

## T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

### 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  
Mason: 4/4/1978  
Stubbses: 4/9/1978

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 1 hour, 34 minutes

Abells: 51 minutes  
Mason: 16 minutes  
Stubbses: 27 minutes

**OTHER MATERIALS:** None

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## INDEX

### 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

016 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  
 024 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  
 034 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  
 035 the officer, being known for being stubborn, told James he would wait until things became  
 better and re-offer a cavalry unit to him  
 045 it was not uncommon to be turned down for commissions because your mother was a  
 native of India  
 048 James could not be awarded land because he was considered a British subject  
 050 Mason quotes a famous Indian proverb: "The devil's donkey belongs to neither the side of  
 the stream nor to the house"  
 053 Mason wanted to have another funny proverb while talking to Skinner one day, so he made  
 one up; it sounded like a traditional proverb  
 057 there are still people like Skinner around  
 060 for 150 years, there was always an honorary Skinner member in the regiment Skinner was  
 associated with  
 070 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  
 090 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  
 094 Mason talks about a current thesis he is reading and the criticisms  
 110 it was very difficult for women unless they had an interest in something  
 118 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  
 125 Mason doesn't agree that women ruined the India experience; some women did not make  
 contributions, but there were those that made excellent contributions  
 129 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  
 133 there were always women that were contributing in different ways-some in the medical  
 field, some by drawing or sketching, some in music  
 134 Mason believes the feelings towards the women is an exaggeration; people are just looking  
 to place the blame for an excuse  
 138 end of interview

### **Tape 865, Side A**

#### **Abells (Part 1 of 3) (865.1)**

141 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  
 146 when they arrived in India, they stayed in Bombay and received a summons from one of  
 the uncles to stay with him at Jabalpur

148 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

151 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

156 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

166 when Abell was a subdivisional 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

172 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

181 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

188 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

196 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

202 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

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

211 Abell's father wanted him to become a lawyer, but Abell was not very sure

213 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

220 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

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

226 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

230 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

232 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

236 *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

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

246 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

257 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  
262 while at Oxford, Abell met a [Ramman?] who would eventually go out with Abell to India  
and was posted to the same province  
266 being athletic helped one adjust and become accepted; Abell played hockey and cricket  
270 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  
276 games like hockey, football and cricket were helpful with a career in India because there  
were no racial feelings towards the game  
283 people attracted to India had to be intelligent and have a good degree because the  
competition to get in was so fierce  
289 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  
292 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  
298 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  
310 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  
320 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  
325 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  
330 there was some excitement and anticipation about going out to India; they were really  
looking forward to it  
331 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  
343 there was a definite sense of responsibility and no question of being bored or under  
worked; there was always something to be done  
346 Abell spent nineteen years in India and would always have his leave cut short  
351 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.  
358 compared with the strains of obtaining a degree, people would get bored  
361 they were also taught to ride if you were unfamiliar with it  
364 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  
379 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  
388 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  
396 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

400 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

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

414 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

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

422 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

430 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

433 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

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

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

449 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

455 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

467 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

476 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

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

482 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

490 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

500 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

- 509 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
- 515 it was a strenuous time, but it was also fun
- 523 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
- 534 they would generally tour together, mostly because it was just the two of you and you did not have to worry about the children
- 544 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
- 552 end of side A

### **Tape 865, Side B**

#### **Abells (Part 3 of 3) (865.1)**

- 003 Sir George was reminded the other day of the relationship between the people of Tibet and the people of India
- 004 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
- 007 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
- 011 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
- 018 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
- 027 the presentation would be followed by a luncheon, hosted by the viceroy
- 028 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 off the hat and asked him something in English
- 038 de Caro and Jordan then relive a story about showing an American film over and over to a group of Tibetans
- 048 while living in the viceroy's compound because you were cut-off from the world
- 048 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
- 053 no one really gave reporters anything that they came for, but you did listen to them; everything was silent and anonymous
- 059 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
- 066 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  
 084 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  
 089 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****Stubbs (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 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 the 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 young 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

508 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  
525 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  
542 Stubbs does not know if anyone else felt the same way he did  
546 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  
553 end of tape