

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

Tape 883 Finding Aid

INTERVIEWEE NAMES:

Edith Dixon	4700.0603	Tape 883.1	(Tape 2 of 2)
Right Reverend Lesslie Newbigin	4700.0604	Tape 883.2	(Tape 1 of 2)
Arthur Barlow	4700.0605	Tape 883.3	(Tape 1 of 4)

IDENTIFICATION: Britons in Pre-Independence India

INTERVIEWERS: Frank de Caro, Rosan Jordan

SERIES: British Voices from South Asia

INTERVIEW DATES:

Dixon: 6/17/1978
Newbigin: 6/21/1978
Barlow: 7/5/1978

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 31 minutes

Dixon: 44 minutes
Newbigin: 39 minutes
Barlow: 8 minutes

OTHER MATERIALS: None

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Tape 883, Side A**Dixon (Part 2 of 2) (883.1)**

- 002 on the night of a strong thunderstorm, Dixon and others went out and watched as a tree that had been struck by lightning burned
- 008 Dixon had to move into a house in the botanical gardens after a plague broke out; the officer there was Martin Leek
- 013 Martin Leek spent some time in Egypt as a botanist studying Egyptian cotton; upon arriving in India, he interbred Egyptian cotton with Arabian cotton
- 021 Dixon's mother and family had ties to India
- 024 an India-born psychologist produced a book discussing coincidences
- 031 Dixon became interested in the psychologist's life and began to research her own heritage;

this was how Dixon found a direct line to her mother
 034 coincidences pile up on each other
 035 there was a Captain James Reese that lost seventy-two of his ship's company to disease and
 native warfare; "sea of mortality"
 046 Reese's two sons also went out to India as writers; they would eventually become lawyers
 then judges
 048 one of Reese's sons would become Dixon's great-great-great grandfather; both of the sons
 spent their lives in India
 052 Dixon's great grand uncle was required to do a large amount of touring; while away, he
 would write letters to his wife and send drawings to his daughter
 059 Dixon's aunt hated being out in India; for her first Christmas at school, Dixon spent the
 holidays with her aunt and her three sons
 063 one of the sons smashed her aunt's fingers with a lid; his punishment was to stay in his
 room all of the Christmas holidays with nothing but bread and water
 067 the eldest son went into the army and gained a small debt; he would eventually commit
 suicide
 071 the second son, Vincent, was his father's favorite; he was killed while climbing in
 Switzerland with his fiancée
 076 the third son is still alive and Dixon hears from him from time to time
 078 the lifestyle for the children did tend to spoil the children to some degree
 092 a picture of Dixon's great grandfather and his brother; the brother was in the navy
 097 her great uncle kept a journal; he wrote a poem to his wife on the death of their two year old
 son Walter; he was unaware at the time that his daughter Harriet, age five, had also died
 103 the child and mother death rate was very high
 106 Dixon's grandfather was the only one of his brothers and sisters to survive and continue the
 family line
 111 Dixon is unsure what the people in England actually thought of children that had lived in
 India; if anything, other people would find the children very meek from the hardship and
 sorrow that accompanies life in India
 115 Crawford's brother married a girl from England and had Harriet; Harriet died at age five,
 her brother at age two; the mother/wife then died
 119 the brother then married a cousin; they were expecting a child when she died
 120 the brother then left for India with his only remaining child, only to have him die on the
 way; he was almost forty years old
 126 an interesting fact to Dixon is when the mother of the brother was on her way out to see her
 father, she met her husband, Reese
 134 upon arriving in Calcutta, they were married
 155 Dixon has always been interested in family history, even as to inheriting the family history
 and heirlooms from the oldest aunt on her mother's side
 171 as they are looking at photographs, they come across a picture of an antique shower; it was
 a bucket with holes in it that was held over one's head
 182 society in India was snobbish; people were also snobbish in England though
 187 the British entered a country already in firm grip of a caste system; no one could earn a
 living besides what his "tribe" did
 193 within the class system, there were people ranging from high class to "untouchables" or the
 "sweep"
 195 the sweeper's job was to literally sweep and empty the lavatory pans, which were used for

the restroom; he was the lowest
 201 there were various ranks of servants, and no one servant would do the job of another
 205 for the British to maintain their feeling of superiority, they had to show the Indians that the
 British also had a system of hierarchy
 208 on top was the Civil Service, which was comprised of almost all university graduates from
 England; the system then came down through the army: cavalry, then artillery, then
 infantry
 213 there were British regiments that were out on tour, along with Indian regiments that were
 led by British officers; the Indian regiment postings was not seen as “high class” as being
 in the British regiments
 215 next came the serfs or Government Services, which Dixon’s father and uncles belonged to
 218 below that was the colored half-castes who were usually employed by the railways
 223 each club was aimed at a particular rank and only members of that rank were allowed to
 join
 226 the lowest of the whites were the boxwallers, who is a man who sells; this included
 everyone that is in trade
 235 Dixon tells the story of a woman who, while attempting to insult another, says a greeting
 that would associate the other with being in trade
 240 money had no basis on deciding you were high or low in the class system
 241 each level had to hold their heads up, only able to do so by climbing on the backs of the
 ones under them
 244 the British may have been influenced some by the Indian caste system
 249 there was a prejudice against women and the whole system of marrying them off and
 protecting them
 254 once, a sweeper was sitting outside his hut with a plate of food, which was thrown out
 when Dixon touched it; she was seen as a contaminant
 262 sometimes you do not have to explain things like that to children because they just accept
 things
 276 Dixon still remembers enough Hindustani to have a conversation to some extent in the
 language; she is most familiar with the phrases that were familiar to children and parents
 with children, like “you mustn’t do...” or “time for bed”
 289 Dixon even remembers a children’s nursery rhyme, which she recites in Hindustani
 294 Dixon was separated from her parents for two years while she was away at boarding school
 and her parents were still in India
 296 the parents were allowed leave every four years or so
 299 Dixon was about eight or nine when she returned to England by herself to attend school;
 her parents came two years later
 301 Dixon’s mother came home to England right before the start of World War I; her father
 went to Mesopotamia, then sent home to England for a brief time, then posted to Italy and
 Germany
 311 Dixon’s father was a railway man; he was the British representative to the Inter-Allied
 Railway Commission
 322 on a tour of the Rhine with her parents, Dixon had her first experience with romance when
 she met an American major on the deck of the ship; she was about sixteen or seventeen at
 the time
 332 Dixon’s husband’s family did not have any connections with India; he had a “continental
 upbringing”

335 Dixon's father-in-law was manager of a French factory; her husband's first seven years
 was spent in France with his French mother; his father was then transferred to Italy, where
 his schooling was begun

350 her husband then went to school in Germany after his father was transferred again; he
 attended university there

353 her husband was fluent in German, Italian, French and English; all the languages were the
 same for him, so he could not tell the difference between any of them; he also learned
 Hebrew, Latin and Greek

357 when the war began, her husband was one of the earliest members of the Royal Flying
 Corp

360 Dixon did not meet her husband until after the war was over; he was an insurance broker
 doing very well

364 her husband became the senior in charge of the firm when his brother became ill with
 tuberculosis

374 her husband went bankrupt because he made poor stock decisions and was a compulsive
 gambler; he left Dixon and their two children to go to South Africa, thus ending their
 marriage

378 after eight years, he returned; Dixon heard he had died penniless in a charitable institution

389 Dixon would hear from him when he first went out to South Africa; he once said he would
 love to come back to England, but couldn't afford the fare; Dixon's father sent him fifty
 pounds to pay for a ticket back, only for him to respond a month later that the money was
 gone because he had tried to double it but lost

401 Dixon was scared her children would grow up and be the same as their father

403 when her father returned, he retired to Brighton

406 people never really did congregate once they returned home from India

409 during a riot, Dixon's father approached the police to offer his help; he was given
 command of a mounted troop of seventy-five horses; they managed to maintain the peace

423 people that spent their entire lives in India did tend to miss India once they returned to
 England

430 to Dixon's mother, home was England because India was "dusty and smelly"; at age seven,
 Dixon remembers her mother commenting on all the green in England

450 men that were able to afford a wife would go home to England, find a girl, marry her and
 take her out to India with him; it was usually a girl that had never been to India before

478 when she was a child, Dixon would always go into the hills during the hot weather

483 Dixon believes that, in the early days, the younger sons would go out to India because there
 was no business to inherit or no way through the family to make money

496 in the early days of the East India Company, large sums of money were made illegally and
 in a corrupt way; that was eventually stopped

508 end of tape

Tape 883, Side B

Newbiggin (Part 2 of 2) (883.2)

001 the British were respectful of Indian customs, for example government office hours
 which were originally staffed by Brahmins who had religious duties as well

006 annual festival in Kotturpuram, the Juggernaut Car

012 Brahmins recognized British power, but retained the deep sense of being Brahmins

017 story about old style missionary with a handlebar mustache who was used to ordering

- people around; he tried loudly and angrily telling a beggar to go but the beggar would not leave until a nearby Brahmin made him leave with only one word
- 035 Hinduism is a resilient way of life, capable of adapting to change without altering its fundamental character
- 040 Scottish missionary/educator, Alexander Duff, who established a college in Calcutta where all future leadership of the Indian National Movement was trained
- 042 Duff was criticized for teaching Latin, geography, and history rather than preaching the gospel, but responded that “I am laying a mine and when it explodes the whole of Hinduism will blow up”
- 046 Newbigin disagrees in retrospect because the mine has exploded but Hinduism is not a granite block, but rather a sandbank that changes shape
- 050 British interest in Hinduism: modern and secular anthologies of Indian literature and poetry, the footnotes show that most translations were made by Christian missionaries in the early 19th century
- 057 story about Newbigin as missionary in Madras; the newly formed DNK government organized an international congress to celebrate Tamil culture; they erected statues depicting great creators of Tamil culture; Newbigin received a telephone message urging him to offer the DNK chief minister statues of 19th century missionaries, Pope and Caldwell, and to come up with the money to make statues; after consulting Indian friends and raising funds, the chief minister accepted the statues and Newbigin was invited to address a congregation of 250,000 people; he spoke about Pope and a Hindu scholar followed with a second speech
- 083 one of those missionaries (Pope and Caldwell) had established the Tamil language as a distinct identity, not dependent on Sanskrit; the other missionary laid the foundations for the Tamil lexicon and first translated Tamil classics into English; the statues still stand on the marina
- 094 1900-1920, there was an intense interest in Hindu culture, but this decreased with time
- 100 Some people thought that India was not enlightened by French philosophy, but the 18th century saw India as wise, part of the ancient East
- 112 The Taj Mahal not something an “uncivilized” nation would construct
- 115 Contact with Eurasian/Anglo-Indians; they were part of his congregation in Madras; most of them have left and gone to Australia
- 121 the Anglo/Indians suffered because they were given special status by the British but did not seek higher education as did their Hindu contemporaries; thus when the British left, they had to fend for themselves so a large number of them left
- 128 story about Anglo-Indian girl who became more Indian as she worked with him
- 136 story about voyage from Liverpool to Madras and entering the Suez Canal; everything changed, the officers changed uniforms and people wore topees on their heads to blend in with Indians and prevent heatstroke
- 162 issuing salt tablets to prevent dehydration dissolved the wearing of topees overnight, but Anglo-Indians continued to wear them because their identities were tied up in them
- 170 previous to the introduction of salt tablets people had to wear topees which could be purchased at Simon Arzt
- 178 voyage to India; going to a costume party dressed as the Missionary of Fiction and won prizes
- 195 “going native” meant an adoption of Indian culture, a few people “went native”, but it was frowned up to break away “from the tribe” (British)

208 the debate among his colleagues about the importance of dress versus the importance of
relationships between people (trust)

212 only a few people adapted to Indian culture, like anthropologists

220 the government regarded the missionaries as a nuisance as well as an asset because of
their relationship with the Indian people that the government officers did not have

227 missionaries were running a large number of welfare activities such as schools, clinics,
experimental agricultural projects, etc. This was respected and encouraged by the
government , but the social/class differences existed between missionaries who were not
as well paid as the government officials

247 The hierarchy of the missions and chaplains

267 the Scottish were the last to integrate with the Union of Churches in South India until
Prince Phillip visited South India and persuaded them to join

293 despite lower socio-economic status than the government officials, missionaries
nevertheless had servants; he had three

297 some Americans refused to have servants, but this caused resentment because this meant
less jobs for villagers and more reliance on machines (washing machines)

304 the gardener carried water to the bucket in the bathroom rather than having indoor
plumbing

307 a fourteen year old boy named Moses, a [chokra?], was with his family until they left India
in 1974, something this culture doesn't understand and considers shocking

320 servant class comprised of several different castes because only certain activities were
allowed of certain castes

344 the bungalows were built in the "old style" and necessitated house servants to maintain, but
modern style flats are now being built so that you can run a house by yourself, but it is
much cheaper to run a house the "old way"

364 transportation by bicycle, car, and walking to communicate to parishioners

373 touring districts and remote villages, the ICS also had this tradition

400 analogy of biblical tale David and Saul to caddy and golfer

417 his wife's view about being a wife and a mother , she refused to get involved in church
committees but opened her home to everyone; this fits into the Indian concept of
womanhood

Tape 883, Side B cont'd

Barlow (Part 1 of 4) (883.3)

447 Interview in Somerset, Wales

454 he went to India because of his Civil Service examination results

485 family connections

514 he was quite excited about going to India rather than staying in London

523 he had no expectations of India

540 one year prep course at Oxford on Indian history and culture

588 new experiences in India