

**T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection**

**Tape 876 Finding Aid**

**INTERVIEWEE NAMES:**

Major Christopher York	4700.0596	Tape 876.1	(Tape 3 of 3)
Sir Charles Dalton and Lady Daphne Dalton	4700.0597	Tape 876.2	(Tape 2 of 4)

**IDENTIFICATION:** Britons in Pre-Independence India

**INTERVIEWERS:** Frank de Caro and Rosan Jordan

**SERIES:** British Voices from South Asia

**INTERVIEW DATES:**

York: 4/26/1978

Daltons: 4/27/1978

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 1 hour, 35 minutes

York: 33 minutes

Daltons: 62 minutes

**OTHER MATERIALS:** None

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**Tape 876, Side A**

**York (Part 3 of 3) (876.1)**

- 006 pig sticking was a fairly luxurious event because there were not that many pigs available in the area; they only killed one
- 009 they would stop every day for lunch where there were two marquees erected; there was a six course lunch, with a different type of curry every day for ten days
- 013 they would either go riding, pig sticking or shooting
- 014 they would then move to the guest houses, which were located above a cave
- 017 York brings out some of his photographs
- 027 below the guest houses was a large reservoir, where they would frequently shoot for a whole day
- 030 the rest house was only big enough for the resident and his family; the guests and the staff each had a tent with a bathroom added on

034 they shot about 160 ducks on the lake; the cave was fantastic and beautiful  
039 all of the caves were in the Nizam's territory  
042 the train returned the same way it came; this was how the resident lived  
044 the Nizam trusted a man called Keys who was a very good resident; the Nizam was known  
to be a very mean man  
046 the palace was built on deep cellars, which were filled with gold and precious jewels; it was  
rumored that each room in the cellar was filled with a different stone  
055 it was standard practice for officers to borrow money from a money lender; York's  
corporal left India owing more than his total income to the bank  
061 an example would be when one wanted to buy a new polo pony; the trouble came with  
repaying  
064 the local banker was the only rich man in the community, apart from the shop keepers who  
were always well off  
072 York was regarded as being holy because of a mole that was in the exact place of the  
highest caste Hindu's mark; they would do for York what they would not do for others  
077 York found out only because someone told him  
095 the cavalry never seemed to be outdated; everyone had a cavalry  
098 the thought never crossed their minds, especially in India; in India, a cavalry was necessary  
100 it was when they returned home that they began to realize that tanks were on their way  
104 in 1939, the Indian cavalry was still very strong; York assumes they were eventually  
introduced to machines and such  
107 horses are still needed in India because they are so much more useful than vehicles in some  
circumstances  
110 seniority is a very big deal in India; everything had to be done exactly right  
113 every caste thinks those below them are unworthy of their attention; the "untouchables" are  
only kept for certain jobs and make certain things  
121 the British tried not to change things until they had persuaded the Indians that it was a good  
thing to change; the British never tried to force the Indians too fast  
124 there was a long period in which the widows were allowed to be killed after their husband's  
death; the British did eventually have to put this practice down by force  
127 the British never interfered with religious practices; the British also never seriously  
interfered with their inability to be honest  
130 no Hindu is ever honest; in India, you never do anything that is dishonest to your family but  
anyone else's family is "fair game" (including the British government or British army)  
138 British officers would eventually get out of debt, York assumes, but he is not really sure;  
York never got heavily in debt  
145 the colonel, the story goes, owed much more than his annual income; the thing was to go  
home and take out a loan to pay the regimental banker because of the lower interest  
153 you would not have a lot of British contacts outside of the army in some areas; other  
stations, like Delhi, would have opportunities to meet politicians and such  
160 there was a large British civil force in India in those days, as well as a large business  
community  
162 if stationed in Bombay, you would meet an enormous number of business people; if  
stationed at Calcutta, you would meet both the civil service and the business community  
167 York's regiment did move up towards Delhi, but York had come home by that time; York  
missed the political and civil side

170 there was a district officer for every part of India who was English; he was the Indian Civil Service

171 there was the Forestry Service, who lived in the various rural districts; one would meet them from time to time, but probably never got to know them

177 mess life in India varied greatly from that in England; in India, you would have many friends and, if you were not busy on duty or sport, you would have lunch or dinner with someone who may be ten to fifteen miles away

181 York would be able to get off every weekend while he was courting and stay with her parents; they would go and have a large meal and dance all night

190 in some places in India there would be no night life, but in other places there was

197 where York was stationed, there was not very many people to visit with because they did not know anyone and no one wanted to know them

200 where ever the army was, there would always be an officer's club; there would probably be a men's club as well

203 the Sargent's Mess was always a very social place; the wife would be promoted as well when her husband was promoted to sergeant; she would not talk to the private's wives any longer, unless it was in a patronizing way

210 York tried to learn Hindustani, but he was not very good at it; he had a teacher who would come in the evenings, but he was always too tired from playing polo or something

215 all York can remember is the Hindustani phrase to get a bath ready

218 there was very little contact with Indian troops, except on maneuvers; what they did see of them, however, was very impressive

219 the Indian soldiers were always a high class

222 York was never on a maneuver above brigade level because they were detached in the south; the nearest large formation was in Bangalore

226 you got a tropical kit before you left for India from the regimental tailor; the regimental tailor copied what the London tailor had made for about one-tenth the price

232 you were given a list, to which the regimental tailor added to before he gave it to you

234 there would be four pairs of regimental britches thick and four pairs thin, two pairs of field boots, one pair of polo boots or long boots, one pair of camp boots (ordinary lace-up boots), Wellingtons (both formal and casual)

248 they never really wore full dress; the only time York wore full dress was when he returned home and was to be presented to the monarch; it was his father's full dress

255 York's father was in the same regiment as York, as well as York's son; York's son was there for seven years and his father was there for about same

260 at one time, this was very common in Britain; York is not sure how much longer this will be going on because the squires are being forced out of business by taxation

266 they had bought the topees in a second-class hill station; they always wore them

271 there were two sorts of topees: a dress topi and a working one; the working one was thick, whereas the dress one was more like a helmet

277 York returned because of boils and stomach ailments; he could not return because they could not figure out the cause for the trouble

283 sickness was a problem in India

284 India suited some people, while others "took to drink"

288 York does not really know if it took a certain personality type to succeed in India because he only came in contact with those in the military; the soldiers that became generals were

not of any particular type  
 293 York was only in India for two years; his circle was very limited  
 297 every officer commissioned in the British army was expected to serve some time in India,  
 with the exception of household cavalry (Royal Horse Guards and Life Guards)  
 303 the strength of the regiment was generally abroad because there was not enough men to go  
 around; they kept more soldiers abroad because a war at home was less likely to occur  
 317 recruits would be brought in and trained; then the recruits would go out and assist a  
 regiment abroad  
 320 until it was time for one to go abroad, the English posted ones were always short of men  
 while the foreign ones were kept at war strength  
 323 every regiment had a sister regiment at home who sent them recruits; this was done only by  
 the cavalry because the infantry had more than one battalion in the regiment  
 331 York refers de Caro and Jordan to someone else who would have information; they then  
 discuss the different people York knew/did not know  
 343 what you had at home was always working fairly hard because half was on leave while the  
 other half was on permanent duty  
 348 end of York interview

**Tape 876, Side A cont'd**

**Daltons (Part 1 of 5) (876.2)**

350 beginning of Dalton interview  
 353 they were once invited on a crocodile shoot; they did not get to shoot one however; they  
 look at pictures of the area in which they stayed  
 362 the idea was to shoot the crocodiles before they got into the water; they were laying out in  
 the sun on the bank  
 364 crocodiles are difficult to shoot, having to shoot them in the head for the most part  
 369 there was a tremendous dinner given by the host, who was a local squire; they were given a  
 delicious Indian meal  
 378 suddenly, a whole English meal appeared, which included roast beef, Yorkshire pudding,  
 and Christmas pudding; the bad part was that it was the hot weather time of the year  
 391 they nearly died from the terrible indigestion they all had that night  
 395 Lady Dalton's father recruited many of his troops from [Mecud?]  
 398 in Lady Dalton's younger days, everyone wore topees; it was considered mad to go out  
 without one  
 403 the topees were comfortable; one could go riding and such with it on  
 405 topees were extremely light; they were covered in khaki cloth; they were really  
 comfortable (even the troops and officers wore them)  
 419 when going certain places, you had to have an armed escort in the car with you  
 425 there was a rifle factory that used tribesman labor; they were manufacturing rifles to shoot  
 the British soldiers with  
 454 there was a ball held at the viceroy's house in Delhi during the time that Sir and Lady  
 Dalton were in Delhi; it was during the winter and was a fantastic gathering of people  
 460 the Indian princes wore the most beautiful clothes and jewels by the ton; all of the officers  
 were in full uniform; every different Indian regiment had a different color in their uniform  
 475 the viceroy's house was lined with body guards up and down the stairs; the viceroy  
 agencies wore a dark blue tail coat with pale blue facing; you knew exactly which agency

- they were
- 498 Lady Dalton's childhood bungalow had very thick, mud walls; it was called "26 Park Lane"
- 506 one would usually buy a topi once you got out to India because you could not get the "right thing" until you actually got out there
- 515 the winter was fairly cold; the summer temperature reached about 120°
- 530 the Residency was a creepy place that everyone would visit
- 537 Lady Dalton talks of the Delhi Horse Shows
- 540 Lady Dalton once stayed with the Finance Minister to the Indian government; Sir Richard Topman
- 544 India is such a large subject that one had to pick out a few topics
- 555 Lady Dalton went with a friend on a journey past Kashmir to the edge of Tibet; it was considered to be very extraordinary task because they went alone
- 563 end of Side A

### **Tape 876, Side B**

#### **Daltons (Part 3 of 5) (876.2)**

- 006 two sons married two beautiful Persian princesses; the question of heirs and inheritance did not really matter because there was not much to inherit at the end
- 015 the king spent money like water and behaved terribly towards his wife, who was a very charming woman who was keen on riding
- 023 the wife would love to go out riding in the morning
- 028 there was a parade that occurred once a year that reminded Lady Dalton of feudal England, where someone had to provide a certain number of troops
- 035 the parade was a fairly light-hearted affair in a way because most things produced were not really able to go to war
- 038 there were camels pulling carts full of guns; there were a few properly trained troops but the main body was very feudal
- 043 there was a requirement for able-bodied fighters; to do this, you got them on parade once a year except for a small group of well-trained state forces
- 048 the parade was a real eye-opener
- 050 train travel incidences were enormous; every considerable journey was undertaken by train
- 053 the trains were very slow and you could not get anywhere in just one day
- 054 the trains were organized so that you slept in the train; in India, one would judge the distance of a trip by how many nights you slept on the train
- 059 as far as the British were concerned, there were three classes of travel: first class, second class and third class; British officers were only allowed to travel first class, having their fares paid for them if on duty
- 062 when traveling for leisure, British officers had to travel first class because the soldiers were in second class; under no circumstances could anyone go third class, which was all Indian
- 067 there were bedding rolls that included blankets and the things one would need for the night; this was separate from the rest of the luggage, which was generally bulky
- 070 there was always a bearer that went with you; his responsibilities included putting the bedding roll in the compartment and making the bed ready for the night; the reverse occurred in the morning
- 080 one would never do for yourself because it was unthinkable

081 to keep cool, buckets of ice would be put in your carriage; it was be renewed and refilled  
every day; this kept the temperature reasonable

085 this method was preferred by York; the air conditioned compartments would always cause  
conflicts between those in the compartment: no one could agree on how cool to keep it

092 there were no restaurant cars; the train would stop so that you were able to get out and  
telegraph or telephone ahead for a meal to be prepared for you at the station's restaurant

096 the frequent stops are probable the cause for the train taking so long

098 the stations were the most extraordinary places; everyone seemed to be camping at the  
station, literally tripping over bodies

102 everyone would be shouting; there were a large number of vendors; one would eventually  
grow accustomed to all the different languages and shouts

106 if you were a Hindu, you could only drink water from the Hindu water carrier; one could be  
excommunicated for drinking from one of the other vendors

108 the Indians were very small minded, and York reasons that they still are

120 the Frontier terrain was very rocky; India was very inhospitable, except for hiding

130 the Dalton's bought mainly rugs home from India

132 a [yacdon?] was a thin, narrow leather box; one would always have two, one for each side  
of the mule

138 Dalton mentions again how to measure a journey (by the number of nights on the train);  
they would eat at the station or have someone bring the food in to you from the station

141 when the Dalton's first went out to India, there was no air conditioning

144 there were three windows on the train; a blue glass window was for the glare and the hot  
weather; there was an ordinary glass window; the third was made of wire mesh

147 you were allowed to choose which window you preferred; the mesh was for when it was so  
hot that one could not breathe

153 you ate dirt and grit from the moment you left on the train to the moment you reached your  
destination

155 India was not dirty in the sense of hygiene but in the nature of the country; there were  
enormous amounts of dust from all of the desert travel

158 travel was better after the rains because there was little or no dust

159 there were long carriages and no corridors on the train

163 there was never mixing of the populations; an Indian never traveled with a white man

166 the servant would come every time the train would stop at a station; there was no way he  
could get to you unless the train was stopped

169 the servant stayed in a compartment behind the master's coach; he had to get out and go to  
your window

171 there were about five or six compartment per car; the lower order cars tended to have more  
compartments

177 the lower classes did not get beds and things; the seats were wooden

180 the servants wore uniforms according to the owner's preferences; the servants of those in  
the British army tended not to dress very extravagantly

183 the servants were mostly dressed in white coats and white trousers; if one wished, the  
servant would wear a type of regimental belt

192 good servants were always clean and beautifully laundered; the servants would never wear  
shoes however

195 it was considered an insult for the servants to wear shoes in the master's presence; the

servants also did not like the shoes  
 203 the higher in the social and financial scales, the more elaborate the servant's dress would be  
 206 one of the best things about life in India was the washing arrangements; one would wear a  
 different set of clothes every day, sometimes several a day  
 214 clothes were washed every day; one never had very many clothes because the cleaned  
 clothes would get back to you the same day  
 216 the washers were very rough on the buttons and such because of their washing methods:  
 hitting the clothes on stones in the river  
 220 the clothes would come back starched and ironed wonderfully  
 221 it was literally "same day service"  
 222 if you were an important person, you kept your own wash staff  
 231 when threading the cotton, the servants would put the cotton in between their toes  
 233 the servants were very skilled in making things  
 236 people were advised before they went out to India to not have expensive uniforms made for  
 them in London but to have a good example of what they wanted  
 240 this would be used as a pattern for everything else, which was made on the spot; a suit  
 could be made for a fraction of the costs in India  
 244 you took the minimum with you when you went out  
 249 the same was true for boot making  
 251 Lady Dalton still has a pair of riding boots, which were made in India  
 254 the Indians were very good boot makers; they were very good with working with leather  
 255 the man who worked the leather was a very low caste  
 259 the sweeper was the man who emptied the buckets from the house and swept the floors; he  
 was "untouchable" because he was the lowest caste  
 261 above him was the man that worked the leather, because leather came from the cow; the  
 cow was sacred and really should not have killed according to the Hindus  
 264 the fact that the cow was sacred meant that the man who worked its hide was very low caste  
 267 the teacher was a very high caste  
 270 the Indians adhered to their caste system very strictly; Dalton supposes they still do  
 271 according to Lady Dalton, the very low classes were taken up by missionaries and made  
 into Christians, etc. but were still considered to not be all that good  
 277 the missionaries gave them a chance to get out of their social caste, but they were still not  
 considered very much  
 281 sweepers were converted to Christians and thought that, because of this, they would be  
 lifted out of the very low class; Lady Dalton does not think this worked very well  
 289 the senior cook did all the shopping out of the bazaar, where he visited every day; he would  
 come back and produce a book that one would go through and order your meal  
 301 the book was an account book that the cook would produce; the bearer would be present at  
 this session, supposedly on your side and nudging your elbow  
 308 there would probably be an argument with the cook, on the basis that he spent too much  
 money on one product or another; you would then take out the difference on his bill  
 311 the difference would then show up again the next day in some other form  
 314 you would order your meal; most of the cooks spoke enough English to understand what  
 you wanted  
 317 most of the cooks would have never touched any of your food, so they would not have a  
 clue as to what the dish should taste like when you offered suggestions (like more salt, etc.)

322 the cooking was very good and very high class  
325 the cooking was done by “rule of thumb”: the cook would watch his father do certain things  
for certain situations  
330 Sir Dalton served three years in Egypt before going out to India; the same thing with the  
cooks happened in Egypt  
333 the cooks in Egypt were at their best during a sandstorm on a primal stove  
337 after the arrangements with the cook, one would go and inspect the kitchen and cook’s boy  
or kitchen aide  
341 you would examine the pots, turn them upside down and look inside, and working area for  
cleanliness and then you would walk out and were through for that day  
346 Lady Dalton once had a female sweeper  
347 Lady Dalton was going to have a party and wanted to roast some nuts; she gave the order  
and walked out  
355 later, Lady Dalton walked to the back of the house and found the sweeper with the dust pan  
full of nuts  
363 in a more civilized place, such as Delhi, one would ask people from different bungalows in  
the station; you would all meet and go to dinner  
370 suddenly, one of the guests would recognize their own silver or own plates; if the host did  
not have enough silverware or plates, the bearer would go to one of the guest’s bearers and  
ask for what was needed  
378 nothing was ever lost and was back in the proper places by morning  
379 there was an amazing camaraderie  
382 Lady Dalton once had an older woman accuse her of stealing her cook; at the end of the  
conversation, the older woman replies, “If we memsahibs don’t stick together, I can’t think  
what will happen to this country!”  
396 when returning to India, one will find their bearer on the key side of Bombay  
404 the Dalton’s were given the name of a very good bearer and wrote out ahead, telling him  
they were leaving for India; he was waiting for them on the key at Bombay  
407 the bearer told them the ropes, for Dalton had never been to India before; everything was  
very well organized  
411 one day, their bearer told them he had to go home; the bearer never came back  
414 the Dalton’s then learned that the bearer had gone back to his old master and had never  
planned on staying with the Dalton’s; he belonged to someone else and never told them  
424 one would pay a retaining fee to the bearer when they home on leave; it was about half pay  
426 the bearer would probably go back to his village for the time because some had wives and  
some did not; most of them did not, however  
431 there was a servants quarters some little distance from your bungalow, but within the  
compound; this was where the servants lived  
437 it was a modest building but the servants would think they were very well off because it  
was more than they were accustomed  
439 the cook was a Muhammadans, so he would not touch any food that was considered  
“unclean” from his religious point of view; he could not eat any European-type of food  
446 the cooks would steal sugar, salt, and flour but would not eat the prepared food  
453 the dishonest servants would not mind at all to help themselves with your stores; you gave  
your stores out every day and the rest would stay under lock and key  
458 the bearer would look after your interests entirely

461 the Dalton's did not have any high caste Hindus as servants; most people preferred the  
Muhammadans over the Hindus for servants

467 Lady Dalton's step father had been in India all his life; he would not have had a Hindu  
servant and would never have had a servant that spoke English

471 the point of view was that it was much more private to have someone who could not  
understand you; he could talk to his brother officers without having to worry about  
information getting out

477 her step father preferred Muhammadans

478 Lady Dalton compares Muhammadans to Hindus; then talks about cooks and where the  
best ones seemed to come from

491 the Hindus and Muhammadans were very divided in Lady Dalton's step-father's day; the  
Northerners were more of the fighting races and more attractive

500 it was not common to have both Hindu and Muhammadan servants in the same household;  
although they agree to differ, they do not fraternize

504 in the North, you did not see many Hindus at all

509 the traders were mostly Hindu because they seemed to be better at it

515 the whole government would go to the hill stations during the hot weather at the beginning  
of the war; after 1942, however, they decided to stop this practice and everyone sweated it  
out in Delhi

527 there were rituals in Shimla that Lady Dalton supposes they still do

538 it was there that Lady Dalton was born

546 when there was a limit on gas during the war, people would get around in buggies

551 on one occasion, the Dalton's had some people stay over but they were short of beds; they  
hired more beds

556 the next morning at breakfast, the guests would tell them about the bugs in the bed and their  
lack of sleep

561 they sent the beds back and got new ones

567 you really only carted around your immediate possessions

576 end of tape