

LSE ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

Title Page

Ref. No.: THS018

Wav file Refs:

Collection title: Tales from Houghton Street: an LSE oral history

Interviewee's surname: Worrall

Title: Professor

Interviewee's forenames: John (Jim)

Sex: M

LSE connection: 1965-1971 student. 1971-present. Professor of Philosophy of Science, CPNSS, Department of Philosophy, Logic and Scientific Method

Date of birth: 27/11/1946

Date(s) of recording, Compact Flash used, tracks (from – to): 24/7/2015

Location of interview: LSE

Name of interviewer: Clara Cook

Type of recorder: Tascam DR-40

Total no. of tracks: 1

Recording Format: Wav 24bit 44.1khz

Mono or stereo: Mono

Total Duration: 00:32:18

Additional material:

Copyright/Clearance:

Interviewer's comments:

THS018 John Worrall

Track 1 [32:18] [Session one: 22 July 2015] John Worrall [JW], born 1946. [00:29] JW joined LSE 50 years ago as a student in 1965. [01:00] First impressions: already knew it would not be a campus in the same way as Exeter or Oxford. Excited to be in London, first time in London. JW describes himself as a working class boy from Lancashire. [01:30] Later came to view the campus as grimy. [01:45] Supposed to be going into scholarship year to go to Oxbridge but at the last minute changed his mind. After a brief career interview decided to be an Actuary as it was the highest paid profession, and came to LSE to specialise in statistics. Everyone did a general degree BSc Econ and took some history and politics. [03:46] As had done an A Level in Statistics took a Logic course instead and was taught in the Philosophy department including lectures by Karl Popper. Most people doing logic dropped out by JW was riveted. Popper very charismatic, believed in what he spoke about, shamelessly namedropped e.g. correspondence with Einstein. [05:00] JW swapped his specialist subject to philosophy, then a fledgling teaching department. [05:28] Chose mathematical logic because Imre Lakatos was the undergraduate tutor. Lakatos was an amazing man, and considered Popper's successor along with John Watkins. Popper retired 1967 but still came to seminars. JW describes Imre Lakatos as a tutor. Lakatos set JW off on his career in philosophy but died before he completed his PhD. [07:37] After completing his PhD in 1971 JW was appointed to staff as a lecturer in philosophy of science. Tempted by offers of America but following a year on sabbatical there his wife hadn't liked it. [08:15] LSE philosophy very niche, following Popper's own interests, best place to be. [08:55] JW was lonely in the first year. Passfield Hall had lost his application form so lived in a University of London hall with few other LSE students. [09:33] In the second year had more of a departmental identity. Became friends with some other students who pursued a career in philosophy. [10:00] Describes Three Tuns pub in St Clement's building basement. [10:15] LSE wasn't a very friendly place, probably because it wasn't a proper campus, but still had a good time. [10:45] Transition from student to staff. Had taught logic and been Lakatos's research assistant. More of an evolution than a change. [11:33] More on the Three Tuns bar. [11:50] Florrie's, run by Florrie, on the third floor of the Old Building, now the café bar on the fourth floor. Spent more time there than in the refectory. [12:55] Describes having wine for the first time at a Fresher's dinner, rather than Fresher's Week, with speeches by LSE notables. Florrie organised. [13:34] Describes the Troubles, everyone was involved. Focussed on getting a First so had not been involved with student experience. Had a wonderful time when LSE was closed. His supervisor Lakatos was a leading person on anti-student side. [14:22] Played table tennis and cricket but no student groups. [15:12] Back to Troubles. Some people took it very seriously. Police were very heavy handed. Very emotional. Provided a breathing space for work on PhD. [16:17] Changes over the years. More technology. Department has become more democratic. It used to be that the most senior professor was head of department, the role wasn't moved around and there were few departmental meetings, little consultation. The teaching is much the same but there are more students now: 200 people rather than 40. More graduate students. [18:22] Enjoys teaching. Students bright and inquisitive. [19:16] Worked with LSE staff cricket team for 30 years, many fond memories of Berrylands and made lots of

friends through that. [20:22] Very sociable department and has a rock and roll band made up of staff and alumni which JW is involved with. [22:31] Main highlights at LSE. Met his wife in 1969 in a logic class that he was taking as a student teacher. Wrote a song for the band about meeting her. [23:22] First time staff beat students in annual cricket match. [23:44] Events: For LSE's Centenary ran a session for the department. Conferences including for Popper's 80th and 90th birthday. Big conference organised by Lakatos but he died before it happened. Met lots of high profile specialists. [24:58] LSE, Popper and Lakatos remain highly regarded in philosophy. [25:43] Grateful to be of generation with a full maintenance grant which you could live on. [26:40] Challenges. Academic research is hard work. Getting used to innovations like the REF. [26:33] Future of LSE. Discusses the industrialisation of education, and the perceptions about value of different degrees from different departments. Departments that are currently popular are based on LSE's reputation, which was formed by the work of different departments. Concern that purely academic disciplines could be squeezed out.