
Interview with Angela Avens

Part 3: on any difficulties encountered

And what do you think could have been done differently with regards to the research?

I really don't know, I haven't got anything much to compare it with. The sort of interviews or not interviews, the sort of surveys you get asked to do now are much simpler, and obviously just ticking the boxes and not interested in any extras that you might add on and so on, on the whole. So I felt that probably it was a very difficult kind of interview to do.

Because it was a sensitive or it was the way the questions were written?

Well I think it was sensitive, I think people were quite happy to tell you what they do and if there are national pay scales and so on you could roughly work out what they were earning perhaps, but the other questions were much more intrusive, what are your savings, is there anything of value in your house? I don't know whether you could actually do that nowadays.

Did people, although they accepted to do the interview did they sometimes not want to answer some of the questions?

Oh yes, you might get to a certain section and they would jib, and you'd have to go onto the next one.

And did they do it in a nice way or did they get a bit?

I don't think anybody got really nasty, I mean there could be refusals but there was nobody ever shouted or get out of here, that sort of thing.

Is there anything else you want to say about, do you think it had any effect on your life doing the research?

It made me realise how very different people are, and how unexpected life can be. There's some things you think oh this will be easy and it's difficult, and sometimes when you think it's difficult it turns out to be easier. But I found it very very interesting.

Was that because you got to see the kind of range of people that there are?

Well yes, it broadened my range of people, understanding perhaps say how a farmer feels compared with somebody who has, or living with a disability or something.

I haven't got any more questions but is there anything else you want to say, anything you want to tell me from your diary or any other memories that you have?

You get unexpected little things, like you would go down to Lynmouth and I remember asking somebody who their landlord was, and being told that it was British Rail, it's just so astounding, some answers were surprising and interesting.

Did you feel you had to give an impression of neutrality all the time or did you just react in the way you would normally?

I was slightly conscious that I'd have to be fairly professional, and to stick to the job in hand rather than go off on a tangent, so that the interview wouldn't take too long, because I think people would jib if you extended it with small talk. It used to take quite a long time I think, so you've got to appear fairly professional even if you weren't.

So you were worried about the people being interviewed thinking it would take too long, or your superiors, your managers thinking you were taking too long?

I wasn't very conscious that I had a manager timing me at all, but I was a bit conscious that I might be keeping people too long, and that's why I think I preferred to fix an appointment at a time when they would have time to do it really. I didn't feel it was any good trying to interview someone who was in a hurry about something, and I was always prepared to come back and finish it

another time if they'd had enough. And I think some places I must have been several times.

Any last thoughts?

No, I feel the one last thought, I suppose one property in Barnstaple I used to feel rather guilty about I think, there was a group of prefabricated houses still left from after the war and I had an address there and I used to knock on the door, and I used to be fairly certain there was somebody there but they weren't answering. But I went back several times, and I'm fairly certain I never got in there, and I think to myself I wonder if there was some poor terrified little old lady inside thinking what does this stranger want that she keeps coming back, so I do feel slightly guilty about that.

Were you worried about the amount of refusals then, did you think it might reflect badly on you, or you just felt that you really wanted to try and get all the people that were required?

Well I tried to work through the list that I had, and I was sorry that there did seem to be quite a few refusals. But there was never any additions, you didn't sort of say well try these alternative addresses or anything. So I never had any comment afterwards about how many had been completed, and really I can't remember now how many there were, and how many were refused.

Would you say it was an enjoyable process overall or?

Yes, I would actually, I did enjoy it. It was stretching and it was enjoyable, and I felt it was worthwhile.

Brilliant, well thank you very much, I'll just switch it off.