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Colin Bell

Life story interview with Paul Thompson

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Principle investigator's thematic highlights

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Table of Contents

Colin Bell

Interviewed by Paul Thompson

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1. Family and school influences

(pp.5-.6)

My father's father was a unionised South London gas meter reader, and could talk about Will Thorne and people like that. Autodidact, reader of *The Times*…. My father also, I knew he was different to other people, because he read *The Times*, and that was odd for people of his class……I remember him as an obsessive reader, which is probably important. He was always known as someone with four or five books under his arm, which is what he did while he was on the train.

(p.1, p.11)

My father was an insurance clerk, and my mother was a secretary…. My father, in 1946, moved out – classic Londoner, moved out to Tunbridge Wells, and commuted back in – and we always continued to think of ourselves as Londoners, like I supported London Football Clubs. My mother didn't work in paid employment, as one would now say, and my father commuted back in as an aspiring insurance clerk, to Central London, which meant I hardly saw him, except at weekends, because he was out of the door before I was up, and frequently was back after I was in bed. ..…I suppose I still think of myself as a Londoner, in a curious sort of way. … I've never really lived in London, but we were Londoners living in Tunbridge Wells.

(pp.1-2)

I think the most defining thing about me, maybe full stop the defining thing about me, is that my father died when I was 12, of a cerebral haemorrhage, and so unexpectedly, in every sense of the word, we are fatherless, my mother's widowed. And we were living in rented accommodation, always had lived in rented accommodation owned by my father's

employer, a big insurance company – Liverpool Victoria Insurance Company, in Central London. And I would say that, socially and economically, we were skidders at this point, we were going downstream fast, and certainly my dominant memory of my childhood, teenagehood really, is of having no money whatsoever.

Go back one stage, my father, clearly, was very aspiring, tremendous pressure on the 11+. And I passed the 11+, and I was the only one - my brother and sister both failed – and went to the local grammar school, which then, as now, is a very distinguished, in the league table sense, school, it's called the Judd School in Tonbridge… It's full, I now realise, of London public servants, full of very Senior Civil Servants' children, who commute up from Tunbridge on a very good railway line.

(pp.3-4)
Partly, I think, because of a girlfriend I then had, I decided that I wouldn't … I mean, I'd left school, but then came back into the Upper Sixth, having decided that I would try and go on….

I was in the middle mass of very bright people and I would guess, I don't think it's an excuse,….I was probably under-performing, partly because of the domestic situation. I mean, throughout the time I was there I had paper rounds, I worked on milk rounds, I did a bit of meat on Saturday mornings – unusual for people at Judd – and that was partly because I was not taking pocket money, or money, off my mother, and I was working in a way which is now very familiar to … I mean, young people do this all the time, but it wasn't as usual at that time. And then in the Upper Sixth, I decided I was going to go to university, and worked rather hard.

2. University

(pp.17 – 18, p.19)
Keele.. was, and is – it was remarkable. An unalloyed pleasure. Really, really liked being at Keele… It was completely residential, .. you lived there. And the much maligned Foundation Year was tremendous for me…. Plato to NATO type stuff, and people said, "You can't do it all", and "it doesn't really join up". Well, I thought it did... You did two

lectures a morning – nine o'clock, ten o'clock – the whole year together. Keele was the most year stratified university I've ever worked in, because the whole year went to lectures together, and when I left Keele, there were less than 1,000 students there in 1964… But it wasn't just the Foundation Year that was amazing, A.D. Lindsay and the founding fathers structured the world into three, and there were Humanities, and there were Social Sciences, of which geography was one, and there was Science. All the time you had to be doing something out of each three columns, and it was being forced to work in areas you'd never thought about….

Quite explicitly, in the first year, the only – to the modern eye – sociology, that was in the Foundation Year – there was no Sociology Department at Keele, don't forget, at that time – the only sociology was W.M. Williams – Bill Williams – doing two lectures, one on rural kinship, which was basically the stuff that became *Ashworthy*, and one on urban kinship, which was straight Willmott and Young. He over-contrasted that stuff, and I was incredibly taken with that. More, curiously, about kinship than about social class.

I didn't do what fifty or sixty per cent of Keele students do, which is change their subject. I said I was going to do history and geography, and in the second, third and fourth year, I did do history and geography. But I also did subsidiary politics with Jean Blondel, Hugh Barrington, Frank Bealey, and a number of other quite famous - and Sammy Finer. It was an amazing Department. And I learnt about comparative politics, and I nearly went into political science. And I also started to get, during the whole of the time I was there, [at] Keele, I continued this upward trajectory. Not only did I work, I was very good at it.

(pp.19 -20)
I was recognised as being quite flash… Because I also played in the jazz band, and also played rugby for Keele. Also, by then, went off to the far end of the Left-wing spectrum. I was literally, I've been a member of three different groups that have been proscribed by the Labour Party, starting with NALSO – National Association of Labour Students Organisation……

And I knew the people you know at this time. It was the beginnings of *Universities and Left Review*, it's Gabriel Pearson, it's Alan [Ryan] … it's those … young lecturers that

were quite influential on people. And tearaways like John Rex used to come through and give us Student Organisation lectures. But the rest of the time I ran the Jazz Club, and we were, commercially, rather successful…

(pp.21, 22)
Bill [W. M. Williams] was kind to me, he also gave me large amounts of stuff to read, of his own stuff … We actually read the typescript of *Ashworthy*. Now, that's not a great book, and I can actually spot one or two significant flaws in it now, but I couldn't work out how he had done it. It was kind of baffling. Now, I think, for many people who do social sciences, it never becomes problematic how something is actually done, and I've gone on from Bill, being interested. He actually told me, for the first time, about questionnaires and interviewing people, and the fact in *Ashworthy*, that he asked, through the questionnaires, the wrong questions. It was only when he did the analysis that he found that he had to write to them all again and ask them a whole series of other questions to get the answer that he then began to need, that he wrote up in the book. Now, I discovered that very early on, and was very intrigued by it, and, incidentally, then read every extant British community study, whilst I was an undergraduate, including, I can remember, reading *Tradition and Change*, long before I met Margaret Stacey, and all the books that eventually are in Frankenberg's *Communities in Britain*. I'd read all of those as an undergraduate, and was very taken with all that…

I think during most of the time, what Keele did for me, for good or bad, was that it allowed you to read everything, and I did read enormously. I discovered libraries, I discovered about doing research…

3. Class

(p.9)
I think I didn't get [the concept of class] till university. .. I actually read, in my first year at university, and it made an impact on me, I was reading Raymond Williams, I was reading Richard Hoggart, and.., *Family and Kinship in East London*. I'd read that in my first year, without doing sociology – this is the famous Keele first year – and it made sense of a kind of experience, although I knew I wasn't heroic working-class, you know, I

couldn't identify with that, in any sense. But … I got my education through… through the normal Left-wing student organisations, that were frequently proscribed by the Labour Party.

(p.49)
I mean, I might have come, you know, some distance come out of the working-class, but I've never really, in any sense, been a member of the working-class in Britain, and nor am I a class warrior. I've never been politically active enough to think of myself as a class warrior. I don't go and resist. I believe in Socialism and progressive taxation, but it's not quite the same as hating the middle-classes! (LAUGHS) I'm not Teresa Hayter, "Hater of the bourgeoisie".

4. Marriage

(p.26)
Joscelyn was … progressively educated, rich, Left-wing parents. She'd been to Steiner Schools. She was at Keele because she was at Keele – I was at Keele because of my 'A' levels. She was in my year, and you knew everybody in your year, but… we didn't really get together till the long vacation between the third and fourth year. And that was it, we were … we were going to stay together.

I think I'm very influenced by both of her parents. He's a serious Left-winger, fought in the Spanish Civil War, the house was full of New Left Book Club stuff. Mother was a small private progressive school teacher. Joscelyn was out of that background, but also was a scientist, she was a biologist… Joscelyn was a scientist, and was always very very tough on my sociology, which she saw as impossibly woolly.

5. Middle Class Families

(pp.33-35)
Now, Bill had me in one day, and.. he said, "What you should do is work on spiralists", and he told me about W.W. Watson's stuff on spiralists, and said, "Nothing's been done on the middle-class"…

There was a fundamental division, within the middle-classes, in Swansea – or anywhere, actually – between the locals and the non-locals, and particularly Watson's category – spiralists – who, as they move up a bureaucratic hierarchy, move around the country, and those who are locals, who equals burgesses. And that was incredibly influential on me. And the burgesses are people who are tied socially and economically to the locality. It might be a solicitor, but one of mine, for example, was quite a successful greengrocer, and he was into being in Rotary and all that kind of stuff.

I wanted, also, still to do a community study, and we agreed, in the end, that we might look at who was living in new housing estates, they were better than Wimpey, on the edge of Swansea, who had moved there. And I did some pilot work, as I now recognise it, by going to talk to a few people there,…. On one of these housing estates, extraordinarily, was someone who had been a neighbour of Thelma, the girlfriend mentioned on an earlier tape, who welcomed me like a long lost friend, and became my way into that estate, and told me loads of … They were classic spiralists, he was a bank manager who moved round the country, and she was very resentful, and, indeed, during the fieldwork, was moved on again, and didn't like it. And Bill's hypothesis, Bill's description of the word appeared to be true – here was someone who did do it.

Then I also, on one of the other estates, [there was] a young pregnant woman,.. and I couldn't work out how the hell she could be living in this rather expensive house, because I was living in a two bedroomed flat down town… She had only stopped being a student.. because she was pregnant, and she was married to a metallurgy graduate student in the University.. But [he] was the inheriting son of the key department store in Vancouver, and that's why they were living in this rather expensive house.

(pp.35-36)

I think what I was then going to try and look at was family and kinship relations on these housing estates. So what you also see in the book, more than you see in some of the other family and kinship stuff, is stuff about neighbouring, because these were actually neighbours, and so I did talk about what they did with each other. But I had less than a questionnaire and more than an aide memoir, and it's in an appendix in *Middle-Class Families*, it is published at least.

Very, very influenced by Elizabeth Bott at this stage, who I also met at the famous seminar! And she came down and did stuff for us. But it was the book and her methods which are described, unusually fully, that made me see how you could do that. And we spent a lot of time in Swansea talking about social networks and the John Barnes paper on networks and kinship and structures of networks. That was the stuff of the Swansea Department, they would talk about those sorts of things.

PT: What about the idea, that's obviously very important, the idea of the family as a form of transmission and having a positive effect in social change, do you think that came from you?

CB: Yes. Yes. I was, at the same time, because I thought I was writing a book, the other stream – I think I make it clear in the chapter – I was reading the British social mobility literature. And in ways that I could now theorise, but couldn't at the time, knew that the literature was telling me that the occupational structure was prime, and that you measured mobility, strong comparative movement. And there's this quote, it's actually in Lipset and Bendix about middle-class families having nothing to give people, except a good education or something like that, when it was blatantly obvious that, …that they got a lot of start in the housing market, and you couldn't explain people's position in the social structure except through family and kinship.

I think I learnt that in the field. I was actually trying to explain how they were there. I honestly don't think, reflecting on my own experience, because though later, through Joscelyn's mother, we did get marginal advantage in the housing market. Other than having this rented car, we had no advantage in the housing market. We were in rented, rotten rented accommodation, and one of the reasons we were going to be driven out of Swansea is we couldn't afford to go on doing this kind of job. I had to do something else, particularly when Joscelyn wasn't working, and we had the baby, we had Rachel.

And I think…I learnt about what you got from families through the fieldwork, and therefore – though I don't think I do it particularly well – could mount a critique of the classic high modern social mobility studies from Glass through to Lipset and Bendix,

because they didn't tell the truth about the continued importance of property. I absolutely bought the Marxian view that property was important. But I saw that, in many cases, this was not industrial or mercantile property, and started to understand that much of this was domestic.

Didn't really have the full benefit of that until - fantastic important book in my life, [John Rex and Robert Moore] *Race, Community and Conflict* came out, which is the first time I heard the term "housing class". The whole, I mean, that book's wonderful …

6. Gender

(p.37)

But I also - it's prior to there being any kind of gendered understanding of society, it's prior to Germaine Greer coming out, the Women's Movement was hardly anywhere at this stage, I don't think I was particularly sensitive to any of this - although I noticed, in the fieldwork, that there was a gendered way that this stuff got passed down, and that this is quite important. Father/son thing seemed to be more important, I thought, than mother/daughter stuff.

(pp.44-45)

I did fieldwork on the women, they were the people who were around. There aren't many men in *Family and Kinship in East London*, in many cases the blokes weren't around here. And the women, particularly those who were from away, were happier to chat. They had more time, and I think may have, either psychically or socially, have the space to take you in in a way that, I think, some of the locals didn't.

(p.81 - 82)

There's *Doing Sociological Research*, there's *Inside the Whale* and there's a book I edited with Helen Roberts, called Social Researching, which has *The Affluent Worker* reactions in it…

Helen [also] edited a book called *Doing Feminist Research*, which is modelled on *Doing Sociological Research*. I mean, *Social Researching* is really owning up to a realisation

that it's all blokes in *Doing Sociological Research*… It was aggressive aspirant blokes. And Helen, who I know quite well, had a go at me later about that, and also said, "Shall we try and put something together?" because she had done *Doing Feminist Research*. And we put together another one, where at least half the people are women, and it does try to take those kind of issues seriously.

(p.118 –9)

PT: Can I ask you one other thing, though? One of the big changes from '68 on, was the Women's Movement and Gender. How did that affect your thinking in sociology?

CB: … I don't know how sympathetic I was, intellectually, but I was struggling to build some of that stuff into what we were doing, and I talked a lot - I mean, to friends, people like Di Barker, as she then was, Diana Leonard, and also Leonore [Davidoff]. We talked a lot… And I think I was, I would have said that I was actually quite influenced.

Of course, there is the famous paper on marriage that Howard and I wrote, where we spotted that this deferential structure that Howard first wrote about in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, that we could apply that. We were two of the very few blokes who went to the famous 1974 Conference in Aberdeen, which was the first Gender Conference of the BSA, where very few blokes went to it……..

When [Willmott and Young's] *The Symmetrical Family* came out, I opposed the views in that as being rather orthodox and male-centric. I think I began to realise from, for example, Frankenberg's piece that's in the same [book] as the "Deferential Dialectic", that you could re-read all this stuff, you could re-read all your earlier stuff, and other people's work, from a Feminist point of view. I think I was beginning to try and write women back in.

(p.139)

Sociology, during the period I was teaching it, was feminising, and by the time I left, and even more now, Honours students are disproportionately female. First year is still a kind of 60 per cent female, 40 per cent male, but as you go up the system, and the graduate students/Ph. Ds. even out a bit.

7. Kidderminster Study

(p.50)

Lorna [McKee] and my work in Kidderminster is a lot more about how partnerships, normally called marriages, work, in comparatively challenging times. And I think, I almost turned those papers round, I think it tells you quite a lot about marriage, and not all that much about unemployment. It's far closer to Jan Pahl's work than Ray's. The resources of families, or the lack of resources, in difficult circumstances, are clearly [there].

8. Qualitative – Quantitative

(p.39)

PT: And in terms of methods, you combined hard quantitative data with participant observation and informal interviews, didn't you?

CB: Yeah. I knew I had to have some numbers, and I was very taken with what Firth, Forge and Hubert were gathering in Highgate, and also because of the influence of the highly positivistic social mobility studies, I had to sort of count, but I always found I knew they were no way … representative, … But in the end, it seems to me that the doing a survey stuff was a front for doing fieldwork. I think it was an excuse to sit in their kitchens, you know, and talk to them.

9. Fieldwork notebook

(p.42)

PT: Now, this fieldwork notebook that you had, what was in it, though, Colin?

CB: I never taped. I've hardly ever taped. What I would tend to be doing, I had a Roneo'd or cyclostyled aide memoir, one for each family, on which I was writing notes, and sometimes I'd write notes on the back of that, but I would also add, after the event, and sometimes when I was really knackered you'd do it at weekends - remember, I had babies and so on – a baby – I would retrospect, write notes about it at the time. But I also

kept, and have got, a C. Wright Mills type file, because Bill told me to keep a research diary, and I didn't so much keep a diary as keep a small lined notebook in which I wrote quotes, references, occasional things people had told me, and so on, and I still own that!

10. Doing Sociological Research

(pp.42-43 p.82)

I was given Philip Hammond's book by my sister-in-law – Joscelyn's sister. She was assistant Editor of *Encounter*… She gave me Philip Hammond, *Sociologists at Work*, about three months into the fieldwork. And I read, for the first time, what purported to be "owning up accounts", and got very interested in the mechanics of how this was done.… The motivation for *Doing Sociological Research* was partly genuinely to do with teaching research methods.

(pp.78-79)

I think I was clearer when I wrote that, that I thought the [second Banbury] project was a failure, and I was prepared to own up to failure… Why should all fieldwork be a great success? …

I think the piece on the [Banbury] research is more significant than the book, and that's what, I suppose, I was doing. They were rightly, correctly, and understandably, rather resentful… They were talking about professional denigration and professional slander and all the rest of it.

PT: What was slanderous in there, do you think?

CB: I think any account of how research is really done, it wasn't all sweetness and light, , is potentially professionally damaging. Some of those accounts are probably professionally damaging. If it's only about yourself that's all right, but if you're writing about other people and the teamwork, lots of people don't like that… .

(pp.80-81)

Go and read *The Affluent Worker* volumes very carefully, and try and look at their questionnaires. They have suppressed all sorts of stuff about, and never published all sorts of stuff about family relationships. They have information about families, but they never wrote it up. And, indeed, some of the questions, I believe – you might be able to test this – were taken out of the published questionnaire. It's as if the data never happened. That's pure Goldthorpe positivism. I think that's a very interesting story. Jenny Platt has told me that story. I wanted her to write up the production of *The Affluent Worker*. Goldthorpe opposes, for the kind of reasons, in a way, Margaret opposed – science is science is science, and you don't have to make this public. I think that's a grossly misleading thing to have done…

In the first volume in *The Affluent Worker*, where they tell you what else they're going to do, because it's a very curious publication, these little short volumes, not one big book. Why on earth did they do that? I don't even know the answer to that, why it came out in three volumes. The first volume tells you there's going to be a family volume. It never appeared.

11. Insider and Outsider

(p.44)
PT: And do you think you got to see the local side as well as you did the spiralists?

CB: No. No. And part of that was to do with the sheer difficulty of getting into Wales. Bill pointed out to me, and Bill's not a Welsh speaker, but there was a real Welsh middle-class that was Welsh-speaking – senior professors at Swansea - and very important, a Welsh historian, Glenmore Williams, took me to a Welsh Dining Club, and I mention that, saying it's real fieldwork. I couldn't get into that. Several of these people on the estates were Welsh-speaking, but it wasn't the language, I think I didn't understand their world in quite the same way. I, like most of the spiralists, was an outsider, although some of the spiralists are Welsh people and were moving within Wales, or had even come from Swansea. But the world of Rotary, and also, did I miss Freemasonry? … I understand, now, what one might want to know about that. Later on, I got into the really horrid world of Rotary in Banbury, and so on, and understood. I found a lot of the locals in Banbury politically antipathetic. I didn't find the Swansea people politically antipathetic in quite

the same way, but the world of greengrocers and solicitors was quite hard for me to get into.

Also, curiously, a new thought for you. The non-locals hadn't been there terribly long, were quite matey with newcomers. What was very clear was that the locals frequently neither knew the estate, nor did they need me. The people they were at school with, they still had people to play squash with, their mates, their mother was down the road, or whatever. I think that, characteristically, made the fieldwork harder.

12. Fieldwork - gossip

(pp. 45-46)

And hence, the really important insight, that you kind of gossip while you do fieldwork. You could chat on, you and I, and talk about our children, and talk about colleagues we've had, and I think if we, if you weren't doing fieldwork, and you turned the tape off, it's just rolling reciprocity…

I found I could gain enormous amounts by telling people things that I probably - I mean, I don't think it was ever, you know, either salacious or particularly damaging, or probably even terribly confidential. They just wonder, "What does he really do?" "Oh", I said, "You know, he's just a Director of so and so". "Oh!" And I caught a frisson, a couple of times, of where you realised you shouldn't … You know, you feel lack of authenticity in yourself, but also a realisation that they might not want to tell you that, actually, his job's not this, but his job's that, or whatever. Or he's had a bad time at work and he's got sacked from that, but he did that. Which is quite an important thing for me to know, but they won't tell you because you might tell somebody else.

13. Fieldwork – lack of training

(p.48)

PT: So you learnt all these techniques on the ground? You never had any methods training as such.

CB: No. I did talk, we talked about them a lot in the corridors of the Swansea Department, but I was never taught. I had no research training. Well, up to the SSRC, never had any of that.

PT: And how to interview, you just picked that up?

CB: No, I was never taught how to interview. Bill told me that I should get a hair cut! (LAUGHS) That if I was going to move amongst the middle-classes, I'd better look like it! And I found it actually quite difficult to dress appropriately, because I didn't have the proper clothes! I used to wear a fairly respectable brown cardigan, but I didn't have a suit.

14. Anthropology

(p.57)

Yeah, I could have been an anthropologist. No, I think I knew that it was other than a very curious hybrid department, I wasn't a real anthropologist. I hadn't done any foreign language, I hadn't gone somewhere exotic. It wasn't real anthropology. I think I knew it wasn't real anthropology. Nowadays, you know, it looks more real than what most anthropologists do. But it didn't at the time, I think I knew it wasn't. I was working on Modern Britain, and I think I knew I was a sociologist.

15. Diaries

(p.58)

There are extracts from them in the book. They're diaries in the sense that I was collecting contacts, who they saw over periods of time. It was quite technically difficult, even at the time, because the women didn't want to keep diaries of the families, they didn't want to report on their husbands terribly much, but they would report on their own activities, quite happily, and it was who they saw. You could see that some did see kin, they saw their mother twice a week, and others just didn't. It was fairly straightforward stuff.

(p.71)

CB: One of the issues about working together [in Banbury] was, we had to see all each other's materials. You had to be able to communicate with other people, you had to read each other's questionnaires, you had to talk to each other, and there wasn't enough time in the day to keep everybody informed and do the fieldwork. I say, somewhere, that the first time that I kept, literally kept an appointments diary, was in Banbury, the first time in my life became bureaucratised, because you couldn't [just] meet people. We were trying to keep a common record because we also had to report to Margaret what we were doing. So there were office diaries and a communal [diary], and we would write up, and then find that we would violently disagree about what we'd seen.

16. The Second Banbury Study

(pp. 59, 60, 61)

PT: So, to Banbury. Your Tikopia. You once wrote, 'Banbury will forever be the social system with which I compare all else. It is my Nuer land and my Tikopia.

CB: You see, that's there. You see, it was there, I really wanted to be a proper anthropologist! I think that's no longer true. And I went through Banbury fairly recently, and was quite sort of taken aback with the changes. But it was, it was expansive fieldwork. It was a full community. It was a full range, there were poor people, there were titled people. It had a working economy, an aluminium factory. While we were there General Foods moved Maxwell House Coffee and Birds Custard out of the centre of Birmingham to Banbury...

Banbury, a bit like the Tikopia, though it's a different sort of journey, of course. We went there. And when we went there, this is really unreal stuff. Joscelyn and I drove, in the famous Mini van that Joscelyn's father had given us, and when we went there with Rachel, as an 18-month old baby, when we first went there, we camped. We had nowhere, we went to find somewhere to live. We, literally, camped in a field, with the baby - it's unbelievable stuff, what one does as a young person - whilst we tried to find a house or whatever. And somewhat unexpectedly, we had decided - now, I'd have to ask Joscelyn, I can't really remember this - we decided that the answer was buying, because there didn't appear to be anywhere reasonable to rent. And Margaret had, bless her cotton

socks, been writing and ringing people about whether we could lodge with them, but I think Joscelyn and I weren't into lodging with people, and so we bought. And, curiously, all three fieldworkers – Batstone, Murcott and me – we all bought, in Banbury, in 1966, and we couldn't have bought without a deposit paid for by Joscelyn's mother. Classic! It's self-exemplifying in terms of middle-class families! And she gave us the deposit, which I think was probably about £300, because the house cost £3,100, in Box Hedge Road, in Banbury.

The neighbourhood is written up in the Banbury book, known as Wychtree, I shouldn't reveal this, but the neighbourhood, there's a chapter on neighbourhoods in Banbury, we all wrote our own neighbourhoods up. Box Hedge Road was very interesting because it was divided, there was rough Council housing up the end, and there was this kind of more owner-occupier in the middle, where we were, and the difficulties of that road are written up. It's called Witch Tree. You can feel what it was like still, about mid-sixties Oxfordshire, which was still pretty wild in places.

I think, this is almost metaphysical, and I don't really think I understood – I do now – the constraints that anyone who does a replication, is going to be under, if the person who wrote the first study, which is a bloody good book - a bloody good book - the constraints I was actually under, and I don't think, deep down, I didn't own those constraints, I hadn't internalised those constraints. Loads of the trouble there really was, was me not really, really understanding that you didn't have the kind of freedom to do anything you liked. It wasn't your Tikopia, it was Margaret's Tikopia. That's the mistake. Banbury was Margaret's Banbury, and I ought to have understood that…

Now, very very early on, ….the first time I did a paper outside, Ray Pahl invited me to Kent, and I gave a paper on Banbury. I would call it a theoretical paper – a non-data-based – a procedural paper, a paper on what we were going to do, very early on, and I went to Kent to give it. Ray and Dick Scase, and the now dead Paul Stirling were in the audience. And it got me far too locked into what the hell a replication actually was, and were we testing, were we describing social change? And I was conscious of what had happened in Tepotzlan when Oscar Lewis went back to Redfield's Village, and all the rest of it. And also, Ray was was very helpful, but also a very mischievous person, and

he gave me a very hard time on the incoherence of the term "tradition" in *Tradition and Change*, and it shook my confidence, I think, in how the Banbury thing could be done.

It could have been done easily, superficially. And I think the book (*Power, Persistence and Change*, 1975) is astonishingly superficial – our book, not Margaret's. Our book is astonishingly superficial. And in part it was because - well, because I left the project, I suppose - but also I no longer had any faith, belief, in Margaret's *Tradition and Change* model, that there was tradition and then there was the non-tradition. She does - I mean, the terms that we just started to use at those times, and we used to talk about all things "reified", is it a social system? With people, the social system? Is he a traditionalist? Is he a non-traditionalist? We got ourselves in a massive confusion over those sorts of things…

(p.62, p.63, p.64)
There's recently been a radio programme on Banbury, with Margaret.. [*Tradition and Chang*e]... She said, the real difference, in terms of the way the work was done, was that she loved Banbury, she liked being there, it was her first proper job after she graduated. She was an Oxford extra-mural delegacy lecturer. She loved being there. She really liked being in the town and liked the work, liked the people. She said, "None of the people who went on the re-study liked living in Banbury".

I think I will agree to ambivalent, I won't agree to hating it. But she says the difference in the tone, I think she actually said it on the radio, was that she loved being there. And tradition and change, it's not a kind of affectionate book, but there's no disparagement of the place. Ann Murcott really didn't like being there, and I think Eric just got on with things, you know, he just did things. I'm not sure he disliked it.

I can remember,.. that when I went to Essex, one of the first things Joscelyn and I did, and I now have two children, because Luke was born in Banbury… One of the first things we did when we went, came to Essex, [was], we went on the beach at Clacton, just something to do with the children – before term started – just, we arrive, we're talking September or something like this, late summer. The beach was packed, and I can actually remember

not having to watch people and be anonymous. And by the end of two years fieldwork - I lived there for two years, you were not anonymous.

It was almost, you know, "Carry on behaving, anything you do I might write down and use as evidence", or something like this. Going to meetings, say, all the time, and people had half forgotten what you were doing. But, I was, for example, I was observing the Labour Party in Banbury, and they were close mates of mine, really close mates. They even allowed me to go to caucus meetings, not just in the Labour Party, I'd go to the caucus. And they would vote in the caucus, and I was expected to vote! And I found that I had to get my hand up early, otherwise I might have actually been deciding policy! (LAUGHS) And they had so forgotten that I was a fieldworker. Not only was I not a councillor, I was actually a member of the Labour Party.

PT: I think you said that Ann was disapproved of, because she was working as a mother of young children.

CB: Yes…. not because she was working, but she'd had a baby as an undergraduate. She was an Edinburgh anthropologist, by the way. She'd already had a baby while she was a student, and she was not an older student, she went at conventional age. Very very middle-class.. And interesting, you see, Joscelyn was there, and not working, with two babies, and Ann was working. Now, I don't think anybody, <u>anybody</u>, took on what the kind of role conflict, and what this might be like. And for [Ann] to do fieldwork other than as - I think she actually uses the phrase, "anthropological mum" - she could be an anthropological mum. But to do other sorts of things, and to do this kind of endless local Civil Society stuff in the evening…. Ann clearly didn't do as much, and I'm not saying I was a workaholic, I mean, I'm probably totally exploiting Joscelyn and everybody else, I did it all the time. I mean, you could never not do it. You know, "Oh, we can count people on Sundays as well"! (LAUGHS) My first ever, <u>ever</u>, serious publication, is in *New Society*, and it's called, "Who goes to church on Sunday?" And it's a religious census in Banbury. Because one of the things I discovered, a great insight in my life is – that's why I was glad you asked about religion – far more people were religiously active at the level of going to church, than were politically active in Banbury, and yet we spent so much more time looking at local politics than we did about religion. Partly because

religion's a more private thing, and it doesn't necessarily work in the wider social structure, but I did things like religious censuses as well. ..

(p.66)
CB: Now, fascinatingly, we have an office. We needed to call ourselves something. And we called ourselves, not "The Banbury Community Study", which probably would have been better, but "Banbury Social Survey". And I think, underestimated, in Margaret's mind set, if she was in that social survey tradition, which we can't grandiosely put back to Booth, but we can certainly put through the Simeys' work in Liverpool, and that kind of [tradition]. Again, by then, I was a brash young man.

(p.66)
But that [course] was a vital fieldwork thing. That was a big class. Thirty, thirty-five people used to come, and we took them, mainly me, but with a little bit of help from Eric and Ann, literally almost through the Banbury book, chapter by chapter. Also, those people became fieldworkers, they were the people who counted at churches, and things like this.

You must remember that many locals in Banbury knew about the first study, because it was taught in the school. It was used in the school in kind of social studies. There was a row [of copies], about that wide, in the Public Library, of *Tradition and Change*, many of which, as Margaret will tell you, had - where there are pseudonyms, and in the ideal typical persons in *Tradition and Change* that she created - have names of real people written against them, in the Banbury Library. And in many cases, wrongly, because these were composites, these were ideal types. Again, that reifies how you look …

(pp.68 - 70)
PT: I think one thing that is interesting is this combination of a survey sample with observation…

CB: I think, probably, that's what I understood community studies to be, and I wanted to do a community study. You know, I was in love with the literature. And I didn't understand you can't do a community study of a town of probably about 19,000 then, or

was it 19 in the first study, I think it's 27,000 people by the time we go back. But you can't observe, it cannot be your Tikopia.

I found a quote, which I may or may not have used elsewhere, from someone who influenced me enormously, who I've been on a pilgrimage to see, William Foot-Whyte – *Street Corner Society* … In a piece he wrote, it's not in *Street Corner Society*, he said he was trying to build up a sociology based on observed interpersonal events.

I read that phrase whilst I was doing the Banbury fieldwork. And I came, slowly, to the realisation that you couldn't build up a sociology of Banbury, built on observed interpersonal events. I think I wasn't equipped, intellectually, I didn't know how to integrate with the survey. I didn't know how to put the stuff together. And at the time, and it was my incompetence and inexperience – massive inexperience.

If you add to that the now very understandable, but at the time, utterly incomprehensible, inability of us to bureaucratise and work in a hierarchical way and get things done, and work out who was to do what, and authority, and how it was to happen and all the rest of it, meant that we just didn't work very well together.

We were at some distance from Swansea. You've got to remember that Ann and Eric had only been interviewed in Swansea, but they got their jobs on graduation, by the way, without any post-graduate degrees... We all move to Banbury. I think three people in the field with those personalities and those genders, with Margaret 250 miles away, it was a recipe for conflict and disaster.

(pp73 –74)
PT: There was another thing about the design, that you mentioned, that you felt the survey was not deep enough to really be meaningful.

I think it was too sociographic. There's very few attitudinal questions in it, very little about culture. We were counting, in a rather narrow sort of way. I think I always thought it was – a term I probably didn't use at the time – under-theorised. Why were we doing it? We were counting because we were counting…

We hadn't theorised the difference between class, status and other dimensions. It was all terribly occupational against the Registrar General. Ann has said to me since, and she's right, that notwithstanding the fact that Margaret was a kind of proto-Feminist, you couldn't handle female occupations at all well, or female activity. Households were classed, as they are in social mobility studies, by the occupation of the man. I think I found none of that stuff terribly interesting, in the end.

We weren't even thinking about changes. I've thought about it a lot since, so I know we weren't thinking about it then, changes in the British class structure between the period of reconstruction, say '45-'50, and the period of the beginning of affluence. If only words like that had been used in the second Banbury Study, the book would be a lot more interesting. You see, *The Affluent Worker* wasn't out. The first *Affluent Worker* article is in the first volume of *Sociology*, which didn't come out until 1967. We didn't know how to conceptualise affluence, and affluence and the class structure.

In fact, there's a lot more that could have been said. The new Council Estates in Banbury were the new affluent workers, and the people who moved with Birds Custard and General Foods, as a whole, were the new affluent workers. There would have been more interesting things to say, only I don't think we knew how to say them, at the time…

(pp.76 –77)
PT: Why do you think it's a failure? In what sense do you mean that?

CB: I don't think it adds much to the first study. I think the first study is a gigantically important book in British social science. I think you have to read *Tradition and Change* if you're interested in modern British society. I don't think you have to read the follow-up study at all, I think it's a great disappointment.

It's also a book written by a committee, and a committee that was disagreeing with each other.

1. T. S. Simey was Professor of Social Administration at Liverpool, and author of *Principles of Social Administration* (1937), as well as of colonial social policy in the West Indies.

17. Community studies

(p.91)

It's a pretty odd field, because the people who do it, by and large, like me, will tell you there's no such thing as community. Yet we go somewhere to do something, and then we do everything we possibly can there. But don't quite go the next step of talking about what Margaret would call "local social systems", because Margaret wrote quite a good article in the *British Journal of Sociology*, on "Local Social Systems", which again, I didn't believe, it was a bit too Parsonian, in a very curious sort of way……. But I, somehow, didn't want community studies to turn into this sort of stuff. I wanted to gather something about reality in these places. And an important community study is *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. I think that kind of Goffmanesque stuff is also quite important… There isn't a powerful theory in the sense that, well, class, or even issues of solidarity or whatever, it just isn't there.

PT: And it could be said that your critique of the theories was the death of this tradition?

CB: Yeah, and I feel guilty. Yeah, I think, to a certain extent, that it was. It's rather odd, isn't it, *to write* … I mean, I've learnt so much from that field, and parts of it I really really like, some of my favourite social sciences. And I suppose other people do write critiques and live off it. But then, you know, you become famous for writing this book that killed the field that you're meant to be in love with and so on. *Race, Community and Conflict* is a good community study. That just shows you what can be done, and is the most important book written on institutional racism ever, probably, and it was done in a community.

18. Farmers Project

(p.102, p.104)
In the tiny British literature on community studies, one of the things that is said by Frankenberg, for example, is "There are no studies of big farms". The really fascinating thing about community studies is family farming, it's small-scale farming, it's where family and kinship is important. Nobody studied capitalist farmers, where, presumably, they were going to say kinship isn't so important..

We set out to interview every other farmer who owned over a thousand acres in the four East Anglian counties …and we got about 78 per cent.

(pp.105-106)
You know the joke about self-rated? In the big methodological debate in the early seventies, about how you would get at people's class position. All those stupid questions about, "Some people say, the workforce is like a football team, and we all play on the same side", but you have to say, "If you had to [choose]…?" And one of the paradigms is, "If you had to say you were one of the following, what would you say?" having wittered all this through, and people eventually grudgingly saying, "Middle class", "Working class". And we had this wonderful guy, we gave him the list, and he looked at it, and he said, "None of those. I'm a squire"! (LAUGHS)

So we had this thing about "self-rated squire" – in terms of the language of the farmers! And I saw they were self-rated squires! I did interview a guy who was self-rated as a squire, but another guy, who drove a Ferrari, had only three workers. The squire had something like 24. The guy with only three workers was farming more. No nonsense about belonging to Unions, at either end of the spectrum. But one only had three, they were paid very well, they were terribly responsible, they just got on with all the stuff, and are pulling loads of money out, and they knew what they were taking out money for, because he was buying property elsewhere. The squire was maintaining a style of life and all that. They were almost adjacent to each other, so you could actually see them, and no geographic determinism……...

Oh yes,.. I would ask to see lots of things, they would take you round and they would show you things, and you would walk round with them. I've interviewed on a combine

harvester (LAUGHS), I was taking notes bouncing down the field! They take you into the house, you sit in the kitchen. There's not, in many of these farms, nothing very dramatic, because arable farms aren't dramatic, there's no cows, and the speed of change isn't all that great. But they would stand and talk to you, and talk you through the history of the landscape and things like this. Some of them were very into it, they'd show you where they'd pulled the trees down and things like that. And so it was doing fieldwork. Classically, the survey was an excuse to be *in situ*, you know, you had a reason for being in somebody's house, which you wouldn't otherwise have had, although you write down the answers and all the rest of it. The actual questions are at the back end of the *Property, Paternalism and Power* book, the questionnaire, the questions are there.

19. On sociology

(p.138)

I also think I had, and still have, a very strong line on sociology being important and significant, and it's a good education and it gives you a way of thinking about things. You're a better person for taking this all on.

20. On celebrity

(pp.15-16)

I think what I've enjoyed in later life, is a degree of within very narrow tiny bounds, a degree of celebrity. I quite like that. I like being a celebrity on this campus, because people know who I am, and what I do, and, you know, you can get away with anything, and I quite like that. But that's the limits of what it is. It's not really respectability. You know, I've managed to do it without wearing a tie! (LAUGHS).