
Interview with Professor Hilary Land

Part 1: on her early involvement

So how I got to be on the project and things?

Yes.

Right! Well I, my first degree I did in Bristol. I got a rather bad degree in maths, not least because it wasn't something I particularly enjoyed. When I graduated in '63 I went to LSE to do the diploma in social administration, because that was the first step to becoming a social worker, which is what I thought I wanted to do. And in fact what it was was really a wonderful conversion course to the social sciences, and compared with doing maths, it was an absolute sort of eye opener, it was wonderful, and I thoroughly enjoyed it, and my tutor was Brian Abel-Smith. And he was a very inspiring teacher, and he also liked somebody who was prepared to argue with him, so that was fine.

So it just happened that at the end of that year when I finished my diploma, instead of going on to do the applied bit of the social work training, which was another year, Brian and Peter got money from Rowntree for this big poverty survey, and they advertised research assistantships, and I applied. Brian encouraged me to apply, and I got one of them. So I had no plans to go into the academic world with my rather bad degree, and ended up becoming a research assistant at LSE. So it was all a bit unplanned and I was in the right place at the right time.

So I started in the autumn of 1964 and the first things that I worked on were, because they'd only just got the money, they'd hardly kind of thought about how they were really going to use it in detail, so I was working on something that became poor and the poorest, which was that very boring occasional paper which looked at the family expenditure surveys of 1952, I think, and 1960, and showed from the figures that it wasn't just poverty amongst pensioners and people who were sick and disabled that the government should be worried about, they should also be worried about families. And this was an eye opener because everyone thought that if you're in work, as most people were, I mean if the unemployment

figures went up to a quarter of a million that made headline news in the early '60s, so it was a shock to discover that families with children where the father was in work were poor/

So although it makes very boring reading, I think, the report, it nevertheless started to, one of the things that started to put poverty, child poverty back on the map. And I think it was published in '65, and it was deliberately published just before Christmas to kind of pull the heart strings, and I remember going to Toynbee Hall, was the press, you know, you had a sort of press, what do you call, press conference, and I remember feeling so excited that here I was in the middle of sort of making news. And it did get, in those days it did get an awful lot of coverage.

So that was really very exciting. But after that, after sort of tidying up poor and the poorest I then was responsible for doing one of the pilot studies prior to the big national survey. I did a pilot study of large families. Dennis Marsden looked at lone mothers and John Veit-Wilson looked at people, adults with disabilities or chronic illness, so there were those three studies. Adrian Sinfield had already done, because he was working as a lecturer at Essex, where Peter was, you see what I mean about the bang, he had done one on long-term unemployed. So that was really the first study that served as a pilot, and then we did those three. John actually never finished his quite because he went off to Newcastle to a lectureship there, but Dennis and I finished ours and they were published, I've forgotten exactly when, I think in '67 or '68. But I had to wait an awful long time for the Department of Social Security to come up with a sample.

We were going to do a sample of families with five or more children in any Greater London borough basically, so it was a very big geographical area, but that's what was needed to find, I think the sample was 150 families. And to start with, the DSS said that we had to give, they would write to the families, because they were using the family allowance records, and ask them to agree to be interviewed. Well we only got about 30 responses back, and it took months of negotiation to get them to write to those who hadn't replied saying please let us know if you don't wish to be interviewed, and again about 30 replied saying no, we absolutely don't want to be interviewed.

So the rest were approachable. I mean some we lost because they'd already moved. I ended up with nearly 80 families I think that I did manage to interview.

I think I went on the end of every bus route in South London doing interviews. And, but whilst I was working, waiting for them to produce a sample for me, I mean not only was I doing my questionnaire but I looked at the history of family allowances, because again they weren't in the news much at that time. Even Enoch Powell wrote an article saying well people have nearly forgotten them now, they don't know what they're for, and it was only when child poverty was rediscovered that people started to say but what about family allowances

So I looked at the history and in particular I read Eleanor Rathbone's book, the *Disinherited Family*, which she'd published in 1924. And she was a feminist who campaigned for family allowances, well, all her adult life really. She started thinking about it when she was one of the first economics graduates at Oxford University, and was absolutely committed to not only that children should be recognised outside of the wages system but that the mother should be the parent that receive money for the children, and that we shouldn't channel children's money via the father. If you want it spent on the children, you give it to the mother, something this government I think has forgotten, or prefers not to think about.

So I found her work really inspiring, and my next job for Roy Parker after I left the poverty survey when the money ran out, I did have a chance to actually write and publish a history of family allowances as part of change, choice and conflict in central policy. So it stood me in good stead, though it didn't actually directly feed into the big national study. But, and of course the other thing that I worked on once I'd finished my pilot study and written it up, was the sample for the national survey. And luckily at LSE at the time, there was Professor Stewart and Professor Durbin, who were leading experts in sampling, and they advised us about the sample.

So we ended up doing a three stage stratified sample, which would have enabled us to work out confidence limits and error factors, though I don't think Peter ever got round to using it. But it would have been possible to have done that with that particular design. So in some ways it's a shame that it wasn't done, but given that it didn't get finished being written up and published until the late '70s, I think, the team had all long gone so it didn't happen. So I wasn't responsible for the design, Durbin and Stewart were responsible for that, but I was responsible for actually working out how to draw the sample. And because Peter in particular was very keen on making sure that we picked up people who weren't necessarily

on the electoral register, we had to look at the rating records as well and include them, if there were any gaps. And I think we probably ended up with perhaps 17 or so more addresses than we might have done if we'd just relied on the electoral register, and I obviously don't think it was worth the effort. The effort would have been better spent on trying to chase up some of the noncontacts actually from the sample that we did draw, but anyway Peter was very keen to do that. If Peter was very keen on something, it was very hard to convince him otherwise, so.

So really my main responsibility in the early days was the sample. I mean I drew some of the samples in London, but we relied on other people to draw the samples elsewhere, because it was the whole of the UK and it was before the troubles in Northern Ireland, so we interviewed in Northern Ireland, including in Belfast, and it was based on constituencies in the first instance and then wards within constituencies. So it included Scotland and Wales as well as England, so it was a very wide sample. And obviously one needed people located in those particular places to do it.

So that was my first major contribution to the actual national survey, and then I was responsible for writing some of the preliminary checking programmes, to make sure that, because it was all punched on cards in those days to go into the LSE computer, and against our advice they were multi-punched, which means you use the top, it's the top positions which makes it much more difficult to play with, but anyway. I wrote a programme which would check for consistency, particularly on the data relating to income, you know, benefits, earnings, savings, where you've got a nice number so that you could just make sure that the things added up and that somebody didn't write down that they were actually getting ten times what the components added up to, if you see what I mean.

So that was really the last thing that I did on the actual national survey, once the data was in, was to really start the preparations for checking the data prior to the actual looking at analysis of looking at, I wasn't involved with the analysis as such because the money had run out by then. That was the end of 1968 I left, and then worked for Roy Parker on this other project. So that was broadly sort of what my major contributions were, and I learnt a huge amount. I mean obviously I learnt methodological things about designing questionnaires and analysing the responses and interviewing and so on, as well as a lot about sampling and a lot about writing checking programmes, which in those days it

was Fortran, so it was not very user friendly, and the computer at LSE, the capacity of computers then was not very great, so I was always writing things that were too big for the computer to cope with. So I had to think of ways of scaling it back. So it was a mix really of different methods and things

So the other important thing is that because I'd done a science degree and my A-levels, which were physics and maths, didn't require writing essays and things, I didn't write at all well, and Brian and Peter between them taught me to write. I think if you go back to the long interviews that the archives have in Essex, you'll see, Peter says there that I couldn't write, and he was absolutely right. But between Brian and, it wasn't just Peter, it was Brian as well, they both, and other members of the team, helped me to write, so that I produced, as Dennis said, just try one idea per paragraph. You might find it a little easier for people to read. So I learnt a lot of interesting things, and I worked with some very interesting and experienced people.