



Doing an Oral History Project

The
Commonwealth
Association

The Institute of Commonwealth Studies

- 3 year elite interviewing project
- AHRC funded (approximately £400,000)
- 60 interviews with Commonwealth leaders, politicians, diplomats and civil servants

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www.commonwealthoralhistories.org

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- Life histories/semi structured interviews
- Elite interviewing project
 - 8 Prime Ministers
 - 15 Foreign Ministers
 - 4 former Secretaries General
 - 2 Special Advisers to the SG
 - 4 Directors, Political Affairs Division
 - 2 Heads, Office of the Secretary General
 - Economic Affairs Division (4), Information Division (3)

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- CHALLENGES
 - Chronological
 - Regional
 - Thematic
 - Gender
 - Political position

Challenges

- Research (no access to ComSec archives post 1986)
- Time involved setting up the interviews
- Travel
- Technology (recording)
- Transcription (preparing & clearing)
- Archiving
- Retrieval

Challenges

- Who to select ?
- What & how to ask them ?
- What are the overarching research questions ?

An Oral History of the Commonwealth 1965-2012

- What was the role and impact of the Commonwealth as a 'diplomatic actor'?

An oral history project on the Commonwealth Secretariat

- ◉ To capture institutional memory of the intergovernmental administrative arm of a multi-lateral association
- ◉ To supplement current work being done by Dr Dwayne Menezes on the history of the Secretariat, based on archival research
- ◉ Material which cannot be found in the archives (political archives at ComSec are more detailed than economic files)

An oral history of the Commonwealth Secretariat

- Personalities matter within the Commonwealth to a far greater degree than other multi-lateral organizations, because of its size, its particular post-colonial identity, its role as a soft-power organization, and ways of working.

An oral history of the Commonwealth Secretariat

- A Witness Seminar on the Commonwealth Secretariat
 - Range of view points not captured in the Witness Seminar of June 2013
 - Middle & lower positions' view and contributions

King's College is interested in supporting this, has the expertise & funding to do one, and to organise the transcription.

Suggested ways forward for Commonwealth Association

- A Witness Seminar, framed on specific research questions, cleared in accordance with established ethics/data protection protocols
- Additional written questionnaires, in response to a set number of questions, with request/space for additional comment. To be submitted in electronic PDF and Word format
- Stored on ICWS existing website

Possible research questions:

- ◉ How did you come to join the Secretariat?
- ◉ What was your perspective of the work and impact of your unit/division on the wider Commonwealth, and its standing in international affairs?
- ◉ In your view, what were the greatest challenges to your work at Marlborough House? How far were you able to overcome these? What were your Commonwealth networks outside the Secretariat?
- ◉ How much engagement and support did you have from your home government?