

**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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**Third Interview, After the War.**

Date: 10 May 2005

*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.*

**44.**

*Professor Lipstein last week we covered the period after the War and the influence of Willi Steiner. He left in 1959 and perhaps we can talk today about the library staff and committee members who continued after Willi left? Do you recall Mr Gordon Hughes who in 1961 was appointed as Second Assistant?*

We were looking for a Librarian and at that time trained legal librarians were not easily to be found. Hughes came as an administrator and he did his job very efficiently with a pleasant manner, appreciated by everybody, but of course he wasn't a legal expert, and the result was things were administered well, but that was all he could do.

*So he became the Squire Law Librarian as you say, in an administrative capacity, with no college teaching, and he had the degree of MA conferred upon him and then he retired in 1982 because of ill health?*

I believe that is so, but I cannot remember it

**45.**

*Do you have any recollections of Mr Prichard from 1962?*

Very little. He was of course a student at Cambridge and became a member of Caius College. Always interested in property and legal history and always a very reliable man, but I cannot say much more.

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**46.**

*Mr Jolowicz who was here between 1964 and 1965?*

[LD: *this was the son of Professor Herbert Jolowicz*]. Again I cannot remember much because I may or may not have taught him when I was young, but of his work on the library I have no particular recollection. A competent person at all times.

**47.**

*Any recollections of Mr Lauterpacht, later Sir Elihu Lauterpacht who started on the Committee in 1964?*

He was of course always interested in Public International Law, and as far as I can think of he must have helped us a good deal on that basis. That was his great strength.

**48.**

*In 1968 Mr Major became Squire Librarian. While he was in this position, the library expanded into the ground floor of the Cockerell Building. Do you have any recollections of this period?*

I remember slightly that it relieved us of the duty when we went to the library to go up a staircase to the first floor. Instead of that, we were much enlarged and we needed more space so that it was a great relief to have the ground floor. It made the whole building more accessible because you started on the ground floor and then worked your way upwards. Moreover it was possible then to keep all the technical machinery downstairs.

**49.**

*Professor Clive Parry, Professor of International Law 1969-1982 served on the Library Committee from November 1966. 1976 became Chairman. I know he was a personal friend of yours. Do you have any recollections you can share with me?*

I remember him well when he came as a student because he was a child prodigy. Obtained the degree of LLB in Birmingham at the age of 19. Came to Cambridge to Downing College to read for what was then the LLB, which he did with his usual efficiency to the extent that when he was being examined for the Hughes Scholarship and found the paper didn't cover the syllabus, he stopped the examination and had the paper reset. It gives an idea of the man's energy, courage and general imagination. He did very well in his exams. Then if I remember rightly, obtained some kind of grant to study at the famous institute of Public International law in Berlin, Kaiser Willem Institute, and that is where he was in 1938 when he quickly left because war looked like threatening. Came back and we worked together quite a lot, especially on the *Digest of International Law* which was the work of McNair and Lauterpacht's father [LD: *i.e. of Hersch Lauterpacht*]. He was a great friend, as he especially showed in times when I was in difficulties and there were such times both professionally and financially, and then especially later on when the war came and I was in difficulties because of my status.

**50.**

*How did he help you?*



He helped me when I needed money to pay for being admitted to the Bar when I could have gone to my family, my great uncle. He certainly helped when I was interned and saw to it that the necessary people were mobilised to apply to the Home Office to get me home. We worked a great deal together. His energy, his critical energy and his general interest in literature and anything made him a stimulating companion.

**51.**

*Can you tell me anything more about his work?*

While I knew him, he wrote one or two books, one on nationality. But he never spoke much to me about his work, as well as I did not speak to him about my work. The only interesting thing which might be recorded is that he is the expert of having married the same woman four times in one day!

He was first during the War first attached to the Black Watch but was invalided out. At that moment he became Professor of International Law at the University of Ankara in Turkey. I do not know what his actual position was, and I never asked him. In that connection, he got to know the secretary of the American Ambassador and in fact proposed to her and was accepted. Since she was a member of the American Embassy, a consular marriage in the American Consulate was indicated. But he was British and therefore a similar consular marriage in the British Embassy was indicated. But he was also an employee of the Turkish state and therefore a civil marriage was proper and a perhaps a religious marriage might make the matter look firmer. He was during the war in Turkey and had varied experiences. He often saw the German Ambassador. Didn't speak to him, one von Papen. He told me at the end of the war when the German Embassy was occupied by the allies, it turned out that they had a direct telephone line to the British Embassy which the British Embassy did not know. He then came to England. Was a fellow of Downing. Was the Law Fellow there, a very energetic person. When we built a house and we had to build a house big enough to take two parties, he became the co-tenant and we lived happily together for ten years. And then he moved and I saw less of him after that, but we always kept in great contact.

**52.**

*As I understand, he was a very charismatic man?*

Yes, if you could take his critical ability.

**53.**

*Do you recall Mr Hopkins who was, and is still, your friend during 1970?*

I really have no idea. We are now very much connected together because we are both benchers of the Middle Temple. At that time he was a very young man. He was a creation of Clive Parry.

**54.**

*Did he help him with the Treaty Series?*

He helped out with everything.

**55.**



*Professor Stein, who was on the Committee in 1970?*

He was of course by then quite an authority, but I cannot remember anything particular which he did.

**56.**

*In 1971 Professor Baker, who is now the distinguished legal historian, became the Squire Law Librarian. While he was in this position, Willi Steiner's classification and re-cataloguing were completed. Then Baker resigned to become full time university lecturer. Do you have any recollection of this time in the early 70s?*

Not really. Baker was really a scholar and not the Librarian. I did not have very much contact with him.

**57.**

*In 1973 you became the Chairman of the Library Committee?*

I never remember that I had been. I thought I was never allowed to be. [LD: KL was Chairman from 1973 to at least 1974 but there are no records preserved from 1974 to 1980].

**58.**

*But you were active on the Library Committee for many years?*

For many years. I knew a good deal about the library which other members did not know so intimately so I could be of some help.

**59.**

*And you were responsible for building up the Private International Law and the Foreign Law?*

Oh yes, and the foreign law.

**60.**

*Mr Glazebrook 1974?*

I cannot really remember anything.

**61.**

*Mr Turpin?*

Again no doubt they were helpful, but I cannot remember any particular activity.

**62.**

*Dr O'Higgins?*

Higgins was a public international lawyer more interested in his own work. Nice and agreeable and helpful person. He was interested in Public International Law. He also was an Irishman and therefore could help with the Irish collection.

**63.**

*In 1982 the Library was incorporated administratively into the University Library. Do you have any recollections of this time? Do you recall the circumstances under which this happened? What if any, were the consequences on the readers?*



I have no direct recollection except that as far as I remember we were not very happy about it. It meant that the financial side got into a much bigger administration and didn't give us either the extent nor the manner where we could administer our own affairs. The Steiner modification of the classification was I think accepted as something strategically excellent though people found it difficult to get accustomed to.

**64.**

*But no additional staff appointments were made as a result of incorporation into the University Library?*

Certainly not.

**65.**

*In 1983 Mr McVeigh was appointed as Squire Law Librarian and he oversaw the move to the new quarters in 1995 when the library moved from the Cockerell building to the Sidgwick Site. What were the reasons for the move? Can you remember?*

It's difficult for me now to say whether it was more the university administration which was keen to take over the Cockerell building, or whether it was our difficulty in accommodating our books. I think both agreed and the only question was who would have to give way to whom. If we took over the whole building (Cockerell building) the university administration would have had to build a new building. It would probably have been the better answer. It would have given them greater technical ability. But no, it wasn't done. The easier, quicker way was taken that we had to go out and they could enlarge.

**66.**

*Architecturally the new building is controversial.*

It certainly was controversial from the beginning because of the whole structure which combined lecture rooms, administration and the Library in a way in which lecture rooms on the ground level were not insulated so that any change of audience within each hour meant a great deal of noise of people moving. This was already realised by the Committee. The University Librarian resigned because he took exception to the form of the building. So it was a controversial matter, with a very famous architect who had his own way. It then turned out of course that there was too much noise and considerably expensive changes had to be made.

**67.**

*In your opinion was the move a success?*

It certainly gave us more room, but it gave up that feeling of may I say cosiness which the old library had. Nice wooden panelling, big tables which lawyers need, comfortable chairs. Instead of that we have a modern building of concrete, vast open spaces and small tables which are not good for lawyers who need many books in front of them, and chairs which were designed by the architect or his minions and are less comfortable than what we had before.

**68.**

*So if you were to contrast the facilities that you enjoyed at the old building?*



I would go back.

**69.**

*It occurs to me that you are probably unique in that you are the only person who has ever worked in all three of the Squire Libraries; Downing St, Cockerell Building and the Sidgwick Site. Would it be true to say that, do you think?*

That is quite correct. I certainly began in 1934 on the Downing Site. Nobody who was there with me is still alive. Nor for that matter are many who were with me in the Cockerell Building.

