
Interview with Ian McCannah

Part 2: the interviews

Now I'm not sure how much of this you might be able to remember but as you know we are really interested in what people wrote in the margins of the survey; those kind of little notes on the scripts. Could you have any memory of the kind of writing anything beyond the coding that you were required to do about writing little notes or anything like that?

I don't remember that, but if you say it happened, it's not entirely surprising. I think one of the issues I faced was there was this vast number of questions.

Yes there are.

And in some circumstances the questions didn't fit the situation. Or the answers were not really, you couldn't put them into any categories that were in the survey. And I think I was conscientious and felt that every question should be answered. Although in some circumstances it just wasn't appropriate, so you'd say not appropriate whatever. So I would have thought that I, it's coming back to me, I mean I did, you know, I would have annotated the margins with information that I felt was important for the survey but wasn't covered by the questions that I had to ask. So there were subtleties in the responses which were not covered by the formal structure.

Can you say, do you have any memory of what they might have been, any type of thing, or anything like that? But it was, you had a memory of the questions not quite fitting...?

Yes, and they needed a bit more explanation. So I would think it was elaboration of a point. I mean I can't remember what it would be, but it may have been questions about the house and there were various questions about the house but, and if you tick the boxes then it didn't really give a flavour of the house. So I might have said something more about the house or perhaps the individual was

not telling the truth and I felt they weren't telling the truth, I don't know, I don't know.

But you did that off your own bat -

Oh yes, yes.

- rather than being encouraged to do that.

Oh yes, well as far as I'm aware, yes.

Yes, and one of the things that sort of I alluded to a little bit earlier was we're really interested in what it was like to drive up and park outside someone's house and then actually try to get in and go in and have the experience of doing those sort of surveys. Do you remember what the field work was like, anything at all?

Well, youth is confident, so I suppose I went confidently and if they said no, then they said no, but you'd move on to the next one. I don't remember too much in the way of, well, I certainly wasn't nervous I don't think. You had to adapt with certain situations when we face the people we had to assess whether they really were going to be of any use because some people clearly would not be suitable for interview.

For what reasons, I mean can you?

I mean things like they might have been pretty frail. They might have been very busy, might have felt that it was too intrusive when you explained it to them. And so you just have to accept that's - I can't remember being rejected very often to be honest.

Right, okay, and what about the sort of circumstances you encountered when you were in the houses and doing the interview?

It was an eye opener. I mean I came from a lower, what we would call lower middle class background now, but it was a clean house and sort of happy family unit, and some of the things I saw didn't fit into that, so it's my first sort of exposure possibly to different, and it was a poverty survey so I guess that the

people that were selected, I can't remember, were they, was it random, it can't have been the whole population, they must have selected people who were in the sort of category of potential.

But I think they were randomly selected so some would have been in the category and they certainly over-sampled people who they expected to be in difficult circumstances.

They over-sampled, okay.

They over-sampled certainly those that...

Could I have interviewed some people who were not in poverty?

In poverty, yes you could have done.

I had a feeling I did actually.

Yes, because not everybody in the survey that we've come across saw themselves as being in poverty.

Okay.

So that would have been possible, yes. So was that your general impression of the people that you saw that they weren't in very difficult circumstances?

I think the impression was there was a range of people. It wasn't all people who were in dire poverty. But I seem to remember interviewing some people who clearly were not. But I'm afraid, I'm trying to think deeply but it's 50 years ago.

No, absolutely and we absolutely appreciate that.

Well not quite 50 years, 45 years ago.

Yes, it's a really long time ago and it's a long, long time to remember so yes I can imagine it's difficult. But it's interesting that you have remembered that those, there was definitely a range of circumstances

that you encountered. And you said that it was an eye opener in some situations.

Yes.

Was it quite, do you remember it being, I mean you was confident you said, but do you remember it being tough emotionally at any time or?

No, not really I don't think. I don't think so, no. Nope, I don't, I think it was possibly a different sort of poverty than now, maybe, I don't...

That's interesting; can you say a little bit more about that?

Well I wouldn't have thought we interviewed many sort of single parents. I can't remember that. I may have done, but I don't think that, not that single parents live in poverty but there may be a greater proportion nowadays -

Yes, sure, of course.

- of single parents that are on the poverty line. I don't remember, they tended to be family units.

And because you had your car they sent you to rural areas predominantly.

Possibly, although, well, yes I think I was in, I wasn't in cities I don't think, but I was certainly in towns, like Oswestry I seem to remember was one of the places, yes.

Yes, great. And how did you find the interviewees, did any of them, I know it's a long, long time, any of them stick in your mind at all or anything?

No, I think some people were a lot easier than others to interview. And I think, maybe another question you're going to ask, I don't know, but I think that there was real pressure I think to make sure that the questions were answered.

Yes, that's something we've picked up.

I think I was very conscious of the fact that they wanted an answer to every question. Now when you're in the field that is not always possible, so I seem to remember that I had to make some judgements, because if you are, if you're going to tick every box, give an answer to every question, then you have to make some judgements. So I think at times I thought well I've got to make a judgement here I hope it's the right judgement. Maybe better just to leave the questions and answers, I don't know, but I think there was a pressure to have every question answered.

And that might have been something you'd have made a note about on the margins and, yes.

Yes. So that means that some people were more difficult than others. It was harder to get the answers out of them. So there may have been a bit of a temptation to make your own judgements on them - because if I remember you had to fill in most of the questions if not all of them.

I think there was a strong imperative that we've picked up from, you know, even just the questionnaire to make sure that the answers were as full as they possibly could have been.

Yes.