
Interview with Steve Winyard

I went to Essex University in October 1968, and graduated in June 1972. And I studied Economics there, but I became particularly interested in social policy, and so started to work with particularly Adrian Sinfield, and I think one summer he employed me on a little project that he had going. And so in that way I started to become involved with Adrian and Peter and particularly Frank Field, who I met through them. And I graduated in, as I say, in June 1972, worked for Social Services Department in the following year, and then returned to Essex to do a Masters in Social Policy and Planning in '73/'74, and during that time I did a lot of work with Frank Field to prepare applications for funding for the low pay unit. Frank was Director of the Child Poverty Action Group, and of course Peter was Chair of it. And we were successful, and so after the Masters, together with Frank and Chris Pond, we set up the Low Pay Unit.

So that's sort of the background. I worked closely with Tony Atkinson who was obviously a very young and up and coming professor at the time. He was probably still in his 20s when he arrived at Essex. And he encouraged me to do a dissertation on low pay; it was vaguely some sort of regression analysis, and I believe I was, and I used some of the data from Peter's study for that, if I remember right. Anyway, there's a little reference to it in the bibliography. And, yeah, so, I didn't have much more involvement than that. I was sort of on the periphery but was aware of it, and obviously Alan Walker was in the same year as me, he was doing Sociology but we sort of knew each other well, and Alan went on to be research assistant on the project.

So do you feel you made a contribution, because I think you're named in the acknowledgements?

Yes, well, I was around and as I say I think I was a bit involved in the data on low paid workers, and did do some analysis under Tony Atkinson's guidance on that. Quite what happened to that I don't know but, yeah, it was part of the team or the family that was sort of at Essex working in various ways on the project.

And what was it like to be part of that team at the time?

Well it was a great, great time in a way. There was enormous energy and there was this very clear links to, for me, to Child Poverty Action Group to campaigning and that really made sense. It was something that I wanted to be involved in, and yeah I thought it was, it was social science for a purpose.

Yes. And had you been that way included before you started your course, or was it Peter `Townsend that...?

I think I had been, yes, my father was a radical, sort of fairly radical thinker. And so I certainly had that as my background, and I found, I didn't find that at school but when I went up to Essex, I certainly found people as I said like Adrian, and Dennis Marsden, Peter and Tony Atkinson, who were very committed to greater equality and doing things; not just studying them but trying to make the world a better place. And I suppose all of that has led to maybe being here, and I've been here nearly 20 years, and been fighting the good fight.

Excellent. Okay, I'll just look at my actual questions then. I think, I think maybe you could talk maybe something about what you think the political and social impacts of the study were, of Peter Townsend's study.

Hm.

And the kind of politics at the time, when they're trying to influence the Labour government and...

Yes, yes. Well, I suppose for me that was very much tied up with Child Poverty Action Group and the work that Frank and Peter were doing there. And again Ruth and Frank, when Frank left Ruth Lister took over. That was in '79. But, it's so hard to think back to that time, but, clearly it's a very, very different political and intellectual environment, and, I've sometimes wondered whether, it was obviously a massive study, Poverty in the United Kingdom, and the original Townsend and Abel-Smith maybe had the bigger impact. I, yeah, I don't remember the publication, I don't remember it having the impact, when was it published?

Ten years later. 1978.

Ten years later, yeah, that's tough with these very big studies, the data then is obviously, it provides something of an intellectual framework I guess, but often you need the immediate material to have the really big impact. So, yeah, not much to add on that.

Okay. Do you think the study inputs in terms of, because Peter Townsend did the work on disability, and that's maybe what brought you here or...?

Well, that's interesting. I mean, Alan was very involved, Alan Walker was much more involved in disability and setting up Disability Alliance at that time. And I think I actually always shied away from disability, I found the whole benefits, that benefits area very complication and difficult, and didn't immediately take to it. No, it was just, in a sense it was chance that I ended up here. But, no I was aware of Disability Alliance, I was aware of the good works that DA did and I arrived here in late '95/early '96, and certainly immediately started working with Disability Alliance and Lorna Reith. And Peter was still President of it I think then, so the links continued.

Did you have much to do with Peter over the years, during his lifetime?

Off and on, yes, off and on. When I moved to Leeds University in '78, so I was at Leeds from '78 to '90; and yes I was involved in the Social Policy Association and so our paths crossed. But we never did any actual work together. I wrote a book with Paul Whitely called Pressure for the Poor, which was a study of the poverty lobby, which very much fits into the political science literature in terms of pressure groups and influencing. But I think, I'm sure I talked to Peter about that.

Ah, I see.

CPAG was one of the groups that we, one of about 40 groups we looked at.

Excellent. Okay. Can you remember anything about the interactions that went on at the time between Brian Abel-Smith, because he left didn't he, the study at one point and...?

Yeah. No I was never that close to it. I was an undergraduate and baby researcher, so you don't really...

You wouldn't be in on all the conversations.

No.

Okay, yeah. Well I can't think of anything else, so is there anything else you want to say? About the topic of poverty, or about Peter Townsend's work, or...?

Well, I suppose, I'm sure that his involvement with CPAG and Disability Alliance for me was very important, that they were a group of academics, same with Tony and Adrian Sinfield, that they were all very committed to a fairer society, to greater equality. And they were all engaged in trying to make that happen, so that was very refreshing and something that I really took to.

Oh, great. Okay, well thank you very much.