

AV 4: Ian Whitaker oral history summary

Recorded at SPRI in the old library, 29.6.1996.

[01.14.40]. Introduction by Peter Speke (PS) who is interviewing Ian Whitaker (IW) about his life and polar research. [00.01.10] Description of Ian Whitaker's education and offer to study history at Peterhouse college, Cambridge, after the war. After the war he spent a year at St. Andrews University, gaining a diploma in Biblical studies and then went on to study Anthropology at Cambridge. [00.02.50] Memories of department of Archaeology and Anthropology after the war. Mention of John Hutton, professor. Anecdote about raiding the cases and learning to throw spears, bows and arrows in the courtyard outside the museum. Mention of Meyer Fortes (MF) arriving and modernisation of the department. [00.05.00] Description of his initial interest in the Sámi. MF encouraged an interest in Africa but IW decided to learn Swedish after his BA and study the Sámi. Mention of registering with the University of Oslo. [00.07.21] Description of early field work and making first contact with the Sámi via an itinerant preacher. Mention of Ethel John Lindgren [EJL] and her second husband who introduced him to Sámi culture. Mention of Ralph Bulmer. [00.13.27] Return to Cambridge and final undergraduate year. Mention of EJL leaving department and his registering for a PhD in Oslo. [15.00] Description of PhD field work and life with the Sámi including learning the language, which he found much harder than Swedish. Description of working as a hired reindeer herder for a Sámi family and his research methods. [00.20.30] Description of his integration with the community. IW never felt 'at one' with them but he was close enough to become godfather to one of the family's children, who was given his name. [00.21.40] Description of maintaining contact with the community after his research there ended. Memories of the daughter of a close Sámi friend staying with him in Vancouver. [possibly Åsa Simma]. Story about taking a long sabbatical and returning to the now settled community in his Land Rover after a long gap in contact.

[00.27.00] Description of IW's relationship with EJL and her formidable personality and appearance. [00.30.00] Description of EJL's early life. She was American but largely raised in China and studied Chinese and Psychology as a Cambridge Undergraduate. Description of her PhD research into Shamanism in Mongolia and Manchuria where she travelled with Nomadic Reindeer herders in the 1930s. Mention of Oscar Mamen. Anecdote about difficulties travelling in Northeast Asia. [00.34.30 - Pause for traffic noise]. Further description of EJL's PhD research. Mention of the Purge of academics in Russia. [00.37.20] Memories of editing EJL's PhD thesis for publication in the late 1980s and what it was like to work with her. Anecdote about how few westerners were working in Northeast Asia in the 1930s. [00.39.00] Description of his travels to China to visit the area EJL did her PhD research and meeting with the Tungus.

[00.41.00] PS summarises IW's academic career, mainly undertaken in Canada at Newfoundland Memorial University and Simon Fraser University, Vancouver. Description of IW's fieldwork in the Outer Hebrides, after he completed his PhD, and on to Newfoundland. Description of his interest in Arctic anthropology at Simon Fraser. Mention of teaching Sociology for a while as his area of research was not popular. [00.45.15] Description of his involvement in the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Enquiry which made him change his thoughts about the relationship between indigenous people and national governments. Praise for Judge Tom Berger and his thorough enquiry into building an oil pipeline in the valley. [00.48.30] PS asks about the impact of IW's work in Canada. IW is uncomfortable answering the question. He considers his comparative experience important as few anthropologists in Canada had spent time with cultures outside the First Nations. [00.50.30] PS asks about the place of anthropology in academia and Northern studies. IW Describes the role anthropologists play in encouraging respect within indigenous communities and placing value on preserving their culture. Mention of Simon Fraser Native teacher training programme and other extramural work in Scotland.

Description of anthropologists providing a voice for indigenous communities in Canada, so their interests can't be ignored or railroaded. Mention of Tom Berger's discussions with First Nation communities and how they informed the route of the Mackenzie pipeline. [00.55.20] Brief description of difficulty getting students interested in studying northern cultures as opposed Pacific.

[00.56.10] Description of IW's relationship with the Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI). He first visited as an undergraduate in 1950, whilst organising Sámi fieldwork, but not again until later in his career. At Simon Fraser he built in his research terms away, with SPRI in mind. IW values SPRI because of its informal, yet serious, no-nonsense approach; the library; the family atmosphere; its interdisciplinary approach and strong culture of networking. Mention of biologist Max Dunbar.

[01.01.00] Description of his relationship with the University of Cambridge and praise for Peterhouse college. [01.02.35 - silent shots of IW and PS in conversation in the SPRI old library] [01.02.35 - PS reading his questions to IW] [ENDS].