

Interview with Angela Avens

Part 1: preparing for the interviews

So if you could talk first of all about how you were recruited to the project.

Do you know, I really can't remember how I heard about it! I really have no memory of it at all.

Can you remember what you were asked to do?

I went to a briefing session in London in early January of 1968 it was, and as I recall I think they spelt it out there exactly what we should do. And we did have the questionnaires beforehand I think, to look through them, so that we were a little bit familiar with what they were asking.

And what was your situation at the time, were you a student or?

Well I was a married mum with two actually quite young children, because my children were born in 65 and 66, and my husband was a full time teacher. So I had to have a child minder at certain times or I went in the evenings.

And which area were you working in?

Well it would have been, it included Barnstaple and the surrounding area really; up as far as Linton and Lynmouth, Barnstaple itself and then a lot of the villages, a lot of working villages round about actually.

So was it an area that you knew already?

I knew vaguely but I go to know it a lot better. It was quite exciting actually, going round to find these different places.

And how did you get around?

Well I could drive, and my husband didn't mind me having the car, so that was fine.

And how long did you work on the project for?

Well I think it was probably from about January to July, and I've looked through my diary for August and September and I can't see any reference to it, so I think I must have finished in July, about six months then.

So you've still got your diary going back to that time.

Well that's the very year I started keeping a diary, but it's very brief and trite really, so there's no great detail about what happened, a few references to where I went.

What kind of things does it say, just the name of the place that you went to or?

Occasionally there's a comment, nobody in or somebody was a widow perhaps, or somebody else was uncooperative, that sort of thing. One of them I did an interview and it was hilarious, but there was only one.

Do you actually remember that interview?

A little bit about it but not a great deal.

So you can't remember why it was hilarious in particular?

It probably was that I was asking such difficult questions of them. I can remember it was always very difficult when it got to the section on savings or have you any objects that are worth something, and that was a difficult part. I suppose we got round it by laughing at it.

Was it you that felt awkward or you felt that they felt awkward, or both of you?

I felt awkward having to ask them really, I'm not fully certain how they felt. But possibly other interviews it might have been that they felt awkward, because they're quite searching questions really.

And was it the first time that you'd done this kind of research?

It was actually, because when I was a student I had digs with people who did sociology and so on, and they were involved with doing a questionnaire from the university at Exeter. And they would go out and then they'd come back and discuss what they'd found and so on, and I found that actually very interesting. And it was something that I could do with children that stretched me a bit, a little bit different from thinking about childish things all day, which was great.

And did you feel that you were part of a team, did you know the other researchers or the research supervisors?

I didn't really feel part of the team. I went to an initial meeting and I noted down a few people that I met. And I had quite a lot of refusals at the beginning, and so there was a Mrs Jones, and I think she either stayed nearby or stayed with me, and she did an interview that I couldn't do because I knew the people. And she also went with me when I did another one, which made me feel rather nervous. But she was quite reassuring, and I think I had reassurance from somebody else later on.

So did they, how did they train you then, did you do mock interviews before you set off or?

No, no mock interviews at all.

So it was assumed that you'd be able to do it kind of thing.

Yes it was really, we just went in at the deep end really.

Did you feel that you understood what the research questions were about, what the research was about, was that explained to you at the beginning?

Yes, we had this briefing up in London, Skipper House it was called, and they explained it. And I thought they did it quite well, you'd be able to forecast what future needs were going to be and so on.

Did you think this is a very worthwhile project or it was just a job?

Oh no, I thought it was very worthwhile actually, it wasn't a sort of trite market research interview at all, this was something with quite some depth.