

Conversations with Mr R. W. M. Dias (Emeritus Fellow of Magdalene College)

by
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Second Interview: 1951-1981

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Between January and March 2007 Mr Dias was interviewed three times at his home in Babraham Road to record his reminiscences of nearly seventy years of his association with the Faculty of Law at the University of Cambridge. He is one of the very few remaining scholars whose experiences extend to pre-Second World War times, and at the time of writing, he is the oldest living ex-member of the Faculty.

The interviews were recorded, and the audio version is given on a parallel page of this website. Here we present a transcript of those recordings. Visitors will find that the two do not appear to match because we have taken the liberty of cutting and pasting portions of the transcript to produce a more coherent narrative of Mr Dias' career. In particular, portions of the third interview, where we "tidied up" some loose ends relating to his childhood have been combined into the first interview.

154. Mr Dias, I've had a chance to think about your first interview and I'd like to follow up on a few points. We spoke about various people whom you'd met a student before the War. To add to what you said last time, can we come back to Professor Hamson whom you mentioned you knew quite well?

Yes. Of course, when I first came here, Professor Hamson wasn't around. I think he was a prisoner of war. I only got to know him after he came back from that, and then I got to know him really rather well.

155. Any specific recollections?

No, except that he had the habit of going on lecturing after one o'clock but he was such a good lecturer that the audience didn't mind at all that they were deprived of their lunch more or less but...

156. So he used to simply continue?

Oh he went beyond one o'clock [*laughs*] and, as I say, he was a very, very good lecturer indeed.

157. Nobody got up and walked out?

Not to my knowledge. I wasn't there of course... it was really rather awkward sometimes. These people had other engagements but still, to my knowledge nobody did walk out. [*Laughter*]

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158. Interesting. You also mentioned Professor Winfield. He had a great influence upon you?

Oh yes, I liked Winfield very, very much indeed. I got to know him extremely well and...

159. Your book on tort was, in some way, a sequel to his book.

Yes.

160. To some extent he mentored you.

In a sense that he never took supervisions or anything like that, which I attended, but he was a very kind man and I know he took an interest in me because he knew I was fond of the Law of Torts.

161. And this perhaps nurtured your fondness for the subject?

Only indirectly. I used to attend his lectures of course, and then subsequently, after I came back as a lecturer, I know he was greatly tickled at the thought that I was also fond of the Law of Torts like he was.

162. And he was someone you could have discussions with?

Well, I don't think I ever really had discussions with him on the subject but still... yes, I knew him. He lectured to me when I was a student and I always had a great admiration for him.

163. We'll move on now to new territory, in fact the main part of your career, the 31 years you spent as a member of the Law Faculty at Cambridge University from 1951 to 81.

So, if we may, I'm going to ask you about this in two parts. Today your memories of the Faculty and the staff, and in the next interview we'll talk about your research, your teaching and your writing. We have to remember that at your time in the Faculty was during its occupation of what is called the old schools adjacent to Senate House Passage when the Faculty and the Squire Law Library shared what by modern standards would be considered very cramped and inadequate quarters.

In comparison with your student days can you recall any major changes after the War in the library in the Faculty of Law?

That's a difficult question to answer because when I first entered the Squire Law Library as an undergraduate it continued in that fashion until I think they moved, but I don't know that there was any major change, no.

164. No, large increases in student and staff numbers immediately post-war?

Oh yes. The student numbers, yes because they were all the returning warriors from war and they were... and also people whose careers had been interrupted by the war and who came back to complete their studies. So it was very crowded as far as undergraduates were concerned.



165. Professor Lipstein said that although it was very cramped in the old library, he preferred it to the new library because it was so cosy. Did you find it was a congenial place to work?

Oh, very congenial, indeed yes. I always remember Dr Lipstein had his own particular room. It was an understood thing by everybody that that was Lipstein's room and...*[Laughter]*

166. Did any of the other of the lecturers have their special corners where they worked?

Well, now, let me see if I can remember. Well, Dr Ellis Lewis, of course he was then librarian and he had his own particular room, but apart from that I don't think there was anybody who had a particular room, no.

167. Did you do most of your teaching in your college?

Well, yes. Of course I was then...I hadn't joined Magdalene then, I did most of my teaching in Trinity Hall and I must say the Hall was extremely kind in making a room available for me to do my teaching, so...

168. When you returned as a lecturer in 1951, you would have had a different professional relationship with the staff you once knew as a student. You originally knew them as a youngster and now here you were back amongst them as colleagues.

That's true, yes.

169. How did these established academics treat you as a young lecturer? You were about 30 years of age, what influence did they have upon you? For example, Professor Wade, he was a lecturer on your arrival but Downing Professor by 1951.

Well, when I first came Professor Wade was Emlyn Wade and he had known my father before the First World War and he was extremely kind. I remember he told me all sorts of stories about the life, you know, pre-First World War.

170. Delightful.

Indeed, yes. So, now, who else was there?

171. There was Duff, who when you first came as a student, was a lecturer, but by 1951 was Regius Professor.

That's true, yes. Well, yes...Professor Duff. I say so with all due respect that he was not a very good lecturer. And as an undergraduate, although I started attending his lectures, I along with quite a number of others, gave up attending the lectures simply because we didn't really feel we were getting much out of them. And of course he was a Romanist and I was very interested in Roman Law myself but... apart from that I don't think we had very much in common. No.

172. Professor Bailey who was a Reader in 1951 and later became the Rouse Ball Professor. Do you have any recollections of your relationship with him when you were first appointed?



Well, my relationship was really not so much with him as with his wife who was a brilliant tennis player. She was a pre-war Dutch international.

173. Fascinating.

Indeed, and we used to play tennis together quite a lot.

174. So you must have been pretty good ?

Oh, I don't know.

175. Did they have their own tennis court?

Oh no, we played on the St John's tennis courts. Yes.

176. That sounds lovely. Then there was Professor Jackson who was a lecturer in 1951, soon after that Downing Professor.

Well now Jackson used to supervise me along with others from Trinity Hall in John's in his rooms, yes. And he was a very good lecturer indeed, yes. But apart from that I don't know that I had any further contacts with him afterwards. Not really, no.

177. Now Professor Lauterpacht was already the Whewell Professor when you started as a student, and when you became a lecturer he was still in the Chair.

Yes, that's right. Well, when I first started reading Law, Professor Lauterpacht was in America and he didn't come back to England, war time conditions being what they were, until about the second term and he was a very good lecturer. But the most remarkable thing about him was that he always lectured without a single note, impromptu and no hesitation, nothing. He was remarkable.

178. Do you know what he was doing in America?

No, I'm afraid I don't, no. I can't remember. If I ever knew, I've forgotten now.

179. After the War the Faculty expanded fast and when you arrived there were many young academics who had not been long in place. Also in the years shortly after your arrival there was a steady influx. These people must all have been influential upon you in various ways and, if I run through a list of some of your contemporaries, I wonder if you can recall impressions of them, how they have perhaps influenced you and whether you have any interesting anecdotes or stories about them.

Well I'll do my best but, yes. What are they?

180. Well, we'll start with Mr Gooderson who was a lecturer in 1950 and later became a Reader in English Law.

Yes. Yes. Gooderson, that's right. He was one of the nicest and kindest of persons and I had a great deal to do with him because I used to supervise undergraduates from St Catherine's and he was the Law don there. So I had a great deal to do with him.



181. Robbie Jennings was a lecturer 1950 to 55. He didn't become a Reader but was promoted straight to the Whewell Chair.

That's right, yes. Robbie Jennings, well, there again, I didn't have a great deal to do with him because Trinity Hall was not in the orbit of Jesus College and so I was never supervised by him. Nor was I ever lectured to by him.

182. He was a lecturer with you from 1951 to 55. And as a colleague?

No real contact with him, no.

183. Clive Parry who became a Reader in 1960. He was a lecturer in your time?

Yes, now, he was really a character *par excellence*. And for some strange reason he seemed to like me very much and I had a great deal to do with him, as it were, socially and all the rest of it.

184. According to Professor Lipstein, he could be very critical.

Well, that was part of his image. [*Laughter*]. He was all like that, but there again he was an extremely kind man and very helpful.

185. He seems to have had many devotees. If he took you on... he was... people loved him in short.

Absolutely, yes. Indeed yes. They did, yes. He was like that.

186. Professor Lipstein was extremely fond of him and describes him as his great friend.

Yes, I can imagine that.

187. So, no specific recollections of Clive Parry?

Well, I have got plenty of recollections, but they're all haphazard and higgledy piggledy. Yes... again, I used to do a lot of supervising for Downing College and I had a lot to do with him through that connection. But apart from that, I can't recall anything specific, no.

188. William Wade was a lecturer in the 50s, and in 79 he became Rouse Ball Professor.

Well now he was... he was a great tennis player and I used to play a lot of tennis with him.

189. Really?

Yes. Bill Wade, yes. I'm trying to think up all sorts of things about him. In fact, apart from playing tennis a great deal with him, I don't know that I had any other real point of contact with him and...

190. So, it seems to me that, as I said earlier, you were a very good tennis player?

Oh, I don't know about that. Well, it depends on what your standard of good tennis player is. I won a tennis blue in my undergraduate days but nothing very special, I'm afraid.



191. Professor Milson was a fellow lecturer in 54. He left the Faculty and then returned as Professor in the late 70s. He still lives in Cambridge today.

Yes. There was a little coterie of persons of which I was a member partly at Trinity Hall, partly at Trinity and I got to know Toby Milson in that connection. He was really one of the most brilliant students I think, that the Faculty produced over that period.

192. How interesting.

I'm not quite sure, is he still alive?

193. He's still alive. I think he comes in to the Faculty occasionally. Not often.

I haven't seen him for a great many years now.

194. Mr Pritchard you might remember, who joined three years after you did? He still comes in the Faculty quite a bit.

I'm sure he does, yes. I think he succeeded me as Secretary of the Faculty. There again, my connection, chief connection with him was because I used to supervise a number of Caius undergraduates and...

195. He was also very fond of Professor Lipstein.

Oh yes, well. Well, who wouldn't be?

196. Mr Yale became an assisted lecturer three years after your arrival. Any memories of him?

He was always very quiet and reserved and, there again, I used to do a lot of supervising for his pupils and it was in that connection that I got to know him.

197. G. L. Williams was a lecturer in 55 and then he became a Professor from 67 to 77.

Glanville Williams?

198. That's right.

Yes. Now, he was, I suppose, one would describe as one of my hero boys because he was one of the most brilliant lawyers I think the Faculty has produced and I used to greatly enjoy attending his lectures and... but, again, apart from that I had no particular connection with him.

199. Someone else that Professor Lipstein was very fond of.

Glanville Williams?

200. Yes.



Professor Jolowicz arrived in 1956 as assistant lecturer and he stayed on until 72 when he became a Reader and then Professor in 76. He's still around.

I really got to know him through his father and his mother because old Professor Jolowicz was a person who had the seat I used to sit in, and I greatly enjoyed his lectures and all the rest of it. But Tony Jolowicz, that again, I didn't have much contact with him.

201. I remember being inspired as a student of Roman Law by his father's wonderful book.
[1952 Historical Introduction to the study of Roman Law]

Oh yes indeed. Very much so, yes. Yes.

202. Eli Lauterpacht became a lecturer in 1958 and a Reader in 81, then became a director of the Lauterpacht Research Centre. Did you have anything to do with him?

Only rather vaguely. Not particularly intimate or anything like that. I had, I'm afraid, lost much of my interest in international law because I always regarded it as a bit of bogus subject [laughs]... one takes it very seriously. And Eli Lauterpacht, there again, apart from that, very vague contact.

203. So there was a large influx of staff in the early 60s. We've left the 50s now. Did this affect you in any way? Was it occasioned by a large increase in student numbers?

Only that it involved a very great deal of supervising because most of them were people whose careers had been interrupted by the war and of course all the returning warriors came back to complete their studies.

204. It must have seemed a bit more crowded.

Oh very much so. Yes.

205. One of the lecturers who arrived in the early 60s, and later later knighted, was Sir Derek Bowett. He was a Reader in 1976 and Professor from 81 to 91. Do you have any recollections of him?

Derek Bowett? Yes. He was a pupil of mine.

206. Good heavens.

Oh yes. I remember him as an undergraduate.

207. Professor Gareth Jones was an assistant lecturer in 1962 and then in the early 70s he went straight from a lecturer to Downing Professor. Do you remember him?

Oh yes, I do remember him but again rather superficially. I didn't have much contact with him.

208. Mr Turpin became assistant lecturer in 1962 and lecturer the next year.



Well, he was a pupil of mine. He came from South Africa and he used to come to me for supervisions in Roman Dutch law, which is the legal system out in South Africa, and also supervisions in Roman law and Jurisprudence. Yes. I got to know him really rather well socially as well.

209. **He's a very nice man.**

Oh extremely. Charming, courteous. Sort of an old world politeness about him.

210. **Yes. He excelled in Public Law and became a constitutional lawyer. His text book is one of the major core text books in the Constitutional Law course.**

Yes.

211. **Ivor Jennings was Downing Professor for a short spell. Do you know why this was?**

I think he was on the staff before I really started my legal career. But then he later came back and he was Master of Trinity Hall so it was in that connection that I got to know him much better. And he'd also been out in Sri Lanka I think for a great many years so we used to exchange a lot of Sri Lankan gossip. *[Laughter]*

212. **Tony Weir arrived in 1964 as assistant lecturer and then he was promoted to Reader in 1979. And he lives in Trinity although he's retired.**

Yes, there again I haven't had much contacts with him and certainly not for, oh some years now.

213. **He's certainly very highly regarded these days, for the last ten years that I've been at the Squire Library I've always been aware of what a luminary he is. Taught Tort amongst other things.**

That's right, yes.

214. **There was yet another large influx in the late 60s and people like Mr John Collier, John Hopkins, D. G. Williams, Hepple amongst others joined. Do you have any idea why the Department expanded so quickly in the late 60s?**

I'm not quite sure why but I should imagine it's because of the very large increase in the numbers of undergraduates reading the subject and also the expansion of the number of subjects that were being introduced and they wanted new lecturers.

215. **What sort of new subjects as you recall?**

Well, the whole syllabus was revised completely during the time that I was Secretary of the Faculty. We had tripos reform that became a real bogey with all of us and, as a result, these new subjects were introduced and we had to find teaching for him.

216. **Do you remember any of these new subjects?**



Well, yes, it was a hopeless job, I'm afraid. They had the idea, I think largely inspired by Professor Hanson, of having two go's at the same subject, sort of, and we had the second year introduction to this, that and the other, followed in the third year with the same subject at a deeper level and that was... I don't know that I ever favoured that idea but still that was introduced and it lasted for quite a time.

217. Interesting. But mind you, when I did my Law degree, we had Contract in the second year and then advanced Contract in the third year.

Well, when I taught, there was an introduction to Contract and Tort and then there was Contract in the third year, and Tort. It seemed an awful waste of time to spend two years at this same subject. But still, there it was.

218. That perhaps explains in part why so many new people were taken on.

I think that was part of the reason certainly.

219. Do you remember Mr John Collier who joined in 1967?

Oh yes, yes. He was a pupil of mine. He was at Emmanuel, wasn't he? What do I remember about Collier? I used to supervise him.

220. It fell to him to write the book on Conflict of Laws.

That's right, yes. He was a Conflicts man.

221. John Hopkins joined as assistant lecturer in 67 and then became a lecturer in 1970. Of course he is still around as well.

Oh very much so, yes. Oh yes. Well I used to do a lot of supervising for Downing and I got to know John Hopkins very well and also Mrs Hopkins, absolutely charming. I should have thought she was one of the most brilliant students that the Faculty has produced.

222. They still do come in quite frequently. She's very actively involved at Girton.

That's right, yes.

223. We then come to Professor D J Williams. He had a meteoric rise, lecturer in 69, Reader in 76 and then 84 Rouse Ball Professor. Any recollections?

Oh, well. Yes, I mean he too was a pupil of mine as an undergraduate and there again very pleasant memories about him, but again nothing very special, I don't think.

224. Since he retired he gives public lectures and he's a very good raconteur.

That's right, yes.

225. Professor Stein came as Regius Professor in 69.



Yes, he came from Aberdeen, was it? Well, of course he has a great interest in Roman Law, which is also one of my subjects, and there again we used to have a lot of discussions about Roman Law together, but apart from that I don't know that I... there isn't really anything special that I remember about him, yes.

226. And then, lastly in this category, Professor Hepple who came in 1969 as assistant lecturer.

Yes, there again, I supervised him and I remember him very well indeed.

227. I didn't realise that he was a student here.

I think he came as an affiliated student.

228. It must have been from Johannesburg.

That's right, from Johannesburg. But since I've been to South Africa quite frequently, again we used to exchange a lot of recollection; in fact he used to tell me an awful lot about the goings on in South Africa.

229. Yes, he was one of Mandela's Counsel I believe.

He was. He was indeed, yes.

230. You say you've been to South Africa a few times, was that for a holiday or in an official capacity?

Not a holiday, official capacity. I was invited out to give courses of lectures at various Universities in South Africa, namely the University of Johannesburg but other locations as well, so...

231. What period was this?

Oh, late 1950s, I think but...

232. The first decade, if you like, of your...

That's right, yes. Well maybe the early 60s as well.

233. We now come towards the end of your time in the Faculty and in 1975 the first of the Arthur Goodhart visiting Professors arrived. This was Professor Kahn-Freund. Do you recall the circumstances of the establishment of this visitor's chair?

No, I don't, I'm afraid. It's after my time as Secretary and I really didn't get to know Kahn-Freund very well so I've very few, in fact no recollections about him at all.

234. Other new arrivals were Judge Elias who came as an assistant lecturer in 1978.

There again, rather vague. Not to very many contacts.



235. Markesinis arrived in 1975 and he was a lecturer by 79, and of course you collaborated with him on three text books. You must have had quite a bit to do with him before he left.

Oh, indeed I did, yes, very much, yes.

236. Professor Allott who arrived in 1976 and became a lecturer in 1980.

I knew him very well indeed but had very few contacts with him.

237. Over those three decades, what were the most profound changes in the Faculty in the way that law was taught?

That is very difficult to answer because there were different styles of lecturing. Quite a few people still adhere to the old fashion type of lecturing.

238. Which was?

Which was straight forward harangue from the lecturer. The other used to conduct it more or less as a discussion group but, again, it's very difficult to focus my recollections because I never attended these sessions. But still, all I can say is that the undergraduates whom I was still supervising, they seemed reasonably happy.

239. What was your style of lecturing?

Oh, the old fashioned straightforward, that type of lecturing.

240. What, if any, were the major changes in emphasis in legal issues with which the Faculty had to cope?

I don't think there were any, at least not that I can remember offhand. No.

241. Did the increasing overcrowding affect your accommodation in the Faculty?

I didn't have any accommodation. I used to visit the Squire Law Library but I didn't have a room or anything like that.

242. You mentioned the Squire Law Library,. Were there any significant changes in the way it was run and its effectiveness over this period?

It was still in the old Squire, in the old schools. No, I think towards the end of the period we're talking about there was all this talk about moving to the new site and people weren't very interested in trying to improve or tinker with the existing set up in the old Squire. No, there wasn't anything very special.

243. Finally, what are your most enduring memories of your time in the Faculty?

Well, except to say that I enjoyed every minute of it. I used to like lecturing and of course the comradeship of the Faculty members, especially people like Clive Parry and Kurt Lipstein. Apart from that, no, no. I enjoyed it very much.



244. **Thank you so much Mr Dias.**
Not at all. It's a pleasure.

