sleep

they sent the beds back and got new ones

you really only carted around your immediate possessions

end of tape