

## **T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection**

### **Tape 864 Finding Aid**

**INTERVIEWEE NAME:** Philip Mason

**COLLECTION:** 4700.0589 Tape 864 (Tape 2 of 3)

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

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

**SERIES:** British Voices from South Asia

**INTERVIEW DATES:** 4/4/1978

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

**OTHER MATERIALS:** None

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#### **Tape 864, Side A**

#### **Mason (Part 2 of 5)**

- 001 after the Civil War, they were aware of their criminal work
- 003 their predecessor was a nice man who had been sent to school in England around age seven because his father believed he must be completely Anglicianized; his father was in the Indian medical service
- 007 their predecessor never returned to India until around age twenty-two; was very meticulous and spent all his time on his criminal cases
- 013 Mason decided he was trying to get up to date and "made some very arbitrary rules" for his court, but was lucky to never have been reported to the high court
- 015 Mason would allow an equal share of time for complaints, but neither one was allowed too much time; he considered ten lines of his writing to be sufficient, kept things fairly short
- 018 Mason would normally start an hour earlier than the courts so he could leave earlier to go and play polo; there was rarely a large workload in the afternoon
- 029 Mason was there three busy years; would work, play polo three days a week, exercise, play squash three days a week, go out riding before breakfast twice a week, write judgments before breakfast two or three times a week

034 when he returned from leave, Mason was posted to Lucknow; it was very odd  
036 the annual administrative reports included facts and figures and would normally take at  
least a month, but Mason had about four months to do it because most of the information  
had not come in; they were very boring to write  
043 Mason then went back to jobs that were like his previous ones; he was city magistrate for  
the summer in Lucknow  
044 being the magistrate was hard work and did not allow Mason to go out into the district and  
see the villages; it called for more work in the city  
046 there was a high rate of abusing loaned ponies; Mason suggested taking the animal away  
for a month because giving the man a fine would only cause him to neglect the horse more;  
or, if you would send him to prison, it would cause a great hardship on his wife and kids  
and he would work his horse just as hard when he got out; there was no proper way to deal  
with it  
054 there were also many cases of people brought in for not having lights on their bicycles  
058 when Mason was left in charge of Lucknow when the district magistrate took a leave, there  
was a riot that broke out not one day after the district magistrate left  
066 after Lucknow, he went to work for the government of India under the Secretary of  
Defense; the Defense department wanted an I.C.S. Under Secretary  
080 Mason served three years in the defense department and became very good with dealing  
with the generals  
087 when asked if he would like to stay in the government, Mason said no because he really  
wanted to go back and be in charge of a district  
088 by that time (1936), Mason had been in India eight years  
092 when Mason went to request which district he wanted, he learned that they were the three  
that everyone wanted; he was given a choice between what were considered the lower three  
on everyone's list  
100 in November of 1936, he was moved to Gwalior, which was considered the best job in  
India because there were few worries  
105 when Mason was making cultivation maps for the district, he was camping nine months out  
of the year; in Gwalior, there was also a lot of camping  
115 you could do almost anything you wanted that was within reason  
116 there were people that were like Gorkhas, and were recruited into the army as such, that  
were more Mongolian and Indian; people were not aware of the differences between the  
two; Mason was very fond of them  
127 the first principle was to always have the other person in order to make a decision; "Why  
do you think God gave me two ears? One for me and one for him"  
134 Mason spent three years in Gwalior, walking twenty miles a day in hill country  
136 although they would carry sandwiches with them, one would never really get hungry until  
you reached home; they would also get very thirsty  
140 because of the conditions, everyone was very physically fit; it was rewarding  
142 there would sometimes be cases that had gone all the way to the Supreme Court, only for  
you to realize that it had been decided wrong the whole way up because no one had been  
there to look at it  
146 there would be complete records of every field throughout the district  
147 it was a twenty-one day march to go completely across the district; 5,000 square miles  
151 one of the jobs was to distinguish the boundaries between villages, which was considered a

waste land but seen as very important to the Indians; was often the focus of disputes  
 160 Mason learned early that the best way to make a judgment was to go out and see the land  
 for himself in every case; it took longer to do, but it was very interesting because the  
 discoveries of each culture that would otherwise not be known  
 167 one interesting thing was the realizing that every village has a little place where they would  
 bury children below age seven or eight that had died; Hindus burned their dead, unless they  
 were real small  
 172 on the way back from the burial area, they would plant a thorn hedge across the path to  
 keep their ghosts back  
 183 there was a further appeal in one dispute in which the commissioner was sent to deal with  
 the pleader  
 196 after that, Mason went back to the Defense Department  
 205 in 1946 it was obvious that India was not going to be a British possession for much longer  
 210 by the time Mason had two novels published, he was ready to leave India but he did not  
 want to lose his pension  
 224 hard to imagine living under an absolute power until you have experienced it  
 226 having the British there meant that the ruler had no defense or foreign policies; there were  
 always limitations to the rulers actions; the smaller the matter, the more absolute the ruler  
 was  
 232 southern India was also very interesting, although the upper classes were Muslim  
 240 kingdoms were run by deputies from the Mogul emperor in India; standards for politeness  
 and courtesy were very high  
 249 British culture in India was always at least thirty years behind the rest of the world, at least  
 in Delhi and the Punjab  
 252 Mason believes it is natural for India to be behind because of the tone of British society  
 258 Mason believes they were very immature when they left Oxford for India  
 263 discuss a movie that was on television the night before; Mason had once seen it in a theater  
 in Oxford played entirely by women at the local women's college  
 269 they were very immature when they went out to India, and also had no experience with life  
 in India  
 274 servants had often been trained by one's parents, which caused the culture in India to be  
 more outdated; one would often inherit servants from their parents  
 289 there was always the "A.D.Z.s Element": the governor always had two young, smart  
 A.D.Zs that were men from expensive regiments; their ideas about life was normally  
 different from most of the Indian people  
 299 a group of elites would always go into the A.D.Zs' room and would be favorites that were  
 entertained at the government house  
 302 there was always a feeling of being more up-to-date in the A.D.Zs' room  
 305 in Lucknow, there was a British cavalry regiment that had money and had been in London,  
 so they were also considered to be more modern in every way  
 311 the cavalry regiment was very nice to everyone, but they tended to despise the Anglo-  
 Indian society all-around  
 313 Indian cavalry regiments were better than infantry regiments  
 327 Anglo-India was a British subculture and should be regarded as such; Mason wrote an  
 article concerning this issue  
 346 the second generalization was that India was not only an out-of-date culture, but it was also

a Philistine culture that inflated such activities as exercise

355 Mason and those that were Oxford with him were not very habitual readers; this denied them some progress in their reading when they arrived in India

370 Mason did not really read frequently again until the very end, when he was posted and placed in charge of looking after certain Indian wives; he also wrote a children's book while there

384 most of the time in India, you were worked very hard, especially using mental skills to make decisions

387 Indians would say that one would have taken less exercise and eat less in response the English always exercising

389 Mason did not believe the British ate very much; in the early days, it was worse and people did eat more

394 the British saw exercise as necessary in order to remain physically fit

398 the combination of hard work, accompanied with hard exercise, meant that there was a limited amount of time left for reading

401 the feeling of service that pulled Mason to India no longer exists today, but was very strong then

410 in prep-school, there were many stories concerning the armed forces going to foreign lands; one was always moved by the idea of going on a great adventure

422 in the stories, a man would not normally get married until age thirty, but always seemed to meet a girl when he was about twenty-one; he would tell her they would be together when he found a home for her; he would then leave for about nine years to go around the world

429 the stories were romantic and a bit unreal, but it was a strong influence on the middle-class education system

435 Mason does not think it is particular to Anglo-India

439 Mason believes India had an effect on the British education system; India encouraged people to believe that those stories were possible

453 Furse wrote a book concerning choosing people for the colonial service

460 It was tradition for one to be in some sort of service like the army, navy, I.C.S., or colonial service

460 Distance was important in the early days of Anglo-India because of the amount of time it took to get things to and from different places; it created isolation and made a great difference in the development of the British in India and the British and Africa

480 By the time the British got into Africa, there were telegraphs

494 when the British arrived in India, there were no maps detailing such things as cultivation and such

507 Mason had prior experiences to photographing and making maps before going to India, which helped him when it was time to make the maps of India

516 discuss the different tools the British used to develop the maps; there were limits on some instruments

529 As time moved on, things moved closer together; the first large step was the establishment of an over-land route that avoided the Suez Canal; the land route decreased the time to around three weeks to a month

549 the British people in India seemed to all have the tendency to place people into certain social classes immediately

562 end of side A

**Tape 864, Side B****Mason (Part 4 of 5)**

- 005 Mason tells the story of a man who was a practicing minister twenty-nine days out of the month; then, for the next three days he would stay in a drunken state
- 012 Mason would not make allowances for anyone under him that had “taken to bottle”
- 014 those that drank heavily provided entertainment from time to time for everyone else
- 018 everyone was based on someone else
- 022 Mason used a friend’s suggestion of using an extended family to tie all seven of his stories together
- 029 Mason also decided to use the idea of using the arrogance against the gods three times throughout the storyline
- 037 the English and Indian cultures are two very distinct cultures that allow two different views on things, which can lead to conflict; an example would be the characters and situations in Mason’s books, especially his first one
- 063 the English found that the Indian culture was very unsatisfactory; the British did put on a front and maintain the standards from home, like dressing for dinner
- 076 one put up a front because they wanted to maintain their standards and not “go downhill”; the English also wanted to maintain aloofness, unlike the French who did not and were faced with terrible consequences
- 080 the French exported large numbers of French men to their colonies, particularly the tropical colonies, that womanized to a great extent. It then became difficult for them to detach themselves
- 085 in Indo-China, the French ran into greater troubles; the English extradited themselves without much difficulty
- 090 the companies had a monopoly in India, which was really needed because of the many ships and numerous voyages that were required of them
- 101 after 1833, the East India Company ceased trading
- 107 Mason does not believe it is difficult now to make people see how sharp the division was between the club members and imperial services to the other ranks
- 112 Kipling was very strange about the division because he crossed the division and wrote about other ranks
- 115 this division did not happen so much with the French, mostly because they were not as commercially minded according to Mason
- 118 Mason believes the mutiny was not as important in some contexts as people make it out to be, especially in the context of inter-marrying
- 119 however, you cannot under-estimate the importance of some of the movements that did come about because it affected everyone, from military to civil
- 124 some people, influenced by the movements in England at the time, thought it was very wrong to live with Indians
- 126 with the introduction of the over-land route, there emerged another change in opinion
- 140 the term “griffin” is said to be Welsh and was used at first to describe horses that were used for racing for the first time
- 145 Mason believes it is a stereotype that the Anglo-Indians spoke a different type of English; when hearing the different versions of one word coming from people with different enunciations, one tends to pick up the words

150 to this day, Mason is inclined to use words most other people don't understand  
 158 there is still a remnant of an Anglo-Indian subculture in Britain, seen mostly when  
 everyone gets together  
 166 when Mason does meet someone that was from India, they tend to use the Indian words  
 more frequently in conversation  
 167 the word "Anglo-Indian" took the place of another word, but there is no word that has  
 taken its place  
 170 in Kipling's time, it was seen as rude to say "half-caste" and the proper term was  
 Euro-Asian; by Mason's time in India, Euro-Asian had become rude and the new word was  
 "Anglo-Indian" when referring to someone with "mixed blood"  
 179 Mason could only use a phrase like "We [saubs?]" in fun to refer to a collective group of  
 British in India  
 183 no other word ever replaced "griffin"  
 188 Mason believes there was a movement against slang words in general after World War I;  
 there was a period when slang was heavily used  
 195 there were British commissioners that, while they were slightly idealized, were active,  
 always in control and rarely had doubts  
 202 each commissioner and deputy was based on something else  
 202 the first was Mr. Bennett, who was based on two previous deputies  
 214 there was a district book that described the past commissioners and deputies; the Indians  
 would remember past commissioners  
 225 Mason saw the poem as a description of the failure and inadequacy of a dream; the point  
 was having the boy taking a high ideal to the district, only to fall very short of them  
 239 Mason was trying to make the point that it is an inescapable part of Indian life and  
 everyone must accept the fact that ideals fall short  
 246 the title *Garlic and Sapphires* stands for moments of intense vision and pungency  
 262 the failure to reproduce the moment of intense living in memory  
 266 Mason believes that there were some British that believed they were doing a good job at keeping  
 things under control  
 271 it can be argued that anyone that went out to India did so because of the potential to obtain  
 a large amount of power in a small amount of time, as opposed to the harder task of doing so  
 in England  
 289 it is proposed by a French psychologist that people chose to go out to such places as India,  
 or in his case Madagascar, because of an inherited weakness; he dominates there when he  
 may not do so otherwise  
 301 Mason remembers thinking that a guest speaker at Oxford had "missed the boat" when  
 speaking of the still many opportunities in India; he argued in terms that did not contribute  
 to idealism  
 315 many went to India because they felt there was something that could be done in India and  
 they could be very helpful in achieving it  
 326 people, with certain qualities, can get along fine anywhere and in any situation; one quality  
 that got one very far was being generous and emotional, which would appeal to the  
 generous and emotional side of the Indians  
 333 Mason recalls the story when a British writer learned, before going into the diplomatic  
 service, that it is better to be gullible than suspicious. This came from the Foreign  
 Secretary.

- 347 what the Secretary meant was that it was better to like the people you had all around you rather than being suspicious of them
- 351 Mason believes this was especially true for the district officers in India; the man who really liked the people in his district may be lead-on occasionally, but he would get more out of the district and do more good for it overall
- 356 Irish temperament, with sudden rages and “bashes” but emotional responsiveness, did well in winning people over more often than not, especially in troublesome times
- 362 “An open face and the closed mind”; Mason does not think this policy lasts very well for very long
- 376 The Indians always appeared to know which British regarded them as a separate people and different from anyone else
- 380 Mason began to write more historical and sociological works because of the lack of materials for fiction novels
- 393 While writing one of his novels, Mason wanted to “get back to the basics” of living; after a while, he learned he was trying to do things that were not meant to be done together
- 432 While working in a publishing company, someone suggested to Mason to write about race relations because of the seriousness of the subject and the demand of attention on it.
- 444 While Mason was writing about race relations, he felt it was very wrong to write anything in his spare time because the project took all of his time.
- 460 Between his books *Founders in the Garden* and *A Matter of Honor*, Mason wrote about race relations; Mason knew it was time to quit when he realized he was about to start repeating himself; he also found he was becoming slower in making decisions and was very tired by the end of the day from the office atmosphere
- 480 Mason wrote his first book under a pseudonym because of the suggestion of the Civil Service Department in India to protect themselves, even though they found no real harm in the book; Mason had to ask permission to publish a book while working for the English government in India
- 502 Mason thought about arguing the suggestion, but realized it would take months and was a silly thing to fight over
- 508 By the time he returned to England in 1947, Mason had already published two books and was considering using his real name. However, his other name was becoming established, so he decided against it
- 514 Mason decided to use his real name when writing about the racial tensions because it was a new publisher and completely different material
- 525 discussion about Mason’s agents; when he was righting nonfiction, Mason did not see a reason for an agent because it was more academic
- 539 since Mason has gotten an agent, he has been published by several different companies in two countries, receiving advancements from both
- 545 Skinner is interesting because he has different personalities; his mother was from a high-class family that fell in love with a Scotsman