

## T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

### 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

026 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

030 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

035 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

041 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

047 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

054 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

058 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

062 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

067 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

072 in many places, if the police officers were good, the police were splendid; if the officers were “slack”, there was a danger of corruption

073 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

077 in a sense, the purpose of inspections was to frighten them

082 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

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

086 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

089 property is the perennial problem; there is also a large gap between the fairly wealthy and the extremely poor

091 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

093 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

097 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  
105 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  
107 one had to be totally honest throughout the process because no one will trust someone else who is in it for a profit  
114 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  
117 if there were any changes in the record, it had to be discussed  
119 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  
128 it was very interesting work and spent almost all your time in different villages  
129 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  
136 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  
141 you could walk or ride from one village to another; the villages were homogeneous  
144 one would get know which tribes were industrious and which were idle; the differences and boundaries were visible when riding  
150 it was an interesting life but you would become a bit of an agricultural expert  
153 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  
157 you did not see much of the urban population; district headquarters would sometimes be small  
159 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  
164 health care was improved in urban areas; because of the many wars, the money was not available for such things as welfare  
169 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  
175 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  
177 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  
188 there was such a concentration on agriculture because the population came from agriculture; some Indians argue the British should have concentrated more on industry  
194 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  
200 the health system also seemed to be very well; there were some of the best surgeons  
203 two of their children were born in England

205 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  
211 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  
217 however, it was not as dangerous as traveling by French railways  
219 she delivered a baby three weeks later  
220 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  
227 now, the conditions and medications have kept the British alive very well in very unhealthy  
surroundings; malaria was always a serious threat  
230 people would also wear more sensible clothes  
231 they would wear topees, but people do not wear them anymore; Lady Abell never really  
wore one  
233 the topees looked ridiculous, but were very light and excellent for riding  
236 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  
238 for a warm bath, they would heat the water outside and then carry it in and pour it into the  
tub  
240 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  
249 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  
251 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  
257 some of the servants were deeply devoted; they were very good with the children  
259 it was a privileged life, with amazing responsibilities; Sir George would not have missed  
the opportunity for the world  
261 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  
269 most of the population is poor and does not have that much invested in independence  
275 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  
283 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  
290 the prime minister of the Punjab when Independence came insisted on making the  
executors 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  
300 they would sometimes be asked to be the guardians of some of the children from school  
303 it was a lovely relationship because they end up with so many friends and offers to go back  
306 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

310 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

313 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 pour  
into India

321 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

323 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

332 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

336 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

340 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

342 those in the irrigation department could also see the large number of benefits

343 job satisfaction was tremendous; you were paid well, but there were huge responsibilities

346 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

360 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

367 like every newcomer, he felt the poverty was a disgrace to the administration

371 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

380 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?"

390 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

396 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

404 it is difficult to assess the state of affairs in a country as large as India

411 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

420 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

428 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  
 435 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  
 439 places put up all around the district for the officials to go around and conduct business  
 444 inspection bungalows were more cost efficient than the tents; they were also more fun  
 447 children usually went back to Britain around age seven; they could not survive the heat  
 449 with the children going back, wives had to shuttle back and forth  
 457 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  
 462 normally May, June and July in the Punjab were the most unpleasant; the rains would then  
 come and by September it was nice again  
 465 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  
 485 the children tended to get very pale and become ill because the many opportunities for  
 disease  
 489 after the war and near the end, air conditioning was introduced, mainly to the vice regales  
 499 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  
 502 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  
 512 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  
 527 life was very political, with endless negotiations with different peoples; the goal was to  
 prevent splitting India  
 546 a united India could run itself with great efficiency  
 548 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

030 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  
035 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  
041 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  
054 inspiration for the British public schools was based on the idea of having responsibilities  
that accompany special privileges  
058 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  
061 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  
066 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  
069 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  
076 you were expected to run the state to the best of your abilities yourself; you should not be  
continually asking for advice  
080 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  
082 the idea of the British officers serving in India were from Indian families was very much  
untrue; they were not all public schools either  
085 everyone seemed to adopt the same standards  
090 there were also a lot of Indians, who were also very good and also adopted the same  
standards  
091 *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  
095 the author served the British government in the ICS, and then later under the Indian  
government  
098 the theme was that the tone and standards set by the Indian Civil Service was almost too  
high for the country  
101 it is a fair picture from a nationalist Indian of the British civil services  
105 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  
114 it was very hard because you were expected to be someone’s mother and father; you tried  
to do the best you could  
118 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  
123 when you started, you began under a district officer; the first things Stubbs was told was to  
learn the language  
126 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 out 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