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# Interview with Professor Hilary Land

## Part 1: on her early involvement

So how I got to be on the project and things?

**Yes.**

Right! Well I, my first degree I did in Bristol. I got a rather bad degree in maths, not least because it wasn't something I particularly enjoyed. When I graduated in '63 I went to LSE to do the diploma in social administration, because that was the first step to becoming a social worker, which is what I thought I wanted to do. And in fact what it was was really a wonderful conversion course to the social sciences, and compared with doing maths, it was an absolute sort of eye opener, it was wonderful, and I thoroughly enjoyed it, and my tutor was Brian Abel-Smith. And he was a very inspiring teacher, and he also liked somebody who was prepared to argue with him, so that was fine.

So it just happened that at the end of that year when I finished my diploma, instead of going on to do the applied bit of the social work training, which was another year, Brian and Peter got money from Rowntree for this big poverty survey, and they advertised research assistantships, and I applied. Brian encouraged me to apply, and I got one of them. So I had no plans to go into the academic world with my rather bad degree, and ended up becoming a research assistant at LSE. So it was all a bit unplanned and I was in the right place at the right time.

So I started in the autumn of 1964 and the first things that I worked on were, because they'd only just got the money, they'd hardly kind of thought about how they were really going to use it in detail, so I was working on something that became poor and the poorest, which was that very boring occasional paper which looked at the family expenditure surveys of 1952, I think, and 1960, and showed from the figures that it wasn't just poverty amongst pensioners and people who were sick and disabled that the government should be worried about, they should also be worried about families. And this was an eye opener because everyone thought that if you're in work, as most people were, I mean if the unemployment figures went up to a quarter of a million that made headline news in the early

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'60s, so it was a shock to discover that families with children where the father was in work were poor/

So although it makes very boring reading, I think, the report, it nevertheless started to, one of the things that started to put poverty, child poverty back on the map. And I think it was published in '65, and it was deliberately published just before Christmas to kind of pull the heart strings, and I remember going to Toynbee Hall, was the press, you know, you had a sort of press, what do you call, press conference, and I remember feeling so excited that here I was in the middle of sort of making news. And it did get, in those days it did get an awful lot of coverage.

So that was really very exciting. But after that, after sort of tidying up poor and the poorest I then was responsible for doing one of the pilot studies prior to the big national survey. I did a pilot study of large families. Dennis Marsden looked at lone mothers and John Veit-Wilson looked at people, adults with disabilities or chronic illness, so there were those three studies. Adrian Sinfield had already done, because he was working as a lecturer at Essex, where Peter was, you see what I mean about the bang, he had done one on long-term unemployed. So that was really the first study that served as a pilot, and then we did those three. John actually never finished his quite because he went off to Newcastle to a lectureship there, but Dennis and I finished ours and they were published, I've forgotten exactly when, I think in '67 or '68. But I had to wait an awful long time for the Department of Social Security to come up with a sample.

We were going to do a sample of families with five or more children in any Greater London borough basically, so it was a very big geographical area, but that's what was needed to find, I think the sample was 150 families. And to start with, the DSS said that we had to give, they would write to the families, because they were using the family allowance records, and ask them to agree to be interviewed. Well we only got about 30 responses back, and it took months of negotiation to get them to write to those who hadn't replied saying please let us know if you don't wish to be interviewed, and again about 30 replied saying no, we absolutely don't want to be interviewed.

So the rest were approachable. I mean some we lost because they'd already moved. I ended up with nearly 80 families I think that I did manage to interview. I think I went on the end of every bus route in South London doing interviews.

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And, but whilst I was working, waiting for them to produce a sample for me, I mean not only was I doing my questionnaire but I looked at the history of family allowances, because again they weren't in the news much at that time. Even Enoch Powell wrote an article saying well people have nearly forgotten them now, they don't know what they're for, and it was only when child poverty was rediscovered that people started to say but what about family allowances

So I looked at the history and in particular I read Eleanor Rathbone's book, the *Disinherited Family*, which she'd published in 1924. And she was a feminist who campaigned for family allowances, well, all her adult life really. She started thinking about it when she was one of the first economics graduates at Oxford University, and was absolutely committed to not only that children should be recognised outside of the wages system but that the mother should be the parent that receive money for the children, and that we shouldn't channel children's money via the father. If you want it spent on the children, you give it to the mother, something this government I think has forgotten, or prefers not to think about.

So I found her work really inspiring, and my next job for Roy Parker after I left the poverty survey when the money ran out, I did have a chance to actually write and publish a history of family allowances as part of change, choice and conflict in central policy. So it stood me in good stead, though it didn't actually directly feed into the big national study. But, and of course the other thing that I worked on once I'd finished my pilot study and written it up, was the sample for the national survey. And luckily at LSE at the time, there was Professor Stewart and Professor Durbin, who were leading experts in sampling, and they advised us about the sample.

So we ended up doing a three stage stratified sample, which would have enabled us to work out confidence limits and error factors, though I don't think Peter ever got round to using it. But it would have been possible to have done that with that particular design. So in some ways it's a shame that it wasn't done, but given that it didn't get finished being written up and published until the late '70s, I think, the team had all long gone so it didn't happen. So I wasn't responsible for the design, Durbin and Stewart were responsible for that, but I was responsible for actually working out how to draw the sample. And because Peter in particular was very keen on making sure that we picked up people who weren't necessarily on the electoral register, we had to look at the rating records as well and include

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them, if there were any gaps. And I think we probably ended up with perhaps 17 or so more addresses than we might have done if we'd just relied on the electoral register, and I obviously don't think it was worth the effort. The effort would have been better spent on trying to chase up some of the noncontacts actually from the sample that we did draw, but anyway Peter was very keen to do that. If Peter was very keen on something, it was very hard to convince him otherwise, so.

So really my main responsibility in the early days was the sample. I mean I drew some of the samples in London, but we relied on other people to draw the samples elsewhere, because it was the whole of the UK and it was before the troubles in Northern Ireland, so we interviewed in Northern Ireland, including in Belfast, and it was based on constituencies in the first instance and then wards within constituencies. So it included Scotland and Wales as well as England, so it was a very wide sample. And obviously one needed people located in those particular places to do it.

So that was my first major contribution to the actual national survey, and then I was responsible for writing some of the preliminary checking programmes, to make sure that, because it was all punched on cards in those days to go into the LSE computer, and against our advice they were multi-punched, which means you use the top, it's the top positions which makes it much more difficult to play with, but anyway. I wrote a programme which would check for consistency, particularly on the data relating to income, you know, benefits, earnings, savings, where you've got a nice number so that you could just make sure that the things added up and that somebody didn't write down that they were actually getting ten times what the components added up to, if you see what I mean.

So that was really the last thing that I did on the actual national survey, once the data was in, was to really start the preparations for checking the data prior to the actual looking at analysis of looking at, I wasn't involved with the analysis as such because the money had run out by then. That was the end of 1968 I left, and then worked for Roy Parker on this other project. So that was broadly sort of what my major contributions were, and I learnt a huge amount. I mean obviously I learnt methodological things about designing questionnaires and analysing the responses and interviewing and so on, as well as a lot about sampling and a lot about writing checking programmes, which in those days it was Fortran, so it was not very user friendly, and the computer at LSE, the

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capacity of computers then was not very great, so I was always writing things that were too big for the computer to cope with. So I had to think of ways of scaling it back. So it was a mix really of different methods and things

So the other important thing is that because I'd done a science degree and my A-levels, which were physics and maths, didn't require writing essays and things, I didn't write at all well, and Brian and Peter between them taught me to write. I think if you go back to the long interviews that the archives have in Essex, you'll see, Peter says there that I couldn't write, and he was absolutely right. But between Brian and, it wasn't just Peter, it was Brian as well, they both, and other members of the team, helped me to write, so that I produced, as Dennis said, just try one idea per paragraph. You might find it a little easier for people to read. So I learnt a lot of interesting things, and I worked with some very interesting and experienced people.

## **Part 2: on relationships and survey development**

**So were there any changes in working practices over time, over the period of time? Was there any kind of change of direction or?**

Well I'm not quite sure what you mean by working practices as such. I mean there was this huge change in the middle when the Labour government came in and Dick Crossman, Richard Crossman became, headed up the new Department of Health and Social Security, and invited Brian Abel-Smith to become one of his advisers. And that meant that Brian gave up jointly directing the poverty survey, because in effect he was seconded to the DHSS, which left Peter kind of holding the baby. And it was roughly at the time when we'd more or less got all the data but it was the writing up which Brian was, you know, they were going to do, the plan was, I understand it was would have done it jointly.

So in a sense Peter was left with this huge amount of data, the money running out and Brian off to the DHSS. And part of the problem was that what made it worse I think for Peter was that Dick Crossman and Peter, although they worked very well together when they were members of the Fabian Society in the late '50s and early '60s, writing about pensions and so on, once the Labour government came in in, was it '64, then those who criticised Labour government policy were

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regarded as traitors really. So Richard Titmuss became Deputy of the National Assistance Board, which later became the Supplementary Boundary Commission, so he was well and truly a sort of paid up member of the Labour party, and Peter's work on poverty amongst pensioners, which he did in the early '60s, with Dorothy Wedderburn amongst others, was critical of pension policy

And so Crossman, and they published, was it the circumstances of old people or something like that, showing that pensioner poverty was still an issue and that too heavy reliance on means tested benefits rather than having a proper national insurance state pension was still very stigmatising, and a third of old people weren't claiming it, pensioners weren't claiming the top up that they were entitled to. And as a result of Peter's work the government actually did another study of old people, and I think they hoped the circumstances of old people, a national one obviously with a bigger sample, hoping that it would disprove Peter's figures, but they didn't. And I remember Peter coming back and telling us that he'd met Crossman when he was giving a lecture, I think at the Cambridge Union or something, and Crossman had come up to him and sort of said very crossly I expect you're pleased now to see that your research findings were proved right, and Peter said no, I wish that they'd been proved wrong and that there were fewer pensioners in poverty.

So there was this problem about the sort of political issue about if you were a Labour party supporter, and you'd been fighting for Labour policies in the 13 years that the Tories had been in in the '50s and early '60s, what was your position when, how did you respond to a Labour government that doesn't implement the kind of policies that you thought they were committed to? And Peter was very outspoken and he was chair of the Child Poverty Action Group, which had been formed in 1965, and he and Tony Lynes, who was one of the first directors, and then Frank Field, who wasn't an MP at that time, he and Frank were always writing both critical letters into the press, as well as to government departments and the Prime Minister.

So they were seen rather as attacking from the outside, whereas in a sense Brian was joining the government on the inside, and although Brian and Peter had worked very closely together because Peter had been at LSE, and worked very closely with Titmuss too, in fact Brian Abel-Smith, Peter Townsend and Tony Lynes were known as the Titmice, because they were a sort of team that were always writing about social security and poverty and so on. So the break in that

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relationship, well, it was a break in the relationship, it wasn't just that Brian had another opportunity and he took it, it was that it was a kind of sense of betrayal I think in a way. And we felt rather, I remember, as a team felt rather betrayed by Brian going off and we sort of thought that he should, the poverty survey was going to be more important than telling Crossman what to do about pensions.

But actually I think, and Peter said this to me not that long ago before he died, that actually he realises now just how much Brian did, not just on the main planks of social security, but in particular he did an enormous amount of valuable work on pensions for, and support for people who were disabled or chronically ill, because they'd been more or less ignored in the Beveridge Report. It was a huge and growing gap, and you had to be a war pensioner or someone who'd been industrially injured really to be covered by the Beveridge proposals, and if you weren't one of those, there was very little apart from the means tested national assistance for you.

So I think after many years Peter revised his view about Brian, but at the time we did feel very let down really. And we sort of, I think we pointed out to Brian that Charles Booth was going to be remembered more for the work that he did on the poverty survey at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century than he would for his views on pensions, but I suspect history might show, prove us wrong really, that actually Brian's work was really very important at that time. And I know Barbara Castle found his work and support inside government invaluable. So, you know, it's hard to know, with hindsight I suspect Brian may have done the wrong thing, but at the time we felt rather bereft.

**Okay, thank you, so that was an important kind of turning point then really.**

Yes, it was, it was. And I mean Brian and Peter barely spoke to each other for about ten years afterwards. I mean it really did make a huge rift, and it's a shame because they'd worked, well, a) they were very close friends, but also they'd worked very closely together and written together, so I think it was a loss for both of them really. But anyway they did finally kind of make their peace. But by then, you know, the poverty survey had been published, and it was out the way, so.

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**Yeah, well thank you. And I want to ask you about the kind of ethos of the team, of how did you build an understanding of values and the way the questions would be asked and the kind of standards that you would have, how did you establish all of that?**

Well, you have to remember that I was based in London, at Skepper House on Endsleigh Street, with John Veit-Wilson when he was working on his study. And Dennis Marsden was in Essex, and by then Peter had been made chair of the sociology, the first chair of the Sociology Department in what was then the New University of Essex. So, and I, we were with the, at LSE and Brian Abel-Smith in a sense had oversight of our work. So it was already split, it was on two sites. But in London, London was where we had basic most of the administrative support, so Sheila Benson did a lot of the administrative work associated with the, you know, I'm sure she typed, she probably typed the questionnaires over and over, and was very involved with the organisation of the interviews and so on.

I really didn't have much to do with that. I mean Marie Brown was based at Skepper House and although she did a lot of the interviews, she was very involved in establishing the fieldwork and briefing the interviews. I mean I remember interviewers coming to Skepper House and being briefed, but I don't think I was part of the, I'm sure, I don't think I went to the meetings. I might have met them over lunch or something, but that wasn't my kind of concern really. So, and then the last year I worked on the project I was actually based at LSE in the main building, in the computer centre, because it made more sense for me to be there when I was writing programmes, rather than stuck up at Skepper House where they had a Hollerith machine, but that wouldn't be any use to me.

So in that sense we more or less did our own thing really. I mean we had project meetings, but not that frequently that I remember, you know, and we sent things to each other. And in effect I think really Peter wrote the questionnaire, as he said, you know, he'd been waiting all his life to ask these questions, and when it turned out, when you see the questionnaire, it's a book! Was it 17 pages or something? When we tried to say isn't this a bit too long, you ought to cut this out, no, no, I've been waiting to ask all these questions for so long, it's like asking me to cut my right arm off. So he wouldn't shorten it.

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So really Peter, well, and Brian too, but mainly Peter, because I don't think Brian had ever been involved in fieldwork of that kind before, whereas Peter had. When he was at the Institute of Community Studies, I mean that's where he started, and he was an anthropologist by background, so, you know, for Peter he was much more comfortable with fieldwork, I think. Brian had a degree in economics so that wasn't his particular method of working really. So I mean there were other colleagues, some of them involved with the poverty survey, some of them not, based at Skepper House, people like Sally Sainsbury, and then Blevin Davis and Mike Reading were working on school meals and services like that. So there were other research assistants based up at Skepper House.

So in a sense I felt I was part of that community rather than specifically solely part of the poverty survey. Because really there weren't very many of us there, I mean it was not a large team, and the interviewers, I mean the ones who could easily get to London were briefed at Skepper House, but the others, of course you didn't bring someone down from Glasgow to be briefed about the survey. I mean people went up there and briefed them there, so one wasn't, it wasn't a big team in that, or didn't feel like a big team in that sense, because one didn't have contact with those literally on the ground, or at least I didn't.

**And when the survey was being developed, did you have any chance to, apart from you said it should be shorter, did you have any chance to comment on the questions?**

Yes, I think, I'm sure, yes, we commented, and obviously what we'd learnt from doing our own studies, our own pilots obviously, some of those questions we could say, you know, look this one really worked. I mean one of the things I remember I was surprised at, I thought when it came to large families one of the most sensitive areas, remember this was mid '60s, but I would find difficult to ask or people might be shy about answering were issues relating to birth control. But that wasn't a problem. The most sensitive question I could ask, particularly were the poorer mothers was when did you last have a new pair of shoes or a new coat, because many of them, they hadn't had a new winter coat for perhaps twenty years, and for me that was a real shock that they didn't really have a pair of good outdoor shoes. And I hadn't realised that people were poor enough to, that clothing was, particularly for the mother, who wanted to make sure the children wore reasonable clothes because they would be picked on at school if they didn't.

I mean that's what they worried about, was not being able to send the kids to school properly dressed, or at least with a proper uniform. And also they didn't like, the mothers felt ashamed to go to the school if they weren't well dressed. They felt the teacher would take no notice of them. So for me one of the really important things was what one looked like, how one presented oneself in public was actually really very important, and one of the markers of poverty was feeling that you couldn't put your best face forward really. So when it came to looking at the sort of indicators of poverty, you know, which people are very rude about, just because you haven't, you know, you couldn't send Christmas cards, that doesn't mean you're poor, well actually it does, because it's a way of keeping contact with your family, and if you fail to do that at Christmas, then you've failed in a very significant way.

So some of those sorts of, I think particularly when it came to looking at what should we include as indicators of poverty in terms of people's daily lives, I think particularly Dennis and I fed in quite a lot of stuff from what we'd learnt from the pilots that we'd done. But I don't remember, well I suppose we must have done, but it doesn't sort of stick particularly in my mind, except as I say when it came to what are some of the key indicators of poverty.

### **Part 3: on fieldwork and data handling**

**Were you involved in actually asking those questions and did you do the fieldwork as well?**

No, I didn't, no. The only fieldwork I did was connected with the study of large families. So, as I say, my input was around the sample, and making sure that that got drawn properly, and then the preliminary, well, data cleaning really. So I was a sort of number cruncher more than, well not, you know, once I'd done my pilot I was much more of a number cruncher really.

**Yeah. And how were the relationships between the team members or between you and other team members? Did you feel there was much support, did you feel there was difficulties, tensions that you're happy to talk about, or?**

Well, as I say, the major issue arose from Brian kind of bobbing out at quite a crucial time. No, I mean I think sometimes Sheila Benson got a bit anxious about the sample and drawing the sample, so she and I sometimes had a rather frisky relationship. Although afterwards we got on perfectly okay, but there were times when I think she felt a bit, sometimes a bit sort of overwhelmed by it really. But apart-

**She wasn't sure of the sample, or she'd...?**

Well, I don't know, I think it was an awful lot for one person to do, and if you were having queries from people based all over the country and you were having to deal with them quickly, it was, I think there was quite a lot on her plate. I suspect she probably needed more support. I mean I know Marie Brown gave her a lot of support because she had a lot of experience of, because I think at time she'd worked for government social surveys, she'd had a lot of experience interviewing and so on, and there were other people like Colin Jacobson I think, I'm never quite sure whether he was on the payroll as such, but he was based, he was involved with the property survey and he was involved in some of the issues around the sample and computing and things. So there were sort of people round the edges who were also based at Skepper House who got drawn in from time to time, as I recall.

**Okay. And was there any kind of emotional impact on the people doing the research, either learning about or being reminded of the difficulties that people were facing, do you think?**

Well, yeah, I mean I did find it, my poor flatmate, yes, if you'd come, if I'd interviewed a really poor family, or a family that was really struggling, I mean it's very draining and upsetting, and so being able to go back to Skepper House and just tell someone about it and people who were interested, and as I say, my poor flatmate at the time, she still remembers it, you know, the way you sort of offload it as it were, or at least talk about it and share it, was really important. And one of the things that we did agree to do was that the families, it was a bit arbitrary, but the large family study, I don't think we did it for the national one, I'm not sure, those that I thought were really struggling, we did send, we did pay them for the interview.

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They didn't know that at the time, but afterwards we would send them, I think it was £5, which at that time was worth quite a lot, so we did sort of thank them in kind. And Brian, there was one family who was in a terrible housing situation, waiting to be rehoused and the children were ill because the place was so damp, and Brian did write, with the permission of the family, did write to I think it was Haringey local authority, to the housing department, and he did, he was instrumental in getting them rehoused. So there was a sense of well let's see whether we can make a difference, however small. If there was something we could do, we did try and do it. Which is probably against all the rules, but that's what we did, so that made one feel a little bit better. And of course it did feed into the campaign for higher family allowances and the Child Poverty Action Group and Shelter had just started at that time.

And we did an awful lot of public speaking. We went to all kinds of groups and spoke to them about poverty. One was invited by all sorts of people to talk about poverty, because it was news, and I mean I remember going to speak to a meeting of the Cooperative Women's Guild somewhere in Surrey I think, and afterwards they gave me all these dolls to take back to the families that I'd interviewed. So I travelled back on the tube with a great armful of dolls, which I actually took to the Family Service Unit, but. So there were a lot, all sorts of weird and wonderful organisations invited people to go and speak, because I did an awful lot of speaking for the Child Poverty Action Group really, talking about my findings.

So that also was, and we wrote quite a lot of articles and things like that, I mean little things in the newspaper and did things on, sometimes on the radio or the television. I mean I remember being interviewed by a couple of television producers, very young, not much older than me at the time I don't think, who came and they wanted to meet some really poor families, could I introduce them to some and I said well no, not without their permission. Because they were grumbling, the ones that they had got through social, you know, through the Family Service Unit or something, they didn't look poor enough. So I explained that I could, you know, that I could write to them and ask if they would agree, but whether they'd reply or not, because their lives were pretty busy with at least five children, if you're on a tight budget you don't have time to write letters very often, couldn't I phone them up? Well these were, I said these families don't have enough beds to sleep in, they don't have telephones.

So, you know, there was an awful lot of ignorance about poverty at that time. I mean hopefully that's not what somebody would say, the television producer would say today, but. So we did quite a lot, I mean and that helped one think that well, perhaps we can make a little bit of difference at the margins really.

**And when you kind of made these, gave these thank you gifts, was that decided sort of along the way in the team, or did...?**

No, I just decided. Well I think I asked Brian, I mean I probably told Brian, I mean because I mean it wasn't my £5 notes I was putting in. I've forgotten now how they made the payments, but anyway, whatever, or maybe I claimed, I can't remember the mechanics of it, but basically Brian took my word for it. I mean that's how it worked. It was pretty arbitrary in that sense. I mean that's just how we did it. He just trusted me to choose the one. Because my sample, because it was based on family allowance records, they weren't all poor. I mean the wealthiest family I think was getting £7,000 a year. Well I was only being paid £700 a year when I first became a research assistant, so there was a big earnings range, income range, and so some of them clearly were fine, whereas the others that were really struggling. So we did make a little bit of difference hopefully. But as I say it's probably, these days one wouldn't be allowed, the ethics committee would probably want to look at it and sorts, but they weren't quite so careful in those days.

**And did, was there any use of paradata in the research?**

Well mine was nearly all notes. I mean the questionnaire was a bit tick box or you just had square boxes that you put figures in, and then the rest of it was stuff that I either wrote in the interview or wrote up afterwards in my notebook. I mean sometimes writing notes in the interview was quite tricky because you'd be sitting in the one warm room in the house, the children, and there were at least five, remember, and sometimes, the largest family was 14, would be watching what, you know, they'd be all over you trying to take your pencil, watching or reading what you were writing. So the opportunity to take careful notes was certainly not there for every interview that you did. So you had to rely on writing perhaps just a word down to trigger one's memory and to write it up as soon afterwards as possible.

**And how was that used, the paradata then, was it...?**

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Well that was the basis of, I mean my book on large families, I mean that's, I use, I mean I quote basically from those notes. I think I've still got some of the notes actually. But, so that's how we did that, you know, it wasn't, I didn't record anything. I don't think Dennis, neither Dennis nor I recorded things, you know, in a sort of audio sense. It was paper and questionnaire and pencils basically. Which again I know these days we wouldn't do, but that's what we did. So I mean I developed a coding frame to analyse some of the data, and then used some of the more vivid quotes in my actual piece that I wrote when I wrote it up. So that's how I, so it was a mix really of things, but it wasn't all coded very tightly, and I think it shouldn't have been, because it was a pilot after all and was exploring things, so it would have been foolish to try to prejudge too much. But I think the work that Dennis and I did in particular meant that it was possible to do a bit more coding for the main study, well that was the idea anyway, and I think it did work, at least for some of it.

**Well I just need to ask you if you could tell me the story of the data entry problems, do you know what I'm talking about?**

You mean punch cards and things, you mean?

**I think so, yeah.**

Well it's just that they were on these, the ones they used to sort on a Hollerith machine. I've forgotten who did the data entry, I don't know because I wasn't involved in the actual physical side of it, but it was always better if you didn't use the top two holes. Because, I don't, I've forgotten why now, it just made it harder to run them through. Otherwise I think you, I think, did you have, I think you had ten holes and then you had 11 and 12, and having the 11 and 12 made it, and also we had, I don't know how many cards, maybe it was, how many pages did the questionnaire have?

**I can't remember off the top of my head. About 40 or something.**

Maybe it was 17 punched cards per household or something like that. I mean it was a huge number, well it goes back to this handling huge amounts of data at a time when computers were not really very sophisticated in terms of handling large amounts of data. Now it would be much easier to enter that sort of data,

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but we'd only moved a little bit beyond, you know, in 1968, you were still using punch cards. So it was, it was better than the old Hollerith machines that you sort of chucked around, you know, and sorted, but not that much better in some ways.

**And then there was a move of the data from Essex to LSE, or the other way round?**

Would have been the other way round, I think.

**The other way round, yeah.**

I don't know what that involved. As I say, my final year was, on the study was really spent based, physically based in LSE and not at Skepper House, so I wouldn't have seen what was going on there, if you see what I mean. I mean some of, I must have had some of the data to play with, to make sure that my programme worked, so it must have been still there then. I guess it must have moved after I left. Because I had to test out my programme to make sure it did pick up the inconsistencies that I'd hoped it would.

## **Part 4: on the research outputs**

**Okay. And how was it decided on the kind of outputs from the research, whether it was writing a book or giving talks?**

Well it was clear from the outset that we were all going to write them up as books or, I mean mine was in the occasional paper series at LSE, and although I know Brian had had problems with some of his other researchers about authorship, there was never any question that I would write it up and it would be, my name would, I would be the author. Whereas this hadn't always been acceptable with some of the other things that, other projects that Brian had been involved with. So I never had a problem about, it was just assumed if it was good enough it would be published and my name would be on the front, and that's what happened. So I did manage to learn to write well enough for it to be published in the end, and Dennis' likewise.

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I mean he, well Dennis was much more experienced, I mean he'd written his book on education in the working class and other things. I mean Dennis and Peter I felt reading their work that they were almost novelists, I mean they had a lovely use of words, they could write in very vivid language, and so their books, if you read Peter's early studies of old people, they really come alive. He describes their circumstances and the old person that he's interviewing in a very perceptive and warm way, and you get the same feeling with Dennis and his, the way he describes the work, his work and his interviews with the lone mothers that he included in his study. So one had very high standards to try and come up to. So I think, you know, they were much more experienced field workers and writers than I was.

**Did you have an idea of what kind of impact the work would have at that stage, you know, when you were writing up?**

Well yes, one did, because, well a) as I say there was this Child Poverty Action Group that seemed to get quite a lot of press and at that time the media were interested in poverty and family poverty and child poverty. And also because Brian in particular was, this was before he joined Crossman but in the early days I think he knew quite a lot of the people, like Peggy Herbison, who became, she was minister of national insurance, he would have meetings with people inside government and I know that some of the work that I did on large families were fed into the arguments for increasing family allowances, particularly for larger families, for giving families with four or more children free school meals, irrespective of their income, which is what they did, the Labour government introduced that for a while. So there were ways in which because there was this correspondence or in the case of Brian meetings with senior civil servants and ministers, there was a chance to influence policy and there were one or two things that our work must have fed into. I'm not saying it was determined by our evidence, but it certainly helped, it must have helped.

So you did get the sense that you could make a little bit of difference around the edges, you know, if one had decent evidence and one could put forward a good argument and make a case. And in a way, that stayed with me for the rest of my academic career, the sort of belief that if you could put forward a really good case and it was backed by evidence, then if needs be one shamed civil servants or ministers into doing certain things, or rather to, one could help break down their resistance to doing certain things, and I guess that lived with me for the rest of

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my career really. Even though my, the work, the data I used was more based on actual policy and the impact that different policies had on, well men and women, women and children in particular, in the '70s, it certainly fed into my work with the women's movement.

**And did you realise academically what the impact would be, you know, it would be so widely referenced and talked about and everything, the study?**

Well, I don't think my large families' thing was that, I mean I don't, it was fairly short-lived I think. I suspect Dennis' work was more, had a longer life, because in the '60s, apart from Margaret Wynn's study of fatherless families, Dennis' is one of the first post-war studies of lone mothers. I mean we didn't even have a word for them properly, and if you look in the old National Assistance Board reports, then you can't, you have to add up the numbers from different categories. You know, you had widows, you had divorced, you had unmarried, and they would appear on different pages.

Lone motherhood was not, it was beginning to be an issue for the policy people in the '60s, but it was only beginning. So in a way Dennis' work stood the test of time in a way because it fed into a growing concern about the particular problems facing lone mothers. After all, you see most lone mothers were in paid employment. We forget that, we assume that lone mothers equals dependents on benefits. Well no they weren't, most of them had paid employment. Particularly unmarried mothers, and widows had pensions that had generous earnings disregards. In fact the earnings disregard was totally removed from widows in the '60s by Labour government.

So it was much easier for mothers to, lone mothers to combine paid employment with looking after the children, and unmarried mothers, most of them lived with their own mothers, who provided childcare, and if not there was local authority nursery provision, most of which was actually taken up by lone parents, the children of lone parents. So what, although it was pretty sparse, nevertheless what was there did go to lone mothers, so they weren't a problem for the benefits system until the '70s really, and then they became a big issue in the '80s when Mrs Thatcher woke up to the fact that there were all these lone mothers on benefits.

So I think probably Dennis' study would be, I doubt whether anybody reads my large families in London, whereas I suspect there are still students who would read lone mothers, Dennis' book on lone mothers.

### **And the Poverty in the UK book as well.**

Well I don't know how widely read, I don't know how far that, see I mean I don't have any notion of how well that, I mean I do remember, because I was in the Cabinet Office when it was published, I was in the think tank when there was only one government think tank, in 1978, '79, and I do remember the deputy Gordon coming in and saying those ridiculous people, you know, this thing about you're poor if you can't send a Christmas card, and I sort of gave him a little lecture about how that wasn't quite what was being said.

So, but I mean I, because I kind of shifted away from poverty as such in my work, I don't think I'm in a very good way of judging what impact the poverty survey as such had, but I mean it certainly inspired an awful lot more work on poverty from the time it was published onwards. And in a way that's, what more could you ask really? I mean if that's what it did then that's great. And certainly all the work done on indicators of poverty, which kind of took on an international dimension, I think Peter was very instrumental in developing those, whether it was for the OECD or UN or whatever, I mean he always had an eye to the international, his international colleagues, as it were.

I mean that was true right back in the '60s, the first big international conference I ever attended was at Essex and that, you know, it was the first time I'd met sort of eminent sociologists and social researchers from different European countries, the United States, Canada and Australia and so on. So again I thought oh, a bit overwhelmed by it all. But, so I'm sure Peter's work has, Peter in particular, well because he has had, and still has a huge reputation. So I'm sure it's had a, it's gone, his work in particular, I mean one thinks of it as his work really, and I know Alan Walker did a lot but, you know, I still think of it as really inspired by Peter. But it's inspired others who kind of carrying, still carrying the torch in a way.

### **And how was it originally funded then, the Poverty in the UK?**

It was the Rowntree Trust.

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**Oh the Rowntree, yeah, you said that.**

Yeah, I mean they applied for it in the summer of '64 and were surprised they got an answer so quickly. Which is why they were rather caught on the back foot, they hadn't really thought god, what shall we do, we've been given some money?

**It's quite often that way, I think.**

Yes, so you know, it was a bit of a shock, so I think they hadn't expected to get it so quick. I mean I'm glad they did, because otherwise I'd have gone off and started my training as a social worker and I probably would never have become an academic, so for me it was very good that the timing was as it was, but they really hadn't anticipated getting such enthusiasm from JRF. But of course it was the first, apart from a little study that Rowntree himself did in the early '50s in York, there wasn't, there hadn't been a poverty survey in the UK since the ones he did in the '20s and '30s. So you could see why JRF would be really keen, because it sort of followed on their tradition.

**So were they asking for a poverty survey or Peter suggested it?**

I've no idea, I don't know, because I was still, I was just a student at that time so I haven't a clue. I don't know.

**That would be interesting to find that out, maybe I'll find that out.**

Yes, you might well, but that's something I don't, it's something Adrian Sinfield might know. As I say, I mean I was just Brian's sort of student at that time, so it's not something he would have discussed with me.

**And do you think the researchers, you or any of them, kind of had poverty in their background at all? I know that Peter Townsend did in some ways, but were any from any kind of working class background, do you think?**

Well I think Dennis was. I honestly don't, I just don't know. I don't know. I really don't know the answer to that. I don't think John Veit-Wilson, I mean

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Harriet Wilson, I think he's still alive anyway, she was a sort of quite well known academic, I don't know whether she, I don't think so, I don't, I honestly don't know actually, you'd have to ask them. I don't know. I think Dennis came from a more working class background. I mean I think he was a sort of grammar school boy that went to Cambridge, I'm not sure, I'm not absolutely sure, but. No, I just, I don't know. I mean I certainly, I was just a middle class girl.

**What about the interviewers, do you think they were?**

I don't, I just don't know because I didn't meet many of them, and when I did it was very superficial. It might be over a lunch when they were sort of in between being briefed, and as I say I wasn't part of the briefing so I don't know about that.

**Part 5: on lessons learnt**

**Okay. So is there anything that you think could have been done differently in the whole process that might have, anything that you kind of learnt from it in terms of...?**

Well, I think, I can see why Peter wanted to ask so many questions, but I think if you're going to collect that amount of data you've got to be much clearer about how on earth you're going to manage that amount of data. Because I think the study would have had a lot more impact if it could have been published within two or three years of the fieldwork finishing, rather than what, 12 years later, 10 years later. I do think that's a pity, that it inevitably took so long, and they hadn't really, knowing, well they should have known they were going to collect so much data, they should have thought more carefully about how they were going to fund the analysis, because it was clear the money was running out.

I mean I remember we had a meeting with Joseph Rowntree and I got the feeling from that meeting that if they had actually put together a proposal for extending the grant, they might well have given it, but instead Brian and Peter went to that meeting feeling very defensive and kind of assured them that they'd got, yeah, no, no, they were going to complete. And my memory, I could be wrong, but my memory of that meeting was it was a missed opportunity, that actually Rowntree were not totally opposed to giving more money. But I don't know what, I don't

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know who else would have been at that meeting actually, I think, I don't know who you'd ask because I don't think there was anyone else, I don't think John Veit-Wilson was at that, and Dennis and Brian and Peter are no longer with us, so I don't know who you could ask. But that was my, I remember coming away from one of those meetings when the money was running out feeling god, what a pity they didn't actually, they hadn't sat down and made a good case for an extension.

So one of the, well I've never done an interview survey since, I rather sit in the library and read the, analyse the policy, you've got more control over your data then, but, or talk to people involved with policy. Certainly if I was going to do another study, I would, on the basis of the poverty survey, I would make sure that I did not ask so many questions that you just had to think very hard about how on earth you were going to analyse the data. But of course today it's much easier with computers, you know, it is simpler, but even so I think they should have thought about that more carefully. But I suspect part of the reason they didn't was because again they kind of got the go ahead almost before they were thoroughly prepared for it if you see what I mean, so kind of grew like topsy.

**Is that why it took the ten years then to publish the book, because it just turned to...?**

Well they ran out of money. I mean I left at the end of '68 and there was no more money. The grant had come to an end. So it was a question of Peter must have found money to involve Alan Walker, he must have got paid to do some of it, I'd have thought, but I think he was a young lecturer at Essex then, so I guess in those days you didn't necessarily have to have a grant to do research or to write something if you had time to do it. I've hardly had any grants in my academic career, because I just had, fortunately I had time. So I guess Peter must have got bits and pieces.

I guess Alan Walker would be able to tell you how they funded it, but basically there was no more money from Joseph Rowntree and I imagine they got bits and pieces of grants from here and there possibly to fund particular bits, I don't know. But that's why it took 10 years, it was because they didn't have anybody who was really working, they didn't have a little team that was working on the analysis full time. You know, if they had had, it could have been published within what, two or three years I guess, and it might have had, coming, it would have coincided

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perhaps with the Labour government coming in again in '74 or whenever and people like Barbara Castle I think would have been very sympathetic to some of the issues that they were raising.

So, you know, and Peter's always had, always juggling 1,000 balls in the air at the same time, so I mean he wasn't working on it full time. He was, he'd got a big department, he was head of department at some point, he was Pro-Vice-Chancellor at another time, so I mean he had, quite apart from all his other interests, he had other university responsibilities at Essex, so he certainly couldn't devote all of his time to it anyway. So I do, I mean it certainly taught me that if you're going to do that kind of study, you have to think it through right the way through to the end and make sure that you don't just front load the grant, you make sure that you cover enough for the later stages, because that's absolutely crucial.

**Thank you. Anything else you can think, any other lessons?**

I'm sure I'll think of things afterwards. No, as I say, I mean I was very lucky in that I learnt a lot, you know, I was exposed to a whole variety of sort of different sort of aspects of doing survey work, including having to do some of it myself, which was always very useful, and also seeing how in certain circumstances at least, really good evidence produced by social scientists can make a difference, but other things, the broader context is also important and the evidence can also be ignored of course, so you know, timing is important. But it kind of gave one a little bit of confidence that if you do have some really solid evidence for an issue that needs attention...

If you can get enough people, enough key groups sort of behind you as it were, you, it's ammunition basically. I think research is ammunition and it's just one form of ammunition, you know, and you just have to keep on. So I suppose in that sense it was, I learnt a lot. And the other thing was because we didn't get the sample for my pilot as quickly as we'd hoped, I had a chance to read Eleanor Rathbone, and you know, so she showed me that as a feminist you could push policy right the way through government if you carried on long enough. I mean she started campaigning, like she started the Family Endowment Society in 1918, and it was almost 30 years before the first family allowance was paid. But she never gave up. You know, and she too used, she used other people's research

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and she sort of banged on about it, very tiresome according to other MPs but nevertheless, you're in for a long haul, I suppose, is one of the things I learnt when it comes to policy change. Things don't often happen quickly. Or only if the circumstances over which you have no control are favourable.

## **Part 6: on changing role of academia**

### **Do you think that that kind of pattern has gone out of academia now, so that people are less interested in changing the world?**

Well yes and no. I mean selective research assessment exercise, these days you have to show what impact your research has had on policy, so there's a kind of assumption that it should and does have impact on policy, and quick, very rapid impact. I mean I think I don't have a problem about hoping that policy has an impact, but sometimes you have to wait a very long time. It's not going to show up next year, or even necessarily in five years' time, you're in for the long haul and I think the way we fund research now, the things that might take quite a long time before they bear fruit aren't getting funded. And sadly academics are so much more pressured, because staff student ratios have gone up and everything, they don't have the spare time that I had, quote spare, but you know, I had time to write.

I could write what I wanted about. I didn't get, I didn't have research grants, I had a couple of research fellowships, one from the SRC and one from Nuffield, and then I shared a bit of a grant with Jane Lewis to write the study of lone mothers with Kath Kiernan in the late '90s, but apart from that I never had grants. I just had time to do it, and you don't have that sort of chance these days, it seems to me. Academics have to account for all their time, and it's either funded by a grant or you're doing your teaching or you're doing your admin and there's not much left for anything else really. So you know, it's a different situation altogether, but there is an assumption that social science should have an impact on policy, otherwise it shouldn't be funded, but I think the way they measure it and the kind of timescale is completely wrong. So it's a kind of double bind really.

### **When I was sorting out Peter Townsend's books and everything in his cupboard, I just had a feeling in the room that people were very**

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**ambitious at that time, that they really wanted to change the world, and then when I came out of the cupboard, it didn't seem the same, that people are sort of, you know, academics, anyway, they don't seem to be so ambitious. Do you think that's true, or do you think things have changed?**

Well it's interesting because we were talking about this at a meeting of the Feminist Archive last week, and talking about the second wave movement that I was very involved in with what's happening now. And I think part of the difference now is that I mean both Brian and Peter and Richard Titmuss were very involved with the Labour party, and certainly the women's movement in the '70s, a lot of it, not all of it but a lot of it, had substantial connections with the trade unions movement. And although there were male chauvinist pigs amongst the trade union movement who certainly didn't like family allowance or didn't want equal pay and so on, there were those who did, and so you felt that you were in it together. There wasn't, you weren't a sort of lone set of researchers or feminists or whatever sort of shouting in the wind, or just getting, appearing on telly from time to time or having an article in The Guardian or something.

There was a movement which connected with other movements, and it seems to me that's one of the differences now, that people, I doubt whether very many academics are active in the Labour party or involved with the local council, because local councils have so little power to do what they really want, because they can no longer, they don't control their resources anymore. They've got more responsibilities but they don't have the money and they don't have the ability to raise the money that they had in the '60s and '70s. I mean most of local government funding they had control over, they raised it themselves, and only a minority of their budgets came from central government. Now it's the other way around.

So you haven't got the same levers on the system that would actually make a change, if you see what I mean, so my guess would be that researchers aren't as, have a much more narrow view of change. Maybe it's more realistic, I don't know, but we certainly felt in the '70s that we were part of something much bigger and that collectively we could make a difference, and in some respects we did. Not in others, by any means, but in some respects we made a difference. So I don't know, I guess that's a question for the historians in 20, 30 years' time.

**Thank you.**