

## T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

### Tape 854 Finding Aid

**INTERVIEWEE NAMES:**

Sir Alec Ogilvie	4700.0584	Tape 854.1	(Tape 2 of 2)
Colonel and Mrs. C.A.K. Innes-Wilson	4700.0585	Tape 854.2	(Tape 2 of 4)

**IDENTIFICATION:** Britons in Pre-Independence India

**INTERVIEWERS:** Frank de Caro, Rosan Jordan

**SERIES:** British Voices from South Asia

**INTERVIEW DATES:**

Ogilvie: 3/14/1978

Innes-Wilsons: 3/29/1978

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 1 hour, 33 minutes

Ogilvie: 47 minutes

Innes-Wilsons: 46 minutes

**OTHER MATERIALS:** None

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### Tape 854, Side A

#### Ogilvie (Part 2 of 3) (854.1)

- 000 A more spacious age; most people who went to India came from families where there would be servants in their home in England
- 006 post-WWII was different
- 009 his father instructed him not to go into government service in India, but rather business in India, he thinks this happened in many families, the tradition of working where one's father had
- 019 he knew what to expect in India
- 023 those who went out for the first time, went out young, so they adapted well
- 025 before WWII, no one in his company thought of marrying before age 30; in many companies you weren't allowed to, and in many cases you couldn't afford to marry

029 story about beginning of his business arrangement, asking for a contract and looked at  
 with a “frozen eye”; he was told that he would have a gentleman’s agreement  
 033 he was given a second class passage out to India and told that the next free passage would  
 be when he retired; they had to pay for a sea passage back on leave  
 036 his first tour was four years  
 037 in 1946, his wife was the first wife to ever receive payment by his company to go to India  
 042 in 1948, the governments produced a “UK Citizens Registration/Act”, it causes problems  
 about who can be admitted and who cannot  
 046 he is thankful that both he and his wife were born in England because otherwise this act  
 would have prevented them from having British passports; his father was born in India,  
 his mother was born in Australia, his wife’s two parents were born in South Africa, and  
 his second son was born in India  
 057 the quality of life for businessmen in India before the war was very high  
 060 houses were gracious  
 064 in the 1940s air-conditioning was introduced; in the 1950s his mother would write his  
 wife wondering why they didn’t take the children to the hills in the hot weather; they  
 didn’t because of air-conditioning, more frequent home leaves, and the expense of going  
 to hill stations  
 077 in South India, you can still see older, poorer British who have retired at the hill stations;  
 they are, “almost unaware that independence happened in 1947”  
 080 memories of going on winter trips from Delhi to Shimla as a young child; his English  
 nanny insisted that the only way to survive such a journey was to dose the children with  
 castor oil  
 090 a lot of nurses ended up marrying army sergeants in the British Army  
 097 he still loves overnight train journeys  
 100 when he and his wife left India in 1965, they decided to return to England the “old way”  
 by train to Bombay (42 hours) and by ship to Italy  
 103 that was the first time they had been by sea in 18 years because they could get from their  
 house in Calcutta to the airport quickly and the air journey took in less than half the time  
 than it still takes to get from Calcutta to Bombay by train  
 109 mail steamers arrived in Bombay on Thursdays (P.M.O. Steamship Company) and  
 departed on Saturdays, therefore Fridays were the day to eat lunch out of your office  
 124 pre-war social life; active club life  
 137 dropping calling cards in senior officers’ boxes in order to get invited to dinner  
 143 sporting life was good in country clubs in Calcutta; there was a long waiting list to get  
 into them and (embarrassingly) most clubs did not admit Indians until after independence  
 150 Indians took it quite well, instead of saying, “you know what you can do with your club!”  
 154 the Saturday Club was in the middle of Calcutta, had tennis and squash courts, a  
 swimming pool, dancing, a resident band; every Monday (in the 1930s) there was a tea  
 dance outdoors; the Saturday Club was a young unmarried person’s club  
 165 the older man’s club like the Bengal Club in London (founded in 1827) did not allow  
 women  
 175 India was more than just sandy deserts, Calcutta had five golf courses, all with green  
 grass; he had a grass tennis court at his home  
 184 there was a huge European population in Calcutta to support these clubs  
 185 after independence, people said there were more Europeans in India than in pre-

independence, but that began to die out in the late 1950s and 60s  
 190 reasons for decline of Europeans: A) high taxation, B) nationals should do the job if  
 possible, C) many foreign companies sold out anyway  
 195 at one stage, his company had over 200 British people, but declined to 50 by the time he  
 left; now there are none  
 204 during the British Empire, most people had relatives in the British Army in India,  
 Malaya, Africa, etc.  
 213 now young people only venture to places like Spain; he is sad because the Empire gave  
 the people a much wider world concept  
 225 the Anglo-Indian population had the most difficult time during the post-independence  
 period because the Indians aren't interested in them  
 233 his own children are very interested in hearing about India; his older son now works in  
 Hong Kong  
 245 national current of guilt about only a handful of people handled an empire  
 248 returning to England was not difficult; his friends and relations were always asking how  
 they did without all of their servants; he claims it was absolute bliss  
 257 his son returns to England every year  
 269 now people can't afford servants; a young Indian couple would only have one servant  
 279 the difference between a young wife going out in the 1930s and one going out after  
 WWII; later, women had different upbringings in Britain than earlier women; post-war  
 women worked in England and upon arriving in India and found that there were no jobs  
 and the housework was done by servants  
 285 the most important person to interview when a couple decided to go to India was the  
 wife; pre-war wives didn't have as many problems  
 300 another pre-war aspect of life, the paying guests (PGs) [like boarders] helped couples  
 make ends meet  
 303 he knew of several cases where the wife ends up marrying the paying guest and the  
 husband stayed on as the paying guest  
 307 riding horses; the Calcutta Light Horse Club  
 318 soldiers and ICS members looked down on the business community  
 322 "the box swallow" is a peddler and became a derogatory term towards businessmen  
 335 looking at old school report and saw that his headmaster's last comment was, "I'm sorry  
 this boy is being lost to commerce"  
 342 he is now a governor of the same school which is, ironically, kept alive by businessmen  
 355 the Indian ICS people (educated in England) were the reasons for smooth transition to  
 independence  
 363 an annual Oxford vs. Cambridge boat race  
 371 once you went to one company in India, you did not think of switching to another  
 385 in India, his business was Managing Agents; it started due to shortage of management  
 393 commercial empires manages steamers, jute mills, coal mines, tea estates, paper mills,  
 electricity supply companies  
 407 these kind of companies are gone because the government hated their power  
 430 patterns of being a managing agent  
 451 he traveled more in the Indian Army than he did while working for his company  
 460 the Scottish were a very dominating influence; most companies he's referring to have  
 Scottish backgrounds

- 481 there was a conscription of people into the Indian Army during the war, but he joined  
before conscription
- 489 he joined the Second Gorkhas
- 504 he was given a booklet with instructions to young officers joining them; one of the  
solemnly written phrases was “officers are encouraged to save money to buy a polo pony  
instead of poodle faking [socializing] in the hills”
- 524 many words in English have come from the British connection with India such as  
“pajama” and “bazaar”
- 536 and vice versa, so if you want a match in India, you say [dessoli?] which comes from  
the old British Army connection so that has become an Indian word, now.

### **Tape 854, Side B**

#### **Innes-Wilsons (Part 2 of 5) (854.2)**

- 000 They were married in Calcutta the day before war was declared
- 010 Mrs. Innes-Wilson also had connections to India; her great-great grandfather was a  
general in the Indian Army; her great grandfather was an administrator; her grandfather  
was a general in the Indian Army; and her father was in the Indian Army and was killed  
in WWI
- 016 she was a teacher and saved money to visit India; she stayed with a friend and to teach  
their daughter
- 022 there is no future in India unless you go into business; their son wasn't able to join the  
Indian Army because it no longer existed
- 027 she was the only member of her family who wasn't born in India; her brother was born on  
the frontier in Chaman; her sister was born in Karachi; she was born in Dover but taken  
out to Lucknow; she stayed there until 1914 when her father came back with his regiment
- 032 she did not return until later, when she met and married Kenneth in Calcutta
- 035 she stayed out the war in Calcutta
- 037 Kenneth remembers his childhood better than his wife; he was practically brought up by  
their Indian servants in Bombay Providence, an Indian state
- 042 the boy, [Linden?], who succeeded to the throne in that area was educated in England;  
they were boyhood friends but lost touch until 1935 when they ran into each other in a  
hotel in Dehradun
- 050 Linden went back to his state in Bombay and reformed it; he was killed in a swimming pool  
accident shortly afterwards
- 057 his mother was a tutor, which was unusual for a woman to do
- 071 his wife taught at a boys prep school
- 076 a knowledge of what ancestors had done in India (stories, photo albums)
- 092 a small circle of families coming out to India generation after generation
- 102 types of stories they were told: Indian tales, jungle stories (hunting, observing animals,  
etc.)
- 140 Indian-English relations were good; he thinks some Indians were like Englishmen with  
brown faces; the Indians he knew were sorry to see the British go
- 166 Pakistan treated English with more trust than India did
- 181 Indians were less concerned with justice than Pakistan
- 195 boundary disputes; British role in resolving them
- 214 the biggest boundary dispute he remembers was in Bengal; the Ganges formed the

boundary but had changed its course by several miles over ten years  
 229 surveying boundaries, some secretly  
 237 the Boundary Commission did not have a geographer because they did not realize their  
 value  
 250 river courses and sources made establishing boundaries difficult; this is where the  
 geographer would have been useful  
 254 returning to India; he finished his training in 1928 as a second lieutenant and had choices  
 of posts and he chose India; his second choice was West Africa; his third was England  
 284 a lot of competition to go to India; some did not want to go and bought their way into  
 another posting  
 271 childhood memories, his mother's stories, and reading (some American books) shaped his  
 expectations of India  
 282 Mrs. Innes-Wilson's grandmother told stories about going to the hills for the hot season,  
 but she was surprised when she arrived because India was more modern than in past  
 generations' lore  
 287 it was more exciting in India than in England, and he was given authority  
 297 when he got to the survey he realized his cousin was there  
 300 preparation: buying clothes from a well-known outfitter, F.P. Baker in London  
 306 they had to buy new clothes once they got to India; tailoring was easy and cheap in India  
 311 when people got to India, they were given a teacher  
 319 the British Army men looked down on the Indian Army men  
 327 Mrs. Innes-Wilson thought she was only going on a trip during the cold weather; she had  
 purchased a return ticket, but decided she was going to stay even if she had not met her  
 husband; she would have taken a job  
 340 her mother made her buy a return ticket; most women who were going to meet a future  
 husband did not buy return tickets  
 365 unmarried girls stayed with their families; this made for the gay life of big towns like  
 Bombay and Calcutta  
 372 before the war, Calcutta had a bumping club life; the large business community enjoyed  
 themselves socially; the clubs were exclusive, snobbish  
 394 the "box swallows" (businessmen) treated army officers well, so they could live well on a  
 pauper's salary  
 408 it would not have been unusual for women to work in India in jobs like teaching school or  
 tutoring family children [like a governess]  
 422 they were married in Fort William in the afternoon, as is customary in hot weather; as  
 they stepped out of the church they were met by a dispatch rider who told them that all  
 leave for serving officers was canceled; they were going to honeymoon in Kashmir (2000  
 miles away) and he had given up his accommodation; so there they were on the evening  
 of their reception, full of champagne, with nowhere to go; so they drove around on their  
 honeymoon until they found a house to move into  
 436 for Christmas a few months later they stayed outside of Calcutta overnight in a  
 forest/traveler's bungalow that seemed deserted, but unbeknownst to them the cook that  
 they couldn't find had been eaten by a tiger  
 480 their first passages to India: she remembers coming through the Suez Canal and seeing  
 camels walking along the edge of the canal; she arrived in Bombay where she was met by  
 family friends; she then took a train

486 to her, train journeys were exciting--the station noise and people hanging on the trains  
496 when he went overseas to Iraq, she was given a free train passage anywhere in India, so  
she took the longest one possible; she went from north India to south India  
514 when he would go on recruiting trips, he was given first-class passages, but his wife was  
not; so he solved this by buying two second-class tickets and took her with him  
520 second-class passage allowed them more access to Indian life  
527 story about going into the printing office of the Indian Congress Party and finding them  
printing pamphlets saying, "Don't join the British Army to fight in this Imperialist war";  
they said to him, "What have you come for?"; he said "I've come to recruit people to fight  
in the Imperialist war"; two of them joined  
539 they were looking for lithographic printers for the making of war maps, so they recruited  
a lot of craftsmen from printing offices all over India.