

**Conversations with Kurt Lipstein, Emeritus Professor of Comparative Law:  
Some reminiscences over seventy years of the Squire Law Library and the Faculty of  
Law, University of Cambridge**

by  
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**Second Interview, The Second World War to the 1960s.**

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*These interviews were conducted by Lesley Dingle with Professor Lipstein in their shared room on the third floor of the library between 14th April and 1st June 2005. They are preserved on a CD. In this publication we present our transcribed conversations, together with annotated explanations, and have compiled brief biographies of the people mentioned. We also include an index of the sections in which these persons are mentioned.*

*Questions are italicized, and Professor Lipstein's replies are in plain text. Comments added later are in square brackets in italics – those from the authors are attributed to LD, and where extra information comes directly from Professor Lipstein, KL. Each question is consecutively numbered and it is the basis for the Index. A total of four interviews were held.*

**31.**

*Professor Lipstein, last week you told me about your experiences before and during the War and I wonder if we could just go back to the period from May to September 1940 when as Professor Emlyn Wade once said, you fell under the prerogative?*

Yes, I was interned. It went very smoothly and quietly because I'd been working on Whit Monday in the Squire Law Library [KL: "*on a project of Professor Gutteridge's*"]. When I walked home to lunch my good friend Clive Parry came and said the police had been and "they want to arrest you but they say have lunch first" After that we all met in the Guild Hall. We were transported to Bury St Edmunds and from there in due course after a week, which we spent on the meadow very pleasantly, guarded by an officer who was a pupil of one of us, we were sent by train to Liverpool [KL: "*and I spent four months in those surroundings and was spared both deportation or joining the Pioneer Corps, but was claimed back by the University of Cambridge to start my teaching at the end of the summer*"].

The crowd with whom I first stayed, had some rather interesting members. Cambridge did not have many elderly refugees. We were all young people. And ours was a potential rather than a real status. But Perutz later on got a Nobel Prize. Michael Kerr who was a student became Lord Justice of Appeal. Another became professor at university of Cambridge in science and one became Astronomer Royal for Scotland. So it was quite an interesting number of people. One whom nobody else recognised but of whom one said he

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looks like Frederick the Second of Prussia, was in fact the eldest grandson of the Kaiser who'd been tucked away in Cambridge to be saved from the National Socialists and who was studying at Corpus Christi under one of the family names, [KL: " von Lingen"], which of course none of us knew. I got to know him quite well. He was a good companion. Uncomplaining and capable of dealing with all the drudgery which occurred for us. I still remember that he was given some writing paper which was designed so as not to be capable of being used for secret messages. It looked awful. And there he was saying "Very awkward, very awkward. My aunt has a birthday. I cannot send her this." The aunt was of course Queen Mary.

**32.**

*So the war ended and you became a lecturer. Did you find that the law school and the library had changed greatly and do you have recollections of the immediate post war period as people came flooding back?*

Yes there was a great change. [KL: "The main task was getting back to normal life because we were flooded with people coming back."] Unlike in the First World War, the university had not closed down but it had worked on a very reduced level. And the Faculty of Law probably had not more than 60 students - partly those who had not been called up, partly those who were not going to be called up and partly some members from the Commonwealth who'd come. And now suddenly we had several hundred people flooding in and had to start a whole new course. What's more, these were people who'd been through the war, many had been officers. They were people who had a mind of their own. [KL: "Many had had responsible positions, and therefore were not willing to take orders as told or to accept the teaching as it was. On the whole we managed. "] I was at that time in 1944 appointed Secretary of the Faculty. It fell upon me to plan the teaching as these people flooded back, to administer the faculty, to deal with the finances and to represent it in every respect. [KL: " I had to deal with administration of the library and with correspondence. I was extremely busy and sat up to 11 o'clock at night in the library because I had to type my own letters and file my own correspondence and there was nobody else to help me. This was in addition to my teaching duties." ]

**33.**

*Could the library cope with the influx?*

The library was not bad and in those days the demands on reading were not as hard and detailed as they are now especially since these people intended to read primary courses and not do research. [KL: "I think we managed, but at that time the amount of publication was very limited and what we had was the stock from which we started in 1939 and there wasn't much ordered from that time." ]

**34.**

*You found yourself on the Library Committee for a number of years. Roughly from 1946-1974. Several well known academics were on the Committee at this time and I wonder if we can start with your recollections of Professor Hamson who was on the Library Committee from March 1947-1964, Chairman in 1955-1957?*



Hamson was the son of the British Consul in Istanbul and his wife who was a French woman [*This is a slip of the tongue - it was his mother who was French, Terese Boudon, LD*] and this determined his whole character. [KL: “*An interesting man. A strong catholic – he married a Scottish protestant and it was a delightful marriage between the two which I witnessed from the moment it started. A man of considerable character with firmly set ideas and views. A very good lawyer – perhaps a little too subtle – a good teacher. And altogether a man it was a pleasure to deal with. Directly after the war he spent a whole year in France and came back therefore with considerable strength in French law and therefore became professor of comparative Law.*”] He was fluent in French, it was perfect, and he was very much attached to France and he was also conversant with Greek because he’d grown up partly in Istanbul and as a result was a man of very broad culture. He was a classical scholar. He was one of the early young lecturers in the law school who made a name for himself. When I met him he was a very active person, interested mainly in contract but also introducing foreign law because he was fluent in French. Of course he was a man who had been interned in Germany for six years because he’d been a member of the contingent which had been sent to Greece when Germany invaded Greece in 1940 and he’d been captured. Six years of imprisonment had left a permanent imprint on his personality.

[LD: *Additional notes on Hamson added after discussion with Kurt Lipstein, May 2006.*] In approximately 1955, Kurt Lipstein and Hamson were both in Turkey at a meeting of Internal Association of Legal Science, and KL recalled. "*Before the session started, the members with wives and children were invited to sail up the Bosphorus to dinner. On coming back, on a wonderful warm September evening, the Turkish members of the party who lived on the Asian side of Istanbul left us. But we were told that there was some revolt in Istanbul. As we arrived in the lovely warm evening and tried to disembark from our vessel we were met by bayonets. The only remaining Turkish member who had been a misfit in Turkey and knew Cambridge well, now arranged with an Auxiliary policeman who came from the same village as he, that we should be given a boat to land behind the lines of revolution in order to reach our hotel. Most of us belonged to this group. Some who did not, and who had to go to their hotel in the Turkish quarter, found that they got through because one of the lecturers knew Turkish. We walked up the hill to our hotel and Jack Hamson and I formed the rearguard to see that nobody was left unattended. The advance guard was led by the representative of UNESCO, an émigré Pole. When he was asked by the revolutionaries who he was, he determined that it was best to be a follower of Islam, but not too much, so he answered that he came from Pakistan, and he was cheered! Hansom and I watched the revolutionaries in their cars, hooting and looting the streets, and saw to it that our charges were unharmed. And in doing so JH said to me, there is real progress here, 50 years ago we’d all have our throats cut.*"

### 35.

*So he served on the Committee from 1947–1964 and he was the Chairman from 1955-1957?*

[LD: *There was no comment, KL just nodded.*]



**36.**

*Someone else I'd like to ask you about is Sir William Wade 1951–1961, who is not to be confused with Sir Emyln Wade. Sir William Wade served on the Library Committee from 1937-1962?*

Bill Wade was one of the outstanding students in the pre-war period from 1938. [KL: *He came to Cambridge just before the war as an undergraduate. He had an interesting war because he was in Government office and then he was sent to the British delegation in Washington.*] During the war he was mainly used as a member of the British delegation in the United States where he married an American women. [KL: *He came back to a fellowship in Trinity College where he became bursar later on as well.*] He was an extremely able man specialising in Property Law and Administrative Law. In both cases he made a name for himself. He was always precise and to the point. [KL: *His future career was one between Cambridge and Oxford. At Cambridge he became Master of Caius College. He published a great deal and had considerable influence.*]

**37.**

*Professor Robbie Jennings, was on the Library Committee from 1957-1972, Chairman from 1963-1972?*

Him I knew well. When I joined Cambridge as a student he too was a student but already enjoying a scholarship to America. I did not see much of him much during the war. He was mainly attached to the intelligence in the army, I think in India. He was an outgoing person, capable, friendly and probably left a considerable imprint on the Faculty. [KL: *He succeeded Lauterpacht [Sir Hersch, LD] when Lauterpacht became Judge of the International Court of Justice. It fell upon him to deal with all matters of public international law. How far he affected the buying of the library, I cannot say.*]

**38.**

*Mr Dias served on the Library Committee from 1959-1962?*

An able lawyer specialising in Roman Law because he was originally from Ceylon, belonging to a well know family there. I knew him quite well. He was a good, excellent teacher. In the course of his life was a co-editor with Markesinis of a book on the law of tort [LD: *The English Law of Tort, 1976*] of which I think he probably bore a very strong brunt. [KL: *A very good lawyer. Determined in his teaching but otherwise quiet and reticent.*]

**39.**

*Dr Glanville Williams who was on the Committee from 1957-1967 and Chairman from 1966-1967?*

He was an old friend of mine to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude. We were both research students in 1934, he at John's, I at Trinity. At that time he was a very lively, happy, friendly young man with blonde curls and a love for hiking and going out on tours. He was one of the best pupils of Winfield, who said that when he was a student for PhD he deserved to have an LLD when he wrote his book on *Liability for Animals*.

When the war came, he took a step which affected his whole career. He became a conscientious objector and this lead in due course to the loss of his fellowship and his remaining merely a teacher without a college. After the war he accepted an appointment to



London only to come back later on to a professorship when most of his past history was forgotten.

**40.**

*In 1938 Willi Steiner, a refugee from Austria, where he had studied law, came to the UK and studied for his bar exams. He then worked for the London School of Economics before his appointment in 1959 as Assistant Librarian at the Squire Library. This was a full time position while Dr Ellis Lewis was the part-time Librarian. One of the things Willi did was to re-catalogue the collections. The catalogue was printed in book form and is still used today and he also devised a new classification scheme for the Library. Did these two innovations have a significant impact upon the library and its users?*

I believe they did although it met with a certain antagonism. [KL: “*It didn’t affect me, but then really I knew where to look for the books. But it probably meant that later on you could distinguish the various types of law books by trying to look not according to the place where they were put but according to the category of books which were to be found in certain places.*”] Placing books on shelves merely by indicating the shelf at which they are is an incomplete method, especially since books have to be moved and therefore soon the instructions are wrong. He devised a scheme very detailed as to subject matter and I believe that it has worked. [KL: “*Prior to his arrival the system consisted of guide cards on the edge of the stacks.*”]

[LD: *In another interview KL made the following comments about Willi Steiner,*

*"A man who hadn't really started as a librarian but who became very much a librarian with all the interest of it as his interest in classification shows. For us, his main concern was that he saw to it that the library's breadth of material was much extended. Before then it was the Common Law library of English Law with very little, even of the Commonwealth or American materials, except the American Supreme Court Reports. What you find today is an entirely broad collection of American law reports, and similarly of Commonwealth law reports, together with any necessary textbooks. All this is due to him"].*

**41.**

*Prior to Willi's arrival there had been a long-serving team of Dr Ellis Lewis, Teddy Hill and Clarence Staines. How did Willi's arrival into this stable team alter the way the library was run?*

[KL: “*It affected the whole policy of acquisitions and made the library more far reaching.*”] Before then it was run by amateurs – not by Dr Ellis Lewis – he was of course a lawyer, but then he was not a librarian and his greatest strength was his relationship to his pupils – not to the books. So it was very much at that time a matter of Staines and Hill who ran the early show, but that meant they were capable of classifying, putting the books away and generally looking to the maintenance of the collection rather than to its expansion or its completion.

**42.**

*In 1968 Willi was responsible for appointing Mr Peter Zawada to the library staff. Today Peter is head of Reader Services. Do you have any recollections of him in those early days.*



A very helpful young man who gave a lot of his time to keeping the library in good order [LD: *i.e. Peter Zawada*]. But of course his real services only came into being after the war [LD: *referring back to Willi Steiner*].

**43.**

*Professor Parry, when Chairman of the Library Committee in 1968 wrote that Willi had succeeded in transforming the library?*

I have no doubt that Parry was right. He transformed the library from a useful library at English Common law to a research library which enabled people to deal with a world wide range of books in a great number of subject matters.

