

THE COHEN INTERVIEWS

GEORGE CHESTERS -- Interview no 6

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This is one of 26 interviews with social work pioneers conducted by the late Alan Cohen in 1980 - 81. The period of social work history Alan wished to explore with the interviewees was 1929 - 59. With one exception (No 24, Clare Winnicott) the interviews were unpublished until this edition in 2013. The copyright is held by the not for profit organisation WISEArchive.

Each interview is presented as a free-standing publication with its own set of notes. However, readers interested in the Cohen Interviews as a whole and the period discussed are referred to:

- (a) the other 25 interviews
- (b) the Editors' Introduction,
- (c) the select Bibliography.

All of these can be found at
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/explorefurther/subject_guides/social_work

George Chesters was one of the six interviewees who never worked in London having probation officer experience in Manchester, Leeds, Stoke and Hull. He was drawn to it through the Scouts but when he approached the Manchester office in 1933 to do voluntary work he was told he was “the kind of chap that the Home Office were looking for” (an intriguing method of selection!) and he became an “approved candidate”. His early experiences were interesting as he joined the service at the tail end of the domination by the police court missionaries. The overt religious influence was still strong: protestant and catholic staff sat separately and didn't supervise the others' clients; the new approved candidates were seen as “soulless and godless”; probation officers ran “tin missions” which boys on probation would be expected to attend.

But Chesters was at pains in the interview to stress that one “mustn't underrate the old police court missionaries”. They were seen as “friends of the delinquent” and they paved

the way for the new probation officers and made them acceptable to the community. It is a view similar to Francesca Ward's (Interviewee no 20) who was keen to point out the importance of the old style almoners, the "grand old girls" as she called them. The past paves the way.

Training was often "just watching" with visits frequently a learning experience. There were no "concise rules about interviewing". But he became aware of a social worker hierarchy, with the PSWs thinking themselves "very superior" and the "almoners really a cut above us all in their estimation". Yet the probation officer thought he was the "cat's whiskers" as he had the authority of the court behind him. Certainly the perceptions of a hierarchy featured in many of the Cohen interviews.

As more probation officers came back from the Home Office training courses in the late 1940s, Chesters found that the acquired jargon had added little and that some staff had become "disturbed" by the apparent psychoanalytic emphasis. For him it all came down to "care and concern", the hallmark of the old missionaries, which for him "really did work". But he does admit "I was always a bit of a rebel".

There are some encouraging case histories of ex-clients taking up a career in social services prompting Alan to ask whether probation officers are a bit delinquent themselves! But George Chesters just thought everybody is a bit delinquent.

Perhaps the most surprising answer comes at the end when Alan asks for Chesters' response to the Barbara Wootton criticisms of social work published in 1959. For Chesters she was fearless and a realist "my pin-up-girl kind of thing". This was the most positive response to Wootton in all the twenty six interviews and contrasts with, for example, Cecil French (Interviewee no 8) who said she was "talking out of the back of her neck". Would any social work critique today produce such reactions?

A.C. How did you come into probation work, Mr. Chesters?

G.C. I first came in contact with probation when I ran a troop of boy scouts. It was in Cheshire countryside, Nantwich way, and some boys, not scouts, had been before the court and the magistrate asked me if they could come into the scouts and if I would keep an eye on them. This I did and the boys seemed to benefit from it and take an interest. Then I moved to Manchester, about 1933 I think it would be, and as I didn't want to get linked up with the scout movement again, I contacted the probation office and offered to do some voluntary work, supervising. It was suggested by the senior officer there, that I was the kind of chap that the Home Office were looking for, and suggested that I should apply to the Home Office with a view to training. After an interview, they suggested I should go and work in the Manchester office and get experience there. I became what was called 'an approved candidate.' They'd got a training scheme just being hatched in London, at LSE [1], but I was then just coming up to 30 you see, so they thought of me as a more mature

person and suggested that I should work in the Manchester probation office. I probably started about 1933 or '34.

It was a very interesting experience. The probation officers all sat in a large room; all had a desk. But one side were the Catholics, and the other side the Protestants and never the twain should meet. Interesting it was that the Catholics had, I think they were called, Sisters of Mercy [2]. I can't be sure, but their habit was white with a large hat with flapping sides; almost like a Dutch hat. And they were going along the corridors and then out of the courts; it really gave a bit of colour. In fact one of them remained as a probation officer until quite recently. She's just now retired. I'll tell a little story about it.

I'd never handled any Catholic delinquents, but when I was appointed, this was 1936, I was appointed probation officer for Hull. And there, of course, the office was not divided. Probation officers took people of any denomination or religion. And I was a bit anxious about it, so I said to one of the Catholic officers, 'Now I'm going to Hull, and I shall be supervising the Catholics, I'm very anxious to do my best.' I got to Hull, had a young Catholic boy on probation and I went to visit his school. The Headmistress was a nun of some order, I don't remember which. We chatted about this boy, we talked about his home, we talked about his school work, we talked about his offence and what I hoped to do for him. We got along famously and I thought this is fine. I'm doing alright handling Catholic people. When just as I was leaving she said, 'you know what's wrong with Hull?' I said, 'no, I've only just come here.' 'Well,' she said, 'they're all mixed up with these wretched little protestants.'

I never told her that I was one of those wretched little protestants. She doesn't know to this day! I went away laughing all the way back to the office. I told this to the Catholic Bishop of Birmingham not very long ago, he thought it was a great joke.

So probation sprung really from the religious organisations. What had happened in the courts, the Police Court Mission [3] (that was probably the strongest organisation) had put in workers. The St. Vincent de Paul [4] had put in workers. The Salvation Army [5] had put in workers, and so had many other organisations.

A.C. Was the Police Court Mission a religious organisation?

G.C. It was a branch of the Church of England Temperance Society. [6] That's really how it all began. In quite early days, they also had hostels for boys and girls. When a magistrate was sentencing a fellow, he would say, 'well I'll only send you for three months, provided you put yourself in the care of the Police Court Missionary Mrs. So-and-so, when you come out, and take her advice.'

It was in 1907 when the Probation Act was passed [7]. There was a great outcry about letting these criminals loose on the population without punishment. But the sponsor, the Home Secretary at that time, I don't think many people realise, was Winston Churchill. So when I used to go and address a Conservative Women's meeting who wanted them all flogged and executed, I reminded them that it was Sir Winston Churchill who was the Home Secretary [8] and sponsored the Bill.

I'm digressing as usual. Well what happened in the first case, the Police Court Missionary was usually appointed the probation officer. Right up to when I came to

Stoke-on-Trent in 1944, their probation officers were really Police Court Missionaries. Their salary was paid to the Police Court Missionaries. Just let me get that date right. It was a bit further back. My colleagues – no, more about 1938, something like that, the probation officers were first of all the Police Court Missionaries. Although they were full time probation officers, their salary was paid to the Police Court Mission who provided them.

- A.C. So that the people who also went into these jobs through the St. Vincent de Paul and the Salvation, they were approaching probation work in the same way as, say, they'd approached being a parish worker or lay preacher.
- G.C. Yes very much so. I was a Home Office approved candidate: I wasn't in any way connected with a religious organisation. But we used the offices of the Police Court Mission for evening interviewing, and I read, while waiting, their literature. They were decrying the appointment of these people direct who were soulless and godless, I think was the expression, and I thought, 'Good God, am I one of those?' So much so were they connected with the church organisations because they'd done good work in the church, was very often how they came to be a probation officer. I think it was in 1937 or 1936 that I went to my first NAPO [9] conference, and it was held in Northumberland Hotel. I remember so well. And there they all were, the men had got dark suits on and little bow ties, the women were all in grey, mostly church army uniform, the women probation officers. It was opened with a prayer and a Mr. Ray, probation officer from Wakefield, was the chairman: he made the prayer. He told the Lord how good we all were, what a lot the magistrates thought of us, what a lot our clients thought of us, and he went on and on and on. I don't know whether the Lord was fed up with it, but I know I jolly well was. And I thought, 'really, am I one of these?' That was really what I walked into.

When I was appointed at Hull, I went to my desk and the only thing in it was a pledge book. I looked through it and found it was very much the same person who was signing the pledge time and time again, of course. What happened, the fellow who came before the courts would promise, 'well if you give me this one more chance yer worships, I promise I'll sign the pledge.' They say to him, 'well you promise and go with Mr. So-and-so the probation officer, and sign the pledge.' Well I'll tell you now I never used it at all.

There was still that sort of thinking. We used to get it in the conditions of the probation order. Such things as 'to abstain from alcoholic drink,' 'not to frequent public houses.' I don't know whether they thought the probation officer would go round the pub doors to see if his clients were there. They also used to put in such conditions as 'he should attend Sunday School.' I think the silliest thing was when there was a young couple who had run away together, came before the court and they had put them on probation with a condition that 'they should not speak to each other.' They got married within three months! I think quite a lot of husbands would enjoy having that condition!

Then the other condition they were very fond of putting in the orders was 'shall not associate with Tom Jones, Harry Brown and Joe Soap.' Names of boys he was in trouble with. They thought of a probation officer going round to see if he was associating.

A.C. How did they manage then?

G.C. I'll tell you what I did, I told him to bring his friends along with him to come and see me, and we'd all have a chat. I didn't tell the magistrate!

But it was of course absolutely ridiculous, particularly in a place like Hull. They talk about gangs these days, but there were the street boys who were mostly in gangs. There were adult gangs; one was called the Silver Hatchet Gang. Quite a new experience for me. They didn't seem to have those sort of gangs in Manchester. At least, I'd never come across them.

A.C. Where did you come from yourself?

G.C. From near Nantwich, in Cheshire, really a country boy; Nantwich Grammar School. We lived out of the town in the country.

A.C. So you'd never met gangs of kids like this?

G.C. No. I didn't while I was training in Manchester. Not real gangs. It was impossible to say they must not associate with each other, because they lived on the same street and if he went on his own he'd just get beaten up!

A.C. They went together for self-protection?

G.C. Yes. I have suggested to parents that they should move to another area; get a change of council house. That would be the only way of getting their lad away from the gang, if it was a delinquent gang. Many of them weren't delinquent, they were probably alright.

A.C. What was the Silver Hatchet Gang then?

G.C. They were older chaps. And I don't think they were so much criminal but you had to be in with them. Well they were the cock of the area. They were in the old part of the town, City of Hull. There is some story that somebody they were against was actually pushed into the harbour and drowned. They were never able to prove it, but it was generally accepted. They fought other gangs, but they weren't the juveniles.

A.C. Did you deal specifically with juveniles then initially when you went into the service?

G.C. Not specifically, but most of the work was with juveniles.

A.C. So you had a big caseload?

G.C. Yes. We were just really breaking through into work with the adults.

A.C. Girls as well?

G.C. Oh no, this was in the rules that 'a woman should be supervised by a woman officer.' Oh yes, it would have been terrible!

A.C. And that applied to the juveniles as well, did it?

G.C. Yes, it applied to the juveniles as well. You see the criminal age then was 8. If you want a personal opinion, for what it's worth, I feel there should be either a probation

officer or a social worker specifically trained for dealing with delinquent young children.

It's a great pity that they're not supervised by specialists who could devote time to them when they are young. My reason being is that you can do a great deal more with a juvenile. Whereas when they've become older, in their late teens and onwards, the damage has been done – it's only a matter of make do and mend. You can only support them to do their best and probably adjust their environment to their needs and do what you can there. But with a juvenile with good support with the home and the child, you really have a much better chance.

Twice this happened to me. Somebody recognised me in a cafe; I didn't know who it was. When I was leaving he came over to me and said, 'you don't recognise me do you, Mr. Chesters?' And I said, 'no, I'm afraid I don't!' 'Well, I used to be on probation to you,' he said, 'I always thought you were great. I think that's why I'm now doing social work.'

A.C. Really?

G.C. I am very interested in a hostel for inadequates. A social worker brought a chap into the hostel and I was talking to him when he said, 'you used to be a probation officer, didn't you?' And I said, 'yes I did.' He said, 'Well I remember you. You used to come to see my brother, and I thought what a nice person you were, and that's why I'm a Social Services Officer.' He told me where they lived and gradually it came to me, and it wasn't his brother! He was the one who was on probation but he couldn't quite face up to it! Anyhow it happened he was a damn good social worker so I didn't feel too bad about it. That's juveniles.

A.C. That leads me to ask an interesting question. I've often heard Dave Smith **[10]** say in a laughing sort of way at work, that probation officers are a bit delinquent themselves. Two ex-clients who have become – gone over to social work. Do you think there's anything in that?

G.C. No. I just think everybody's a bit delinquent. I don't think there's a great deal. It might be that people are purging their guilt or something like that. I never came across it – but it's 10 years since I retired. No, I wouldn't say that. I'm just trying to run down the background of my staff and I wouldn't apply it to any of them. When Dave sees them they're at the student age, and weren't we all that sort of thing? It's a very interesting thing how people forget. I remember a young lad, now a magistrate, and when he sits on the bench he pontificates about 'my word, when I was a lad, I wouldn't have been able to do this,' you know. I don't know whether he's got a bad memory or whether he's just a bloody liar. I always feel like getting up and saying, 'do you remember so-and-so?'

I knew quite a lot about him! I mean when you go back to the university and see the students, Oh I'm sure I was never like this! Which you jolly well were!

I was saying how linked up we were with the Police Court Missionaries, although I was not a Police Court Missionary, and was not appointed because of belonging to any organisation. But there were many who were either Church Army captains **[11]** or who had been Police Court Missionaries in the service, and I heard stories about

many of the old Police Court Missionaries. There are some quite hair raising stories. One court paid the probation officer 15 shillings for each case. One of his boys was getting into trouble, he'd chase round as quickly as he could when he heard he was going to be interviewed by the police, to tell him what he mustn't say and what to do, because if he was sent to an approved school he would lose his 15 shillings!

It was very interesting that many of the probation officers also had a tin mission which they ran. They didn't quite belong to any religious organisation, but they had what we called a tin mission and of course the boy on probation would be expected to attend his tin mission. And probably go and pull the weeds up out of his garden as well! They were very badly paid but they got quite a lot of perks. The magistrate would in shooting season send round pheasants and partridge, they'd send him a Christmas turkey. They were always putting things his way. Very generous were the gentry to the Police Court Missionary. It was quite the thing to be identified with it, and at the turn of the century it was very fashionable for titled women to have 'a cause,' doing good works. If necessary, to go round themselves delivering goods to the poor, clothing and all that kind of thing. As a matter of fact the Police Court Missionaries did quite a lot of this. People would send him clothes, to give to his clients. Of course he had the first pick. He wasn't so badly dressed.

A.C. How long was it like this for?

G.C. Up to the turn of the century. And it went on some areas for quite a long time after. With some of the old officers I had quite a lot of difficulty in convincing them that going around at Christmas time distributing gifts, was not necessarily helping the people. It was the officer who was getting the kicks out of it. I said, 'they've got to face life all the year round' and sometimes they'd find that in the front parlour there were the most expensive presents for the children. Probably they were going to pay for it during the whole of the next year, but the days of going round distributing second-hand toys had gone. But it was so ingrained and it had been so much the pattern of the older Police Court Missionaries, that they thought I was a very hard person, not to be cheered by this idea of doing good work. Then sometimes they'd have an insurance book, and they'd do insurance collecting. Some of these Police Court Missionaries, they were part time probation officers you see, and that allowed them to do anything they liked. Then there was second hand clothing being sold, some of it that was given to them to give to the poor, but they collected the money for them. Others went to sales and bought furniture and sold it, probably for 1/- a week. Perhaps a bed for somebody, until the person paid for it, with a good profit. They were really doing them a good turn because they were able to have a bed to sleep on. The tin missions never had an audit, and it was remarkable that when they retired it was usually found that the Police Court Missionary man or probation officer had quite a nice string of property from which he could collect rents.

This is up to about the '30s, yes. There was a great deal of change really. It was the 1925 Criminal Justice Act [12] that put more responsibility on the magistrates to look after the probation service, and for the committees to function properly. Many of them were getting away with things, wouldn't spend the money, others hadn't really got an appointment of an officer, and it became the law that every petty sessional division should have a probation officer attached, male and female. After '25, although slowly, began to move and began to develop. But these were remnants that

were still around, and things that I heard about or observed and happened before I was there.

A.C. Still a thing within living memory.

G.C. Yes. I knew these old chaps that I'm talking about. We mustn't underrate these old Police Court Missionaries, part time probation officers. They made it possible for the probation officer to be very acceptable to the community. Now, you see, other social workers were being appointed at this time. There was the health visitor. The health visitor had a rough time because she made people scrub the floors and be clean. Made them. They had to do it.

They insisted, and so they were always very suspicious of the health visitor. Then there was the school attendance officer, who they called the 'Board man.' There was a war went on between them and the parents. He was somebody who made their child go to school. They would play all sorts of tricks. When he knocked on the door a bucket of water would fall on him. All sorts of things, such as being flattened with a mop. They really had a bad time, did the poor old 'board man.'

Always the probation officer has had access to the people. People have said to me, 'I expect you've had some very awkward moments. Have you ever been attacked?' And I said, 'far from it. I've always been made most welcome in the home.' People might have been aggressive about what had happened to them, or what the magistrates had done to their boy, or what shouldn't be done, and unloaded it on me, but they were never antagonistic to me. The reason for that was that the Police Court Missionaries were really friends of the delinquents. You see, in the earlier days, you were outside society if you had been before the courts. You were even pointed at, where as now it's not particularly anti-social to have been in court. But the neighbours didn't even speak to you. All those kinds of things happened. Unless of course you were living in the East End of London on a street with definitely a delinquent culture. Then everybody was like that. You'd be deviant if you were straight! But in the ordinary towns and villages and cities in England, you were outside the pale if you'd been in court. Well it was the Police Court Missionary who spoke for them and told the magistrates their story for them. The magistrate would say, 'do you know anything about these people Mr So-and-so?' And the Police Court Missionary would speak up for them. Well then, if they were put under his care he would visit them. He would probably pray with them. Leave them a tract. I don't suppose they knew very much what it was all about. Doubtful if they read the tract. But he was demonstrating concern for them. He was accepting them as people. And so, we who followed them were acceptable. They saw us as a friend of the people, which was a relationship that at the time few other social services had.

A.C. What was the relative balance then, between people like yourself who were Approved, and the missionaries?

G.C. There was an undercurrent running. We were considered not to be dedicated people, we were professional. There was just an undercurrent, not as bad as this article I read in the Police Court Missionaries magazine. But it was there, and they were very suspicious of these people coming from the Home Office.

A.C. Who was in the majority?

G.C. In the 30s, I think there was still people who had been appointed from the religious organisations were in the majority. The training scheme was only just starting for the young folks. The course run by LSE

A.C. You didn't get in on that?

G.C. No I was about 30.

A.C. So how did you do – did you just walk in on the first day and start work?

G.C. No, I had to go to Manchester and work there for which I was not paid. I had a job besides. It was a selling job so I was able to go in the course in the mornings, and fix in other things and interviews and visits. I had a very good mentor I worked alongside and it was a very valuable experience.

A.C. How did he train you then?

G.C. It was really just watching. He explained, of course, law and procedures and all those kinds of things. I went visiting with him. There are two things that have disappeared since those days. One is bugs, the other is pawnbrokers. Can you tell me where there's a pawnbroker?

A.C. I know where there is one in Nottingham, yes.

G.C. He may still have the three balls out, but has he still got a license as a pawnbroker? He might even buy second hand goods.

A.C. I don't know.

G.C. He'll buy second hand goods from you, but will he lend you money on the article? Many of them have kept the old sign out but there must be some I think in the London area, and it might be so that that one is actually still. But in the city of Stoke-on-Trent, there just isn't a pawnbroker, you couldn't find one. Well, at the corner of every street in the working class areas there was a pawnbroker's shop. It was almost essential to the life of the community.

When we gave out any clothing to people, we used to have a rubber stamp that we used to stamp on it: 'THIS IS THE PROPERTY OF THE PROBATION COMMITTEE.' Because if you didn't, it would most likely end up in the pawn shop. When a parent was buying shoes they would say it must be leather soled, because if they hadn't leather soles the pawnbroker wouldn't take them in if they had to pawn them. Of course the general practice was for father's suit to come out at the weekend, and then go back again. Poor unfortunate woman, her husband's brother died and he had to go to a funeral in the middle of the week, and she daren't tell her husband that his suit was in pawn. She had to go round all her friends and collect up enough money to get the suit so father could go to the funeral. That was their life in those days.

A.C. So when you were training, doing your salesman's job, and at the same time training as a PO, did you just learn about interviewing and so on through watching the other chap?

G.C. Yes, I was going to tell you of an experience. Moss Side Manchester even in those days was a very seedy place, and I went out with my mentor and it was a dirty filthy room. The papers were coming off the wall. If you go into a place like that there's a horrible sickly sweet smell. You'll find that behind the wallpaper were little red bugs and God help you if you got one of those on you. But now they have disappeared. There's lice and there's all sorts of things, but those little red bugs have gone. Where they've gone I don't know. Anyhow I went in this place. In the middle of the room was a chamber pot full of excreta, and I thought 'George! Pull yourself together. If you're going to be a social worker, you've got to get used to these things.' I sort of acted as if I hadn't noticed them, and the fellow offered me a chair to sit down, when my mentor gave me a kick on the shin and passed me another chair. I couldn't make it out -. It wasn't until I got outside and I said, 'what was all that about, what were you kicking me in the shin for?' He said, 'you ought to know if you do go in a place like that, you don't sit on an upholstered chair, you sit on a wooden chair.' That was how to interview!

As a matter of fact, there never has really been any very concise rules about interviewing. It's so very difficult to instruct a person how to interview. Everybody develops their own technique. It's a matter of being able to communicate really, how you get a rapport going with people, and feeling comfortable and reveal themselves. I think you learn by watching and listening to other people; very much so, and picking from what they do what is acceptable to you; what you can use. I think that's really how you do it. The thing that I had to really look at much more was matters of law and court procedure. Those were things that mattered very much.

A.C. I'm interested in going back to the very beginning when you said your interest was first aroused when you were involved in a scout troop and had some delinquent boys in the scout troop. I just wondered, was your personal motivation, or interest, sort of religious, humanitarian, or how would you describe that?

G.C. I had been brought up very involved with the Methodist Chapel. And our social activities were round the church, and we put on shows and took them round all the little village chapels like that. I loved organising those. Then there was the Youth Club that we ran before I came into scouting. Then somebody who was running the scouts had to leave the area, and I was asked if I'd take over, and I did for a few years, but I'd never been a scout as a boy. It wasn't that I was necessarily dedicated to the scouts it was just that there was nobody else to do it and it was felt I was doing something useful. I still think I couldn't tie a reef knot.

A.C. Your interest in social work and probation arises from a religious background, religious beliefs?

G.C. I think it arises from the fact that I've always found people fascinating, interesting. If I hadn't gone into social work I should have done something that would involve relating to people; salesmanship or something like that. I hated the country although I lived in the country as a boy, and all my relatives were farmers, and I hated going to spend holidays there. I wouldn't stress an especially religious motive. I found them very cramping and bigoted and so on and didn't necessarily reject the teaching, but didn't find organised religion was particularly compatible. That is what it is. You are

just that sort of person that you like people and how they function, and why they function, and how to handle, and how to help them to help themselves.

Another thing is how we saw ourselves, you see, in relation to other social workers. Well now, we had been approved by the Home Office and had done the training course, we began to think of ourselves as the bright and shining lights; God's gift to the probation service, and considered our status as social workers. You see, there were only about three professional people who'd had real professional training. There was the psychiatric social worker, and the hospital almoner, and the probation officer. Well, the probation officer thought he was the cat's whiskers because - well, he'd got the ear of the magistrates and the judges, even the Lord Chief Justice himself would send for a probation officer. Whether a man went to prison or whether he didn't very often depended on us, as to whether he had his liberty or not. So we were really very important people in our own estimation. The PSW thought that she or he (but more she's in those days) was really good. She could understand the jargon of the psychiatrist. She could interpret what he had to say. In fact, she was his confidante and thought herself very superior. But it was the almoners who really were a cut above us all in their own estimation, because they had to pay for their own training. It was not grant aided in any way. So of course they had to have money, to go into the profession. And they worked with doctors, and that gave them prestige, and I think it was their final hope that they'd marry a doctor.

And so they didn't much care for the other branches of social work. That's how we saw each other!

- A.C. Were you influenced by each other's ideas? For example psychoanalytic ideas, I think, were flying around a lot during the 30's.
- G.C. There was overflow, but we were rather precious. You see, we go through phases. I think the first one was, we thought, that housing was the answer to it. Octavia Hill [13] was a name we all had very much in our mouths, getting the people out of the slums into good housing. That would cure delinquency. So we put pressure on housing committees to get some re-housed and all the rest of it. But we still had delinquency, very much so, on the estates. The next thing was hygiene. It was terribly important the people should be cleaned up. I've known of a probation officer go down on her hands and knees and scrub a client's floor, to show her the importance of being clean. Another probation officer insisted that his boys all wore a collar and that they should polish their shoes before they came to report to him. Anyhow, we moved out of that stage and health became the most important thing. The medical officers of health for the schools were appointed; school medical officers. So we took down the delinquent's medical history: when he had the mumps, when he had the measles, any other illnesses he'd had, and we took him along to see the school medical officer. I remember one school medical officer saying to me, 'Now what you must look out for Mr. Chesters, is adenoids and tonsils.' So we took the little beggar off to have the tonsils out and their adenoids removed, and we still had delinquency. It wasn't really until just before the war, in the mid thirties, that we really discovered Freud. Then we had a whale of a time. We were able to talk sex without being vulgar. We used to take them off to the psychiatrist. We took our report, and really what the psychiatrist did was, he sent the report to the magistrates, which really only said the same as we'd told him, but he used much bigger words;

psychological jargon. Don't think the magistrates really understood, but it made them feel important.

They would have this report, and they felt better and did what we wanted, because it was in the psychiatrist's report. This lasted us right through the war. The Home Office training courses at Rainer House, [14] were very Freudian based.

Psychoanalytical theories were expounded. There was Dr. (Emanuel) Miller [15], Jonathan Miller's father, was lecturing there. There was Dr Kate Friedlander [16] all the ex-European psychiatrists. We had trouble getting these trainees down to earth when they came to work in the office. They would want to psychoanalyse the clients. It really was dreadful! A report was done by a young fellow straight from training on a boy aged 9. He was going to see the school medical officer and he'd written this report in which he stated that this boy was suffering from a castration complex. Involving it all and fitting in this Freudian theory you see. He gave it me to read, and he said, 'what do you think about that?' and I said, 'well, if I was the medical officer and I received this report I should wonder who it was that needed the treatment.' He was a very nice fellow and took it all in good part. But I knew the school medical officer had no use for Freudian psychology. So I didn't think it would get him far.

But another one. A boy had a blackout in school, he was on probation and he was going to see a specialist, not necessarily a psychiatrist, at the hospital and the probation officer had written a report on him. He'd stated how this boy had got an Orpheus complex and went to great lengths to write all this out, and gave it me to read. 'Oh Good Lord,' I thought. I said, 'has the doctor asked you for a report?' He said, 'no, but I thought it'd be helpful.' 'Well,' I said, 'I suggest you don't send it. First of all you're telling the doctor what's wrong with him, and if I were the doctor I'd say 'What the bloody hell have you sent him to me for if you know what's wrong?' You can indicate symptoms which might lead him to think this.' And he decided not to send it. Fortunately he didn't because it was proved the boy was suffering from petit mal. But they'd had this stuff pumped into them on the course. The magistrate's clerk rang me up one afternoon. He said, 'Mr. Chesters, can you tell me, what is the psychological theory of the key in the lock?' I said, 'why?' and he said, 'Well that young probation officer came whispering in my ear when the magistrates were considering a case of stealing from a gas meter and said, 'Mr. So-and-so, have you ever considered the theory of the key in the lock.' He said, 'of course I just brushed him to one side.' I said, 'I can't tell you over the phone. It has a sex connotation. I don't think you need worry about it.' But you see it was given to them undigested. That was the sad thing about it.

A.C. Have you seen officers make good use of those theories?

G.C. If you can look at one theory along with another it could be so. And something that you've heard may give you a clue to something. Then they used to question these lads on things they'd heard on the course about psychoanalysis. Well you can very easily disturb something that you can't put back. It was really very dangerous. Anyhow, the Home Office did come to their senses. What happened then, after the war we had a flood of Fulbright lecturers [17] from America who came to teach us casework. Well, really what they were telling us was very much what the old court missionaries had been doing, but they had a lovely jargon about 'negative feeling,'

'ego supportive therapy,' all kinds of things like that. But well it all finished. It really all came back to the care and concern which was really what the old police court missionaries who had paved the way for us, had done. Casework was very acceptable although now I understand it's not as fashionable, but it was still going strong when I retired. But now we've got group therapy and community involvement and all sorts of things, and casework is not the thing it was. So fashions change. But I must say that care and concern, to me was the thing that really did work. Even if it didn't appear to do so at the time. A very good example is, at the Citizens Advice Bureau a chap says to me, 'Didn't you used to be a probation officer?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'do you remember Mr Gilbert?' 'Oh yes, I remember Mr Gilbert.' He said, 'Oh he was a good man. I was under him. He took me to his house, and we had five kinds of jam. I didn't know there was more than one kind. I thought a lot of him.' He'd only been a little boy then. But that's care and concern. I suppose it didn't matter, he'd giving him a choice of jams, but that care and concern had warmed something inside him and never been lost; and will stay with him all his life. That's how I see it.

- A.C. Can I follow some of this up with you? One of the things that always interested me about probation (I've never been a probation officer myself, although I've got a lot of friends in probation) was their attitude towards authority or the way they saw authority, the authority they carried in their work, and the peculiarly ambivalent feeling many of them seemed to have about it. I've got some probation friends who certainly right through the 60s, in the middle of the 60s anyway, were clinging to the idea that they were nothing to do with authority, and would repudiate or disown the authority they carried in being servants of the court. I wondered what you thought about all that.
- G.C. Quite a lot of it depended on the type of person you were. Sometime if you have the need to be controlling, you would then say that you were an officer of the court. You had the authority of the court. I'm afraid I was a bit of a failure at the authority angle. The way I saw it, the authority was the magistrate's and I, as I explained it to the probationer, was under them and that they were the people that had the authority. I was there to assist and befriend him, and to report him to them (the magistrates) on their progress and how they were getting on. I said, 'And you wouldn't expect me to tell lies would you? I shall have to tell them the truth about you, however much I care about you.' Some probation officer would say, 'I shall bring you back to court if you do this.' I would say, 'the magistrates will want you brought back to court if you do that.' Do you see? That probably was the coward's way of getting out of it, but I put the authority on the magistrates. I was there to help him to cope, but I would have to tell the truth to the magistrates of what would happen, and say if he wouldn't come to see me I would tell the magistrates and the magistrates would decide what was to be done with him. But, you see, as the probation officer lays the information 'I'm bringing you back to court.' Do you see?
- A.C. What you are saying is very subtle. You're laying it all on the client aren't you? That he should accept responsibility for what he does? That whatever you do is only in reaction to how he behaves.
- G.C. Yes. I'm there to help. But the magistrate is there and I certainly couldn't tell lies about him.

- A.C. When you first started telling me, I thought when you said perhaps that was the coward's way out, I was thinking 'yes, that is a cop out.' Because it really is to your discretion whether he goes back, and as it unfolded and you explained the way that all worked, actually that's a very complex sort of thing you were doing.
- G.C. The authority is the court. It's the court that has the probationer back. But for many probation officers it did something for *their* ego, I think. Now very few of the students that are lodging with me now begin talking about reporting to me. 'Oh my God, I was trying for years for probation officers to get off that word report. It goes back to the days of the ticket of leave men who were let out of Dartmoor on what they called a 'ticket of leave,' and he had to report to the police,' I said. And that's where this idea of reporting to the probation officer comes from. When I went to Hull, they had a little card and the probationer came with his card, tapped on a window and it was opened. So long as somebody initialled this card, that was good enough, he'd reported. He saw that as the extent of the relationship. I might tell you I forgot to use the cards. The order says attend for interview, as and when required. It's attending for interview, and it should be thought of in much the same way as you go to see a doctor. But when it's called report, it has authority and something almost punitive about it. But it's still used, definitely. I think that is my attitude about it. Then, of course, I'm probably a bit odd! I always was a bit of a rebel.
- A.C. You make it sound a bad way of presenting the probation officer's authority. Saying, right it's the court's authority. It sounds very parental if you know what I mean. It's more like concern of the parent, really.
- G.C. Quite. Now you can be strong for your probationer and from your very strength, just as a parent has, they want the parents to be strong. I've known a girl say, 'My probation officer won't let me go there!' One of the dance halls where there'd been drugs. 'No, my probation officer won't let me.' I know the probation officer hadn't made it an issue, to that extent, but she wanted her probation officer to say it. She wanted boundaries. You may begin with your boundaries pretty tight, and as the person develops you extend your boundaries. Just as a little child wants mother to stop them doing things, they can accept mum's authority. So the same relationship can exist. You'd say, 'well, you can't expect me to help you if you're going to go where there's always trouble, John. So you'll have to decide which it'll be.'
- A.C. All these ideas and methods of working that you're describing now, is that something that you've acquired during years of experience, or did you go on short courses or read particular books? What influenced you?
- G.C. Well I think it's like everything else, you read a lot, you go to lectures and listen to all kinds of people, and you pick from it really what suits you. They've probably have said a lot of things that you completely reject and then you develop and you find that it works with you, and that you can relate.
- A.C. What things influenced you?
- G.C. As I've told you, I was extremely interested in people. I read a great deal. I should think perhaps more than anything even, reading Dickens. There was no television. We lived in the country. Dickens. *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, all those things, but I like reading and you learn an awful lot from novels even, about people.

Anything else that had to do with human behaviour fascinated me. Before I thought about probation we had some extra mural classes from Liverpool University that I attended every Thursday, just because I was interested in people. Then we'd Home Office courses running, this and the other. I never missed those.

A.C. Can you remember any in particular or any articles in particular that have stayed with you still?

G.C. You see you don't remember how you get these ideas. It's something that becomes part of you. But you've obviously picked it up or tried it against other experiences. We were talking about the religious side of it. NAPO always opened their meetings with prayer, and I always used to argue, and said, 'why do we think we are so special that God has to give an ear to us, because our job is not as important say as the sewage engineers, or the man who clears the drains. We could manage without probation but we couldn't do without the drains being cleared. Why do we think that we're so specially selected?' I've always been a bit of a nuisance. It was a carry on, of course, from the Police Court Mission days.

A.C. Were you active in NAPO?

G.C. Locally, yes, I think I was chairman of the local branch once for a while. I used to be the secretary when I was in Hull. Well now then what I'd like to tell you is coming to Stoke-on-Trent.

Yes 1944. When I arrived at Stoke, I hadn't realised that they'd a very small service. The man had been appointed senior without the Home Office consent, and the Home Office found out after he'd been a senior for about a couple of years or so, they'd never had their approval! The poor fellow now couldn't be a senior any longer. And they had to advertise and I was appointed. Of course, the atmosphere was very tense all round and the local man who'd been here some time felt he'd got his nose pushed out. So I had to tread very carefully. The sad thing was the man who had been acting senior probation officer, in a couple of months after I'd been appointed and then started, went to his doctor and it was diagnosed as cancer, and after about a couple of years after, he died. But strangely enough he relied on me for a great deal of support. The other chaps did quite a bit of stirring, but I was able to cope.

Stoke-on-Trent in those days was like a county area. The North, they had their own clerk, and Tunstall had its own justices, Burslam had its own justices, Handley had its own justices. Stoke had its own court. Fenton had its own court but it shared their clerk with Longton. Now, this chap at Longton had been magistrate's clerk from the age of 25. He was now 80 and in private practice as a solicitor and he ran the court. The magistrates were just merely a decoration. And the probation officers working in that court had a terrible time. He wouldn't allow him to go into the juvenile court except when one of his probationers was before the court. He treated him very, very badly. I decided the best thing to do was to take over that area from him and go in. A new person can often do things that another person couldn't, and I had got considerable experience in other cities, you see. This man was such a law unto himself he sat below the justice and he would decide the sentence. He'd say, 'six months your worship'. Just tell them what to sentence. He would tell them if he was guilty or not guilty. The people in that area didn't say, 'I'll have you before the beaks, or I'll have you before the police court,' or anything like that. It was, 'if you say that

again I'll have you before Lawyer Hawley!' He was the judge and the jury and everything, a very strong-minded man. I'd a boy before the court who'd never worked since he left school. He was completely adrift and the mother unable to cope with no father, and I suggested that he was not particularly bright, and that he was prepared to go to an agricultural hostel for training. The clerk seeing this said, 'what's an agricultural hostel? Of low intelligence? Those are not the sort of people we want on a farm. I've got a farm and there's some valuable machinery there. No, we are not making any condition for him to go to a probation hostel.' Now, I didn't argue or discuss anything. Just accepted it. A few months later I said, 'could I have a variation on this order.' The boy on probation wasn't working. 'Right,' he said, 'bring him in. Make the little bugger work!'

Then I made myself useful to him in one or two other little ways, I got a rapport with him and was really getting somewhere, getting him to rely on the probation officer and the court, when he was up before the Lord Chief Justice Goddard, [18] and was dismissed because he'd held a secret court at 9.30 in the morning. So all my efforts, all the trouble I'd taken, were wasted. But it did result in the combining of the courts, and having one clerk for the whole of the city. So that was that. Also, social work was a pretty low standard when I got here, and one of the first things I got going was a social workers' club and we tried to make that really go, and I'm happy to say it did go. We met all kinds from the health visitors and all the social work organisations, and over a cup of tea discussed cases, and that was how we got our little liaison going. 'You know this family,' or 'Do you know that family? Well, I've been there.' We'd probably then agree on who should do what about the family which was very good. Only a few weeks ago I went to some fellowship or something or other, and the person came to me after and said, 'do you remember the social workers' club that you started? I used to come to them.' I didn't recognise the person, 'Oh I did find them helpful,' she said. And I'm sure that it did a great deal.

You see, the Potteries were stagnant because there was no movement of population. You couldn't go to Birmingham and be a potter. You might go to Birmingham to be an engineer. You might go to Manchester if you were an engineer, but you see the potters had to remain here. They'd lived in the same streets their grandmothers had lived. They were a very tight packed little community. They were very contented people; non-aggressive. Very seldom were there strikes. Only a sort of national strike. I'd been in Yorkshire, I was at Leeds before I came here, somebody only had to sneeze out of turn and there was a walk-out. But here, there were no strikes; the potters never strike. They are very easy and friendly. The difference between the people - you can illustrate it in this way. If in Yorkshire I said to a father, 'Now this boy must go to the clinic for treatment,' I said. He said, 'he's my lad isn't he? I'll decide whether he goes to the clinic or not.' And I'd say, 'well yes, he is your lad, and I know you'll want the best for your boy, won't you sir?' 'Well, I'll think about it, I'll see.' And he went to the clinic. Here, I would say the same thing and they'd say, 'Yes Mr. Chesters, yes I'll take him myself, Mr. Chesters.' A fortnight after they'd been, 'well, it was raining and I was really going to go.' The only way to get them to go was to take them by the hand and take them there. They are not at all aggressive, if anything very good tempered, very easy. The same with the magistrates, but you must initiate things. They were very bad at initiating anything new. It has since the war, the whole outlook has widened very much indeed.

- A.C. Were you in Leeds, as well? I didn't realise that. I thought you came to Stoke from Hull, but you went to Leeds. Were you anywhere else besides?
- G.C. No, I had experience in Manchester, Hull, Leeds, Stoke.
- A.C. Always in what were county borough areas.
- G. C. Yes, interesting. I think I should be very bored with rural probation.
- A.C. And then you became a CPO?
- G.C. Yes. In my day it was Principal.
- A.C. One of the problems with probation was there weren't many rungs up the ladder, were there? And there were very few senior positions.
- G.C. It had by then really begun to get going. It was much better before I retired. We got our Principal Officers and Deputy Principal then. In the early days, no. When I went to Hull there was no sort of leader at all. There was in Leeds. One of the reasons I went there was a chap appointed the principal officer and I had a great admiration for him.

There was a difference in attitude of the magistrates. Things that were considered to be terrible, heinous crimes now don't rank the same. Girls were brought before the court in need of care, sent off to homes and schools and things because they were in moral danger. Staying out at night and all that kind of thing you see. They were whipped away for years. Lads were brought before the court for masturbating and they were told what a dreadful thing it was. Their teeth would drop out, and their hair would fall out.

- A.C. Really? When was that? Can you remember?
- G.C. I suppose it was still an offence. Police would find them masturbating in a public place or something like that. But it was the horror with which it was expressed by the magistrates. I remember those cases. I know a good story. There was a firm of women's outfitters, a fashion house, that had an indecent note pushed through the door and they'd given it to the police. The police inspector was very keen to prove how good he was, anxious for promotion, decided that he'd solve the mystery as to who'd written this. He'd been sent round the schools to examine the handwriting of children to see how it compared with this note. He even came across to the probation office and asked had we got any correspondence from any of our delinquents. By a curious coincidence we had a letter asking about some lost property, and he compared this juvenile's handwriting with the indecent letter, it was the same. The lad was found and he happened to be the son of a shipper living in a very posh part of Hull. He was attending (Hymers) College [19]. As a matter of fact he had an IQ of 140. He was brought before the court causing great distress to the parents. The chairman of the juvenile bench was the secretary for the Seaman's Union, and he says, 'I've never read anything so disgusting in all my life and I couldn't possibly show it to the ladies sitting on either side.' Well, I knew that old Jimmy Sullivan, a seaman, had been to his office and used every vile word ever been invented to him so I didn't think much of that statement. But the boy was placed on probation, as a matter of fact. I happened to be the officer. About 3 days

afterwards, one of the lady magistrates came across to the probation office and talked to me about all sorts of things, and then eventually said, 'Er was it very dreadful what that boy had written in that letter, Mr. Chesters?' I thought, I'm not going to tell you. I said, 'Oh, not really. I don't suppose it would mean anything to him. He's probably seen the words on a lavatory wall or something,' and just bounced it off. But all that letter contained was, 'I think your fucking frocks are frightful!'

A.C. Is that all?

G.C. And that was all it was. That inspector had wasted all those man hours on this. The court had gathered, all that aggro had been created, the parents had been terribly distressed. He was expelled from (Hymers) College. He did go to the grammar school afterwards. All through I thought his alliteration rather marvellous really. But that was what was happening; that sort of hypocrisy was still around in the late 1930s. There were these homes that these girls were sent to because they stayed out at night, whether they had sexual intercourse wasn't really material. These were girls who'd left school, they were 15 and 16 and they were sent, if not to an approved school, there were hostels run by the Salvation Army and the Church Army. There'd be a condition of their probation to reside there for 2 years. And there was usually in charge of them a frustrated old maid, who got rid of her inhibitions by shouting and controlling these girls. Quite often, as the girls all played them up because they thought 'we've experienced something you've never experienced,' and they really used to – they were difficult. But to incarcerate them for all that long time! Then they would send them out as maids to somebody.

A.C. Can I just take you back to Manchester one more time? What I still haven't got clear in my mind is how long this training period was for, and whether there was a Home Office inspection at the end of it. How did you know you'd passed or whatever?

G.C. Well the Home Office had a report from the Principal Officer at Manchester, you see. I was really on their approved candidate list, you see. Had there been any problem, that's how it would have been known by the Principal Officer. It was for a period of about 12 months.

A.C. For 12 months then a report went to the Home Office? You then had to apply for your own job, did you?

G.C. Yes. I'd quite a number of things going, but Hull was the first and I remember accepting it. Coming back that night, (11th December 1936) Edward VIII was making his speech abdicating, and there wasn't a soul about. It was like Manchester had gone dead; they were all listening in. I wasn't at all sure that I was going to go there, but the clerk to the justice, a chap called Shaw said to me, 'Look here, you'll do much better to go to a city.' I'd got places like Rochdale and Northwich. He said, 'you go to a city and get some good experience and then you can choose almost anywhere after that.' Off I went to a city I'd never known before, but I thoroughly enjoyed it and although the Yorkshire people are a bit slow at accepting you, they take their time, but when they do accept you they are very, very loyal.

A.C. Did you stay in the service all through the war?

- G.C. Yes I think at 30 you were exempt, you see.
- A.C. I see. You became a senior and then PPO. What sort of relationship did the provincial probation service have with the Home Office in London? Did that impinge on you very much, or were you like laws unto yourselves once you moved right away from London and the Home Counties? Was it a different world?
- G.C. I've never worked in London. I don't know what it's like working in London under the direct control of the Home Office. Of course now they've broken that up. I think the PO s who worked in London always considered themselves a bit superior in that way. Of course when you were made senior it had to be Home Office approved, and again when made PPO. I think now a senior can be promoted senior without approval from the Home Office. They kept a fairly tight contact, and they did it mostly through inspectors. If there was something that they wanted to discuss, they would probably invite me to go down there and see someone or other. The only trouble was, you seldom had the same inspector twice and one would have a bee in his bonnet about one thing, not about another, and very often they'd give contradictory advice. So what I found was that whatever they said or thought should be different, I thanked them very much for their suggestion and, 'I'll make a note of it,' and usually if it was something I thought was useful and going to be good, I acted on it, if it wasn't it went in the wastepaper basket. Because the next inspector would not be bothered about it at all.
- A.C. It would be harder to get away with that in London, wouldn't it?
- G.C. Well I don't quite know how they controlled it. It was different, and yet we worked on the same rules and those kinds of things.
- A.C. What do you think is the biggest change you've seen in probation or social work in general, during the period 1929-1959?
- G.C. During that time. I was going to say the biggest change is taking the juveniles away from the probation officer, and also of course there's nothing like the amount of matrimonial work done. It used to be that we nearly did more matrimonial work than we did probation work. It was fairly much the thing that people should live together, whether they liked the idea or not! I remember having quite a set to with a clerk who said that it was the probation officer's duty to reconcile these people whether they wanted to be reconciled or not, because the magistrates had said so. They'd adjourned it for you to obtain their reconciliation, the possibility of a reconciliation, but they didn't say possibility. What he meant he just wanted it out of the way so he wouldn't have to waste time hearing it in court. But it was also – and I had a theory that the magistrates who were the most unhappy in their marriage were the ones who were so interested in trying to get people together. Like – I've got to suffer, so why shouldn't you? Up to 1959 the biggest change? All those years back. Well, I think we did become more conscious of being a profession and getting professional training, there was only Rainer House doing anything about it, and they worked in conjunction with LSE There were just one of two courses going other than degree. I can't remember very much about it. We were too busy chasing after somebody about whom we'd got to report to the magistrates.

- A.C. You get applied social studies starting don't you? And those probation officers being trained in universities.
- G.C. Yes, these weren't called applied social studies. They called it social science certificate.
- A.C. That was before the social science certificate had been going since the turn of the century, hadn't they? Eileen Younghusband (Interviewee no 26) got a course started at LSE in 1954.
- G.C. That's right, that came later. That's it, we were becoming more professionally-conscious, and there was real effort made and other services were also now thinking in terms of academic training.
- A.C. Was it difficult to absorb students from those courses afterwards into the service? You were saying something about absorbing people from Rainer House in the 30s who'd been exposed to Emanuel Miller and Kate Friedlander.
- G.C. That was in the late 40's. Well, I mean they came back there from those courses -. But again, after a little while they sorted themselves out and got back to reality. But as a matter of fact it disturbed quite a lot of them. There were their own problems, you see. They thought they were psychoanalysts. But it should be set against other theories. They got themselves all churned up inside, these chaps, and it was difficult getting them settled down after it. Well then suddenly there was a change at the Home Office. Miss Vandy, who'd been responsible for the training, came onto the inspection again, and they got May Irvine to run the course, and she was very good. As a matter of fact, I'd spotted May Irvine before them. She was at Manchester on the PSW course, and I got her to run us a course here. She came down on a Friday afternoon, every Friday afternoon. Before she went to the Home Office. She used this experience in her application, as a matter of fact. It was a very good course. We used to meet at the Federation House, the pottery industries place next to the station, so she could come straight off the train and we could get going.
- A.C. What year was that?
- G.C. Haven't a clue! I'm no good at checking up on the years. It would have been in the 50s, when the change came in the Home Office. Well then, of course she went there and the whole set up there was casework orientated. The Home Office had been doing a bit. The principal inspector for the Home Office was moving towards casework orientation. It was quite acceptable to me, so I devoured it. As I said, you take what you want to take; very much so.
- A.C. Some rather critical things have been said about social work and social workers in this period, I'm thinking of people like Barbara Wootton [20] and the things that she said, but I wondered what you'd say about it all?
- G.C. Well, Barbara Wootton said what needed to be said at the time. It was then that we'd been having all this Freudian stuff, and there was a backlash. They were building up a psychological jargon to get away with things. She really threw it all back to us, if you remember. What was the book called?
- A.C. *Social Science and Social Pathology.*

- G.C. That was the one. And I've heard her speak twice. Once when I was at Oxford on a conference and she stayed on and I was chatting with her, I've a great regard for her. She was a realist and we got her to come to Stoke. Oh yes, I was talking to her then. I was on the committee of this organisation and we had dinner before the meeting. Then she came to Keele for a lecture. She was my pin-up-girl type of thing. She was fearless in what she said. She had the courage to say the things that needed to be said, that other people ran away from. And she really brought them down to earth. So at that time, she was right. They were building up jargon and theory. It's awfully difficult to remember. It wasn't that she was against social work as such, but it was this remote sort of stuff – psychoanalytic stuff. She was really saying what they wanted. They want support and some concern. That's where it ends. You don't have to go into a deep analysis. It used to be terrible! They tried taking them back to where they were children and finding out what their feelings were about this and the other. Even the clients said sometimes 'I don't know who's mad: whether it's me or him.' And they talked a lot of nonsense. I remembered one officer who locked the door before the interview and said, 'now you can say to me anything: feel secure.' That was why he was locking the door. The kid was scared to death!
- A.C. What do you think is the best social work thing you've done, looking back on your career? It can be any time and any thing. I've purposely left it vague. Anything.
- G.C. I encouraged the Probation Committee. As a matter of fact, I had a very good committee. I chose young fellows as probation officers who had good training and of good intelligence and with very little experience, because I thought you can always give them experience, but if they're pretty thick and dull to begin with, I doubt if you can ever really change it. They'll always be thick and dull. So even the Home Office had jokes about my appointment of these young folks straight from college, but I must say it worked very well. I would prefer to start off with a youngster who had ability and to give him the experience and opportunities rather than take a chap who had probably been doing good works somewhere or other, and just done the Rainer House course. Or come in as a direct entrant. You see, we never had enough trained people. It was very difficult to get hold of trained people, and you couldn't keep the courts empty and very often had to make a direct appointment. So that it was difficult to keep up the standard. But I think that contributed quite a lot to the success of the Stoke service. I don't think that I've been very successful! Probably wasn't a success!
- A.C. Oh come on!
- G.C. I can't think. I tried always to build up a good rapport with the magistrates and the probation officers. I'll tell you what was a great experience for me, and I learned a lot, and got terrific support, was when we had Eric Sachs [21] as the recorder for Stoke-on-Trent. He was appointed about the same time as I was here. He was here for years. And he became a judge of the High Court. He's just died, as a matter of fact. I built up a rapport with him. I got him so interested that I sent him every quarter a summary of all the cases he'd placed on probation and their progress. We had a loose leaf binder and he used to read them, and it was very good for the probation office. He'd put, 'good work on this,' 'tell this man something or other,' you see? All little notes on the side of it. I remember the first week it happened, we'd a man before the court who'd had ill health and living in terrible accommodation with a

family. The recorder asked if we would try and get the local authority to rehouse him. The probation officer wrote to the housing, and had a very bad letter back from them, in which they said, 'we don't give corporation houses to jail birds.' As the man had never been in jail in his life, it was a ridiculous statement about it. So I went to discuss this with the recorder, and he said, 'you know your mistake here? You've started writing letters, and when people have committed themselves to paper they will never go back on it. The way if you want anything, is to go and see this person, the head of the department. He said, 'I found this when I was in the war office.' He said, 'if I wanted anything from another department, I would go and see the person concerned there. If necessary, sit on his side of the desk and talk to him until you have got it. that's the way it's done, not by writing letters. The personal contact.' And, by jove, he was right! You could deal with the most awkward situations personally. And then, just little over 12 months ago, I found out that he was living down in Sussex, Wadhurst and I was visiting my nephew at the time who lived down there, and I rang him up. It was his wife who answered the phone and said, 'of course I know you! I'll fetch Eric to the phone.' Would I come round and have coffee, there and then? We went and had a real good old chin wag, and it was a very delightful experience.

The other very delightful experience I had and again learned a lot, was when I was in Leeds. The chairman of the juvenile court was Dr. MacDonald [22] and I don't know what there was, but there was something about him and he had a wonderful understanding of delinquents. A boy in the days of the Arthur English [23] padded shoulders, comes in between two policemen and the policemen state all the terrible things that he's done. There was a great deal of feeling and the press were there. He said, 'I'm adjourning this case.' So next week when he comes up, no special press in, nobody there. There isn't the same prosecuting police fellow, it was all much calmer. Then he sends for the boy, 'come right up. You know John,' he said, 'you're not really very brave, are you? This is really only an act. I understand how you feel and what your troubles are. Now, you've met the probation officer, haven't you? Well can you accept him as a friend, somebody who'll help you?' He got really right through to the boy, which very few magistrates could do. I learned so much from him, and we both were on the same lines, and that was very supportive to me. He gave me a book when I left about shared experiences, which was very nice.

So you learn from people. But only the kind of people you want to learn from. We've had some very aggressive judges and all this kind of thing, but it was always a great challenge. It seemed as though in different places if the juvenile court man was good, the stipendiary magistrate was bad, and the other way round. You never seemed to get all good. But they're a challenge.

- A.C. Finally, you said there was something you wanted to say about school reports in court.
- G.C. There was always a bit of feeling about who should present school reports, and the education sent in their senior school attendance officer, with the reports. I had done a report on the boy appearing before the court in which I stated that I had interviewed the Headmaster, who'd made certain statements to me. The school attendance superintendent got up to his feet and said he objected very strongly to Mr Chesters going to schools. Anybody approaching the schools should do it through

them as the headmasters complained of various people knocking on their doors. Very indignant. The magistrates weren't really interested. I didn't make any reply or say anything then. But in the afternoon I went round his office and told him that if I'd done something that he found distasteful I was very sorry, but my concern was for the boy, and that I'd found the Headmaster was only too pleased to discuss the boy with me, and hadn't in any way resented it. All I wanted to do was to cooperate with him to get as much information as we could about the juvenile, to place before the court. He did more or less apologize and smooth it all over, and after that we had quite a good relationship, but in other courts, there was an edginess between the school attendance department and the probation. One of the things that I did when I became senior was to stop probation officers making their reports verbally in court. When I arrived at Stoke, there used to be quite a business of the school attendance superintendent talking to the probation officer, finding something a bit more about the boy, jumping to his feet before the probation officer so he could put in his information about it, then there was refusal of the probation officer to them tell the superintendent or discuss the case with him. There was quite a bit of contention. Well, I insisted on a written report being handed in and none of this holding the floor. It was their glorious hour when they could stand on their feet and address magistrates. It did something for their ego, and it wasn't particularly welcomed by the probation officers. Not only did it stop them making careless statements in court, they now had to think about what they said, and also we'd got a record of what was said in court.

A.C. Thank you very much.

EDITORS' NOTES TO THE CHESTERS INTERVIEW

- 1. The London School of Economics and Political Science** (informally, the London School of Economics or **LSE**) was founded in 1895, the moving Fabian spirits being Beatrice and Sidney Webb, Graham Wallas and George Bernard Shaw. The initial finance came from a bequest of £20,000 from the estate of Henry Hunt Hutchinson, a lawyer and member of the Fabian Society. He left the money in trust to be put "towards advancing its [The Fabian Society's] objects in any way they [the trustees] deem advisable". The aim of the School was the betterment of society through the study of social science subjects such as poverty and inequality. The important role of the LSE in the development of social work education is referred to in several of the Cohen Interviews. The Charity Organisation Society (COS) sociology department - that had provided some theoretical training for social workers - was absorbed in 1912 into the LSE's new Department of Social Science and Administration. The range of courses later provided by the Department was described by David Donnison in 1975: "The Department was teaching about 300 students at this time (1956): about sixty were taking the Social Administration options in the second and third years of a course leading to an honours degree in sociology, ninety were taking a course leading to a Certificate in Social Science (later renamed the Diploma in Social Administration) and twenty five graduate students were taking the same course in one year. The Department

also provided four one-year professional training courses designed in the main for graduates in social sciences: the Personnel Management course for about twenty five students, the Mental Health Course [established in 1929] for about thirty five students training for psychiatric social work, the Child Care Course for about twenty students training to work in local authorities' children's departments and involuntary child care organisations, and the Applied Social Studies Course for about twenty five students entering various branches of social work. A number of graduate students were reading for higher degrees, and various others were temporarily attached to the Department." The School ceased to offer professional social work qualifications in 1998.

2. **Sisters of Mercy** Known as the "walking nuns" as they were authorised by the Church to be non-cloistered. Founded in Dublin in 1827 and the first convent established in England in 1839. They always had an interest in people in prison. Today in the UK it is a registered charity, The Union of the Sisters of Mercy of Great Britain.
3. **Police Court Mission** began its work in 1876 and by 1907 there were 143 missionaries in 358 courts when they became "officers of the court" under the 1907 Probation Act.
4. **St. Vincent de Paul** was founded in France in 1833 as a Catholic voluntary organisation to tackle poverty in the slums of Paris. It has been active in England since 1844. It works through volunteers on a parish basis. There are now 10,000 volunteers.
5. **The Salvation Army** was founded in 1865 by William Booth. It is less concerned with doctrinal niceties than with moral Christian living. It is well known for its social work such as its missing persons investigation service.
6. **Church of England Temperance Society** was founded in 1862 and began its work with police court missionaries in 1876 when it received a gift of 5 shillings from a London printer, Frederic Rainer, for such work.
7. **1907 Probation Act.** This measure formally introduced probation as a means of rehabilitating offenders who had broken the law. See Kate Bradley's *Juvenile Delinquency and the evolution of the British juvenile courts c1900 – 1950*. www.history.ac.uk.
8. **Winston Churchill** was in fact Home Secretary 1910-11
9. **National Association of Probation Officers (NAPO)** was formed in 1912 and was one of the first professional associations of social workers. The Association decided not to join the BASW merger in 1970.
10. **Professor David Smith** trained as a probation officer working initially in Hereford. He went to Lancaster University in 1976 becoming professor of Social Work in 1993 and then Professor of Criminology in 2002, a change which reflected a shift in the focus of his own work as well as changes in social work itself. He is now emeritus professor and Principal of the County College.
11. **Church Army** was founded in 1882 by Rev. Wilson Carlile as an orderly army to be evangelists among the outcasts and criminals in the slums of Westminster. Like the Salvation Army, it undertakes social work activities.

- 12. 1925 Criminal Justice Act** extended the probation services and thenceforth probation was increasingly used as an alternative to prison. Its provisions came into force in 1926.
- 13. Octavia Hill.** (1838–1912). Housing and social reformer. With financial support from John Ruskin, Hill was able to realise her ambition to establish improved housing for 'my friends among the poor'. She also became involved in the Charity Organisation Society (COS). In 1884 she was asked by the ecclesiastical commissioners, embarrassed to find that the church had become a slum landlord, to take on the management of certain properties, initially in Deptford and Southwark. In 1889 she became actively involved with the Women's University Settlement in Nelson Square, Southwark.
- 14. Rainer House and Foundation** The Rainer Foundation was the name chosen for the Church of England Temperance Society in 1939 when the Home Office assumed full responsibility for the probation service. It was named in honour of Frederick Rainer who had earlier prompted the Society to get involved in police court work. The Foundation developed into a charity providing residential and other care for young offenders. Subsequently merged with other charities.
- 15. Dr. Emmanuel Miller** (1893-1970) was a founding father of child and adolescent psychiatry in the UK. He is credited with establishing clinics that became the forerunners of freely available child and adolescent mental health services in the UK. He assisted in the establishment of the Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health and the *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychology and Psychiatry*. And he was also a mover behind the establishment of the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency and the *British Journal of Criminology*. In his early professional years he practised across the range of activities, with a special interest in children but also working in what was then called mental deficiency, and in neurology. In 1929 he became a member of the Royal College of Physicians. Miller's approach to psychiatry had a strong psychoanalytic and sociological bent. He was the psychiatrist to and director of the first child guidance clinic to open in England, which he founded at the Jewish Hospital in east London, working with the psychologist (as he then was) Meyer Fortes and a leading psychiatric social worker, Sybil Clement Brown. When some of those interested in this type of work with children combined to create the Child Guidance Council, Miller became a member of its governing body. Miller believed that psychoanalytically informed work would help to prevent delinquency and neurosis spreading from the youthful individual to the adult. He published *Types of Mind and Body* in 1926 and two extremely influential and much cited articles in 1931 on the psychopathology of childhood and illusion and hallucination. He also wrote a moving but professional account of the state of psychotherapy in 1931 and in *The Generations* (1938), the most sociologically inclined of all his writings, his rallying call for mental health to lead social reform for a better future.
- 16. Dr. Kate Friedlander** (1902-1949). Psychoanalyst and physician. Born in Innsbruck, Austria, and obtained the first of her three medical degrees at the University there in 1926. Moved to Berlin where she became an assistant to Professor Karl Bonhoeffer at the University psychiatric clinic where many of the young doctors were interested in psychoanalysis. Published a number of important papers on neurology and developed a keen interest in social affairs and with a strong social conscience. Her interest in delinquency lasted all through her professional life. Two of her early papers, "*The*

Somatic Origin of Anxiety" (1933) and "*The Biological Basis of Freud's Theory of Anxiety*" (1935), proclaimed her deep interest in this subject. Together with her husband and daughter she emigrated to London in 1933, and joined the British Psychoanalytical Society. In the 1930s she had already pursued her interest in delinquency and joined Glover in the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency; she published a book, *The Psycho-Analytic Approach to Juvenile Delinquency*, in 1947. The arrival of Anna Freud greatly stimulated her work with children as did the eventual creation of the War Nurseries in London and elsewhere. It was she above all who persuaded Anna Freud to found the post-war child training course at the Hampstead Clinic.

17. **Fulbright Lecturers** were part of the larger Fulbright Programme formally established in America in 1946. It was the idea of Senator William Fulbright who in 1945 proposed that the proceeds of the sale of US government war property should be used to fund international educational exchanges between countries including American faculty members going abroad to teach for up to a year. China was the first country to make use of the programme.
18. **Baron Goddard of Aldbourne** was the Lord Chief Justice from 1946 to 1958. He said that "they had to give the job to somebody. There wasn't anybody else so Attlee appointed me."
19. **Hymers College** was founded in 1893 as a boys' school. It was fee paying and became a direct grant grammar school in 1946 and fully independent in 1971.
20. **Barbara Wootton.** (1897–1988). Eminent economist, criminologist and social scientist. After leaving Cambridge, Wootton took up a research studentship at the LSE and later worked for the research department of the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress. She was Principal of Morley College from 1926, and Director of studies for tutorial classes at London University from 1927 until she became Reader at Bedford College in 1944 and Professor in 1948. She published widely and her *Social Science and Social Pathology* (with Vera G. Seal and Rosalind Chambers. Allen & Unwin, 1959) remains a classic in the application of utilitarian philosophy and empirical sociology to the enlightened management of society. It is a wide ranging 400 page book and Alan Cohen, in his interview questions, concentrates on a chapter ("Contemporary attitudes in social work") that was very critical of some approaches to social work and the claims made about what social work could achieve. It would be difficult to find more trenchant and sustained criticism of the attitudes, language and assumptions of the selected social work writers and academics quoted – in particular of the claims made for the more high-flown psychoanalytical approaches to solving human problems. These she ridicules and claims that they do a great disservice to social workers in their daily tasks. It is clear from the edited transcripts that Alan Cohen was keen to gather the views of his interviewees about the impact of the Wootton bombshell and most of them give a response. From 1952 to 1957 she was Nuffield research fellow at Bedford College. She was created a life peer in 1958 and was the first woman to sit on the woolsack in the House of Lords; and later held several senior public appointments. Her reputation as a fiercely independent thinker was sustained during the following years of public service. Accounts of her life and work are available from her autobiography, *In a World I Never Made* (1967) and Ann Oakley's biography *A Critical Woman* (2011). (Sources: Personal Papers of Barbara Wootton, Girton College Archive, Cambridge; and the books cited above).

21. **Sir Eric Leopold Otto Sachs** (1898-1979) was recorder in Stoke on Trent from 1943 to 1954. He was a high court judge from 1954 to 1966 and then Lord Justice of Appeal from 1966 to 1973. He reached the rank of Brigadier in the second World War.
22. **Dr. W.S. MacDonald** was appointed to the newly constituted Probation Training Board in July 1948 and was described as member of the Leeds Probation Committee; member of the Leeds Juvenile Court Panel; Chairman of the Leeds Public Medical Services.
23. **Arthur English** (1919-1995) was an actor and comedian in the music hall tradition. He was known as the “prince of the wide boys” and developed the character of a war-time ‘spiv’.
