



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

The Friends of Gibraltar Oral History Project (1930 to 1970)

Outline Transcript of the Interview of Tim Gowing by Mary Ingoldby and Jerry Robinson on 30 April 2013 (Serial 008)

Track 1

Tim begins by describing how he was born in Gibraltar in 1939 and lived there until his parents retired in 1953. He went to boarding school in England in 1949 until 1956. He comments about his father's amazing Colonial lifestyle, in the Gold Coast, Spain, and subsequently Gibraltar, the main focus of the interview.

Could you tell us a little bit about your father's family?

The family came from Norfolk. After serving in the Army during WW1, his father worked in the motor business. He had three brothers: a farmer, a director of a scaffold business who subsequently went out to Hong Kong, and an accountant in Manchester. He describes his father as incredibly upright and virtuous, very likeable and sociable. The family had a Nanny called Phyllis Farrugia who looked after the children in Gibraltar.

Did your father talk to you about his career?

He revealed very little and most was learnt later in life from reading his book (memoirs), which was written in 1978. He related it to his great friend Cecil Kellehar, who wrote it up for him. Tim comments how his father was a private person, describing early family life as not having arguments or discussion about life over the dining table. Instead, the emphasis was on holidays in Gibraltar and having fun, with parties, beach parties and swimming. Tim was not aware that his father was writing his memoirs.

What did you find most surprising about your father's memoirs?

It all came as a total surprise, especially about his early life in the Gold Coast about which we knew nothing at all. His father died before his mother – so after his death Tim discussed his father's life and career with her. Tim commented on the value of having a written account. His parents had a wide circle of friends and had a lot to do with the Colonial Secretary, the Colonial Hospital and the Garrison Library.

What sort of person was he, what image did he portray?

He was an upstanding man, looked good in uniform. He was keen on at golf – you would say, a thoroughly good chap - a real English gentleman. He was the sort of person that doesn't exist anymore. An adventurer. Tim talks about how his father drive across Africa (1000 miles to Timbuktu), describing the, as pioneering days, and as a Colonial

policeman. He also mentions how he got special leave to do the trip and that one of the permits failed to get through.

Did he go into Colonial Service before he was married:

Dudley Gowing was born in 1898 and got married in 1932 in London at All Souls, Langham Place. She was also from Norfolk. The Gold Coast (now Ghana) was then called the 'White Man's Grave'. His father had previously served in the WW1. However, he only talked about his time in India, Kashmir in particular, which he thought was absolutely stunning.

What made him want to join Colonial Police?

Most probably the adventure. He found working in the motor trade rather boring. To spice up his life in the motor trade Dudley Gowing often went driving at Brooklyns – he was in one of their cars when it caught fire. At the time, Brooklyns was the premier motor racing circuit in England. Over the years, Tim recalls how he had a collection of nice cars, commenting that it was one of his loves in life.

What did your father say about his time in Kashmir?

He liked India, but talked mostly about Kashmir with the beautiful mountains and the lakes. Tim relates how most of his father's Army service was in India, maybe a spell in Palestine, before joining the Colonial Service in Gold Coast.

What were Tim's thoughts about his own early life in Gibraltar?

Tim describes his recollections of Gibraltar as exciting. He recalls the issue of ration books and how out in Gibraltar he didn't use them so on return to school in England, he was able to buy lots of sweets at the Tuck Shop. Tim recalls beforehand how he went to Brampton School in Gibraltar, which was run by a Headmistress called Miss Simpson and operated like a prep school, and on her retirement it was taken over by a Mr and Mrs Prosser. His brother, Rupert, went to the Christian Brothers School in Gibraltar. Tim recalls that Brampton was co-educational but the Christian Brother was male. Both schools contained a mixture of British and Gibraltarian children.

You were brought up with Gibraltarian children?

Yes. A lot of Tim's friends were Gibraltarians. They all belonged to the Rosia Swimming Club, which he describes was a great place to be, as there were hundreds of members and they met all our friends there. They had canoes, went fishing, as well as swimming. Tim recalls how it is a little bay open to the sea. He cited how it has a great history, because Lord Nelson when he died was brought into Rosia Bay pickled in a barrel – 'The Spirit of Nelson'. Tim recollects how he used to swim off the harbour walls and relates one occasion when his mother, who he describes fondly as a chatter box, was swimming when an octopus coming in from the sea floated close by.

Did you speak any Spanish?

Very little regrettably - It's a typical English thing, what with Gibraltar being very British and Phyllis, our Nanny, being fluent in English. He comments on how his Gibraltarian friends spoke English and dived about in both languages.

Let's talk about Phyllis?

She was a Gibraltarian and came to the family in 1937 to look after his him and his brother, Rupert, and later his sister, Jane, and has been with the family ever since. She was originally the Nanny. However, she came to the UK with his parents in 1953 and for a while lived with them. She then decided to become a housekeeper and so she went to work for several families in Norfolk. But we remained her actual family. She never married and. Despite having two sisters and a brother, eventually as there was little connection with Norfolk, returned to live with Tim and his family in 1971 in the Dorking area. Tim recalls how she has only been back to Gib about once and how her life was based about the house and with them. He describes her as an amazing hard worker and a terribly loyal member of our family, which is how the family will remember her by. She was evacuated with them during the war so knew UK quite well. [She was 107 in 2013]

What do you remember about your early days at school?

There wasn't much sport due to Gibraltar being so small and the shortage of space. Instead Tim cites how swimming was the main pastime, along with great beach parties in Spain at the weekends. They went on trips to Spain to get away from Gibraltar being so small, and because they found the beaches more exciting.

How did you travel back to school in UK?

They used to go initially by liner. The Union Castle and P & O used to call into Gibraltar. After a while British European Airways started flying to Gib. Tim describes it as an amazing flight as they would take off from Northolt, fly to Boulogne for lunch, Madrid for tea and then eventually arrive in Gibraltar. The aircraft were Viking two engine planes, before they gradually went on to jet planes. Landing in Gibraltar was exciting at that age. Tim describes how they had great fun on the planes as they were mostly all his friends and other school children and how BEA used to give out little bottles of sherry of which not many got handed to their parents. Tim comments how all holidays from school were nice but that holidays in Gibraltar were extra exciting.

What happened on retirement?

They left Gibraltar in 1953 as his father had to retire at 55 from the Colonial Service. Im comments that it was far too early an age – so they came back to Norfolk and where his father did a lot of charity work. Tim describes how his father ran a large organisation which took disabled people to holiday camps at the end of the season, which gave over their accommodation for use by these people and all the carers.

Did you and your family miss the life?

Yes. They missed the life in Gibraltar hugely, especially his mother who Tim describes as being very sociable. He didn't think that they ever went back there to visit. His father had a good send off as he got on extremely well with the Spanish Authorities even during the 1950s. The Governor of Algeciras arranged for a police escort on his leaving Gib right through to Algeciras and until departing the region. There is quite an account of his departure in his manuscript.

Can you recall other significant events during your father's time in Gibraltar?

Tim recites an incident when Randolph Churchill, then a journalist and son Churchill, got into trouble with the Spanish Authorities. Randolph Churchill was in Malaga covering the Spanish Civil War. He was reported to have had his passport confiscated and placed under house arrest. He called Dudley Gowing for help. Tim's father duly went to Malaga and put him into the boot of his car and smuggled him into Gibraltar. The incident is mentioned in Tim's father's memoirs. Tim goes on to recall how during the war years in Gibraltar the relations between the Governor and the Military, and with his father and the police was *sometime rather prickly*.

How has Gibraltar changed due to the war?

The only thing Tim remembers about Gibraltar at the end of the war was a German submarine with a white flag flying coming into the bay to surrender. He recalls how they lived on North Pavilion Road, which actually comprised a series of steps. He describes it as being at the southern end of Gib near South Barracks, just above the south end gate of the dockyard. They lived in a nice house of five or six bedrooms, quite high up the Rock with a nice garden and a great view looking out over the harbour into the bay. From the property, they could see all the naval ships and cruise liners coming in. Tim reminisces how his parents missed the life.

Did your father ever talk about the incident with Australian Troops?

Yes he did. The police arrested some of Australian troops who were drunk and been causing chaos in town. All their mates got to hear about it and laid siege to the police station where they were being held. Harold Wall of the Gibraltar Chronicle, had contacts in England, sent through a report to one of the British papers, so got a bit of publicity. In the House of Commons a question was asked about this incident. Tim believes that his father had quite a sticky time as there was an inquiry, although he was eventually exonerated. Tim sympathised with the Australian troops at being cooped on a troop ship for three to four days and at how on their first port of call, being Gibraltar, went out for a drink and took too much, and started fighting. He commented at how Gibraltarians tended to live in the town centre and would have been affected by such disturbances whereas British administrators tended to live further out.

Like many children Tim's tonsils were a cause of concern and needed to be removed. The surgeon's name was Dr Skelton Brown, a personal friend of the family. On removing his tonsils out, as occasionally happens, they bleed so had have to rubber plugs inserted. Tim's parents were obviously worried when this was happening. On the very day, an

Army Officer living just near the Garrison Library, who was in terrible debt, shot his two children and killed them along with his wife who also died, but the Officer didn't die just injured himself. Tim remarked how his father had to deal those two things on the same day. Tim only knew about it years later.

During the war, did your father ever have to deal with incidents of espionage, German agents, or suspicious Spanish workers?

Tim didn't know, but instead commented that his father did bring quite a lot of new things to Gibraltar through his position in the police – police launches was one of the main things he introduced. There was a lot of smuggling going on. At first, the police got one launch and then they end up with two or three. Tim recalls how they were painted red and how they occasionally went out on them which was great fun. He refers to photos of them in his father's album.

How much did his work impact on family life?

Very little which is probably why Tim and his brother and sister knew little about it. He commented that a like a lot of fathers, he would arrive home for tea and get on with family life. Tim comments how his own family talks about his father's life from time to time and his two sons are interested in their grandfather's life and have read his memoirs.

Track 2

Was Tim aware of the large Military presence in Gibraltar?

As a child, Tim wasn't unduly aware of the large military presence in Gibraltar, but he was sure that his parents felt cramped in at times which is why they took weekends away. He comments how their British friends were mostly involved in banking, multinational companies, shipping.

As a child did it feel British out in Gibraltar?

Yes. Tim commented positively that 'It was a little bit of Britain, as it still is'. Tim has been back four or five times. The first time he took his wife and it was quite depressing – 'it was quite a long time ago now – it was very down trodden, everything needed repairs, everything looked tatty. Our house was boarded up so it was all sad and I came away quite depressed'. But when we went back two or three years later it had changed and the last time we went it appears to be thriving with the new marinas and restaurants and cruise ships.

Tim speaks about meeting up with his old Gibraltarian friends. He recalls how he went to his sister in laws and husbands wedding anniversary in Soto Grande, where he met up with an old friend from the early days called Gene Lawrence, 'we had such a great time reminiscing'.

Tim talks about being born in Gibraltar. While identifying himself as British he retains a great feeling for Gibraltar. He commented that whenever previous governments start talking about the possibility of giving it back he gets

annoyed and has written to the Prime Minister and Government about it. He concludes by declaring that 'I feel an incredibly strong attachment to Gibraltar'.

*Compiled: December 2013
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