

KNOLE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM HUGHES (W.H.) 22nd November 1983, Godden Green, Kent. The interviewer is Robert Sackville-West.

(tapping sound throughout; some hissing and slight feedback)

Track 1

Interviewer: Here in Godden Green in Mr William Hughes' house looking out over the green, and I'm going to ask him what it was like in service at Knole in the old days. Can you recall how the interview went? Who was it that you went to see?

[0:19] W.H.: We went to see the butler. He had a little room on top of the main servants' entrance; We went to the little room at the top. There were 17 of us. He interviewed us all, gave us our expenses, and said that Lord Sackville was away and that he would let us know at a given time whether we had the job or not, he'd let us know. Then he took me in, he kept me back and had an extra word with me. I was at the time with Lady Greenwold at Tonbridge, it was called Southlands. So it was only a bus ride for me. And most of them were London and around, or long distance. So I thought it was because of the distance that he was giving me extra as it were; but there was more to the meeting than I knew. Because it was arranged with the Southlands family, my interview with Mr Booth, to help me to get a good job. She felt responsible, as I was a lad up from Wales she felt responsible that I got a good job.

Interviewer: Mr Hughes, how old were you at that time?

W.H.: 17.

W.H.: A year and 3 months at the time. I was a year and 3 months with Lady Greenwold.

Interviewer: Now when was it that you heard that you'd got the job?

W.H.: Mr Booth rung Page our butler to ask if I could come over the following day as Lord Sackville was home and would like to interview me. So I came over on the bus to Knole and I met Lord Charles Sackville.

Interviewer: Yes, now what did he want to learn? What did he ask you?

W.H.: The butler took me in to the sitting room. *(feedback audio interference here)* Lady Anne Sackville was in the sitting room. She sat in the corner, and he sat by his desk. He asked me how long I had been away from Wales and did I like service. Not much really. Just a few questions, I think he was more having a look. Then he rang a bell and the butler came, and went out into the pantry, where there was already staff in the pantry. Then the butler came in about 10 minutes' and said, "Alright, you'll be hearing from me." [4:00] So I went back to Southlands and then the following day Booth rang up Page and asked when he could release me. And I'd got the job as Second Footman at Knole.

Interviewer: That was fine. When you started as Second Footman, can you tell us something about that? What you had to wear? And what you had to do?

[4:31] W.H.: Well you had for the mornings what they call Parson's grey. That was the morning. That was mainly for silver cleaning, you had a green baize apron and in case you had to answer the door or phone. If the phone rang, you put a jacket on, and you went through to Lord Sackville or you couldn't find him, or if he wanted you, you were partly on duty but you were silver cleaning. It was your day off if you were silver cleaning, otherwise you were on duty *all* day and then you was dressed in tails, red waistcoat, stiff shirt and white tie and you were on more or less, just doing nothing for the day, just phoning calls, waiting on lunch and tea and dinner. You were on for the day. And phone calls.

Interviewer: Now tell us about the silver cleaning.

W.H.: Well you all had – it's still there - in the pantry there was a large table affair, thin narrow table. And you all had your own drawer and your own instruments, in the way of brushes, leathers, and your own saucepan and you made your own mixture of... and the main instruments in cleaning silver was your thumb and finger. You cleaned; you used the thumb with the finger. And you rubbed until the stuff that you put on, disappeared. And the main thing you used the brush for, in the case of stuff that was ... what have you, was just to brush it out. Then the spoons and forks, you brushed between the fork. But always washed eating instruments, and leathered them before they go on the table.

Interviewer: Were there any particular pieces that were awkward to clean?

W.H.: Oh yes, there were the candlesticks. They were all fish and owls and all owls' heads and they were difficult to clean.

Interviewer: Would you have had to do shoes as well?

W.H.: My job was to clean *Lord* Sackville's shoes, because I was the Second Footman. I was more or less the stooge for the butler. I pressed all Lord Sackville's clothes. Cleaned the golf sticks. Cleaned all his shoes. He was a man who wore anything up to 5 pairs of shoes a day. Each pair he wore, you cleaned the next day. It was cleaned for the next day and (*indistinct*)... taken out for the night and washed, put on a hot water pipe, dried and ironed and put inside the shoes. You never knew what shoes he was going to wear, so you had to get all his shoes ready. He took the choice. He didn't ask you. He would take it on.

Interviewer: Let's go back to the morning, who would take in his newspaper for example?

W.H.: I would get the breakfast tray ready. Collect everything. The kitchen would do all the hot stuff. The still room used to do the toast and the fruit and there was the housekeeper, Mrs Jeffrey. And she had a still room maid. So collected that. The kitchen staff – if you had anything hot - you'd collect that from the kitchen, then you brought it to the still room and

they'd used to get his coffee ready, and his orange which to be peeled and quartered. He alternated; he had that with a grapefruit. So get that ready. Papers ready. I had to iron them.

Interviewer: You ironed the papers?

W.H.: Ironed the papers and they'd be roughed up. Just in case...somebody'd iron them, but you'd always be afraid of the coals. So the papers were put neatly and just with a big flat iron. You'd just run the iron over the papers.

Interviewer: And he had two daily papers a day?

W.H.: Two papers a day; he had the Times, Lady Sackville liked something different. So the papers used to go in to him first. Times was the regular one. One week it would be the Express and the next week it would be the Mail. Then suddenly somebody'd say the Mirror was very good. So we never knew what the second paper would be. She'd change her mind at the last minute.

Interviewer: When you came to be promoted, you became First Footman?

W.H.: I was Second Footman for about 2, 3 years, and I became First Footman at the age of 21. And I was reckoned for that time I was the youngest First Footman the Lord had had. And I had a man of 28, 27, above me, and I'd give orders to, and he'd been in service for longer than I had.

Interviewer: Yes, that must have been a bit awkward.

W.H.: It was awkward but you get on with these things. You learn to be tough. Lord Sackville was a major-general with a good army record. He must have spotted that I was a bit of a hard one. He always gave me credit for being a bit firm.

Interviewer: That's it. Now we've heard about something of your duties as Second Footman. Now when it comes to First Footman, what does he do?

[11:30] W.H.: You go further up the stairs as when you're First Footman. There's more responsibilities. We didn't have a valet. We *had* a valet. The butler and him never saw eye to eye, because he wanted to do valeting of His Lordship himself. So Booth took to valeting. I'd lost the job, moving up, of being his understudy, Booth. [12:00] But now I became *more* of an understudy to him. Because when he was out, or not about, he took me into his confidence. And he was very, very strict and a very good butler. I was about the only one he would talk to. He was a very kind man to the young girls and the staff. And they all thought the world of him. But the young footman didn't; he was just, but very hard, very thorough. And you had to watch your p's and q's with him. It was my job, if he was out for dinner; but I became Lady Sackville's right-hand man as it were. I had to do all her wants. The bell would

ring. One for the butler, two for me. So when it was two, nine times out of ten that was for me, and Lady Sackville. I had to clean *her* shoes; I had to take her breakfast up. It became the other way. Instead of watching the breakfast go up with the butler, it was my job to take *her* tray up to her room. The maid answered the door but I would place the tray in front of Lady Sackville.

Interviewer: I think it's time we heard a little more about Lord and Lady Sackville. Lady Sackville – this was Lady Anne? [13:30]

[13:30] W.H.: Lady Anne Sackville. She was American. She was a great friend of Mrs Simpson. And when the troubles ... when we lost the King at that time. I might add she was the first one to be introduced as the lady friend of the Duke at the time. [14:00] They met at lunch and it was through Lady Sackville Mrs Simpson got in and the other woman got out. Ours was very much an American house. Visitors were all more or less from America; and when the crash came in 1931/32. We lost quite a bit; we lost quite a few of the *good* families from America.

Interviewer: What sort of a person was Lady Anne? Was she nice?

W.H.: She had an accident. Over the years, we were not supposed to know. We're not sure whether she fell off horse or she was pushed off. But she walked lame. She had two toes missing on the left foot, so she walked with a stick. But she was a dry...you had to be very careful with her. She really knew her stuff. She didn't muck about. She'd been trained by Lord Sackville. On many occasions we used to see him, never in front of us, he'd walk her up and down the Colonnade front. And the butler'd say to me, just before lunch, "William come along and do this, something going on here, we'd missed something." We didn't know what. On one occasion, he'd say, where's William, Lord, we weren't there at the end of lunch time, so he thought he'd give her a little dressing down. So he'd lay the law down to her and she'd just lean on her stick and walk, very humbly, down alongside him.

And when he'd finished, he come in. He'd never ever, lose his temper to her, in front of us. And we were never allowed to lose our temper or show say any sort of, anything against her *at all*. He was so – I always heard that he was *very* fond of her. The family didn't like it. But, and she was a *very* difficult woman. Lost her temper a lot. She drunk a little bit too much at times. Champagne was one of her things, whisky in the morning sometimes. If whisky was called for in the morning, that was my job to take it up. Then we'd give it the front, the go-by, as we called it. We wouldn't touch the front, only when the bell rang. We knew she was on the warpath. So you'd leave her alone. Again I was very fortunate; if you fitted in in these places, you were alright. I was the lucky one. I did with her. I can honestly say, the years that I'd known her, she was *more* than generous and kind to me.

Interviewer: And now let's hear about Lord Sackville, because you must have got to know him.

[17:50] W.H.: He was – I always said to everyone – at the end of my service, when he died, there goes my father. Because he was my father figure. Everything that I – I watched him. I acted him, in a way. Many, many times, I was given the name ‘Prince of Knole’ because I loved clothes. I used to go up many time and look at his suits. He had rows of them. Marvellous stuff. I would *try* and get as near as I could, to his colours, the ones I liked. I’d go up to Parkers and Selfridges - fancy trying your luck with things like this, when you *knew* he’d paid, in those days, £90 to £100 for a suit. I went up to Selfridges, with £10, £20 in my hand, I’d try and get a suit like Lord Charlie’s got in his wardrobe. I did manage to have a good collection of my own. I was a bit of a saver, and we had quite good tips. We did pick up quite a bit of money. And I used to like a little gamble on the horses. I’d often come up, and if I did pick up an extra few quid, then I’d spend it on clothes. So in that way, probably, I got the name ‘Prince of Knole’.

Interviewer: He had an army career, hadn’t he?

W.H.: He was a Major General; he was Governor of Guernsey, Jersey. Oh no, well let’s get this right, Guernsey and Sark, those were the two he was governor of. It was from there, and at the time he was *Sir* Charles, he got knighted for his war work. He was with Foch, Marshal Foch, for the signing for the peace. He was one of the people who signed the 1914 end of the war. And he was also, when President Wilson came over here, when the British, when they started the League of Nations. And on the steps going up, if you remember, this is history. He was shot on the steps when they were going to this meeting. And there was a lot of people against him, when the United Nations was being formed. But Wilson was in favour of it. And Lord Sackville was not more than 5 steps behind him. And he was shot there. And if you ever go to Knole, you’ll see *marvellous* photographs of Wilson, signed at the bottom. Lovely strong writing, to Lord Sackville; and also one from Marshall Foch, same one. He always had them on his desks, these two people were two of the people he was taken to.

Interviewer: How many years’ service did you do with Lord Sackville?

W.H.: I was with Lord Charles, 37 years.

Interviewer: 37 years. You as butler must have come into contact with the family *much* more than the other staff. To what extent did other members of the staff come into contact with the family?

W.H.: You watch this Upstairs and Downstairs on the television. Now a lot of that, I’ve told this to the person who came to Knole and done, they did a thing at Knole which I took part in it, with Mr. Jo Grimond, when Lord Sackville did it. We were the 13th issue, it was a Country House series, it was called, it were a half hour on the television. That *wasn’t* the service that I knew here. For instance, when the telephone booth was out in the passage. When the footman answered it, and it used to lay into about five different rooms. If Lord

Sackville was wanted, or Lady Sackville was wanted, you'd ring through to them first to see if this call was to be taken. If yes, you'd put this call through. If not, then you'd say they weren't in. The thing was, very often, it used to break down for some reason. I think it was the length of the run; a lot of people put it down to the rats used to gnaw the wires.

You put it through. And there was a person who I knew. He'd married the daughter of Biggs, Lord Sackville's ... (*indistinct*) he always wore, he was a dapper little fellow, he was about the first person outside the Sackville family that used to take calls that we'd pass forward, that I'd seen. Well he was repairing with another fellow, this telephone box, and we were all having a bit of fun in the passage. And one girl rushed up and said, "Careful, be quiet! Lord Sackville's in the telephone box." She'd been in the house; it was the first time she'd ever seen. So we played on, we kidded that it was Lord Sackville. This chap was taking on Lord Sackville's place. That just shows you – they didn't know, they never went through the front. You see the front of the house was the *men's* job. The girls disappeared about half past 8 of a morning. They'd go back into the bedrooms and the back of the house. They didn't see the front of the house at all. They didn't answer bells, when they had their parties. They had their Sundays off. But we didn't.

W.H.: There was one thing we did fall flat on, now and again. To think, oh we used to have silver plates and when we had 18 people in the house – it was about 5 or 6 courses, you didn't have silver plates for *all* of them, because you'd had the desserts – you'd use them up all the time. But in the main, you had, say, 12, 18 plates, each take off the table. We had two old men, and one old boy, and I used to wash them up. And he felt that some of the girls could be washing up the plates. And the housekeeper, Mrs Jeffrey stuck to *her* girls and he stuck to his boys. So, no go. So in fact, the girls never went to the front of the house. Only while they were at lunch or dinner, did they go up there to tidy up the rooms, just to sweep the hearth, put the pillows, sheets were right, and check up everything. And that's the only time they went into the house.

Interviewer: There must have been visitors to the house, you mentioned Americans. Were there some visitors who, perhaps, from your point of view, less welcome than others?

[26:22] W.H.: Mrs Simpson was one we didn't like *at all*. On one occasion, Lord Sackville... now lunchtime, he didn't worry about who sat where, or who sat next to whom, on top of chimney...he didn't care. But dinner, he used to love to make a plan. We couldn't lay the table until he did this plan. And we used to collect it off him about half past 5. He'd make up his mind then. So he'd give us the plan, with little bits of gold tickets that he had.[27:00] He'd put the name that he'd printed on there, and we had to put down when we laid the table, the name in *front* of these persons where they are to sit. So when they walked into the room, there was no 'you go here, and you go there'. People just went to have a look where their place were. Now this particular night, Mrs Simpson thought, he would have on his right-hand side, a lady of privilege – in other words, *she* was the one to him, most

important in the room. On the right-hand side of her Ladyship, he'd have, would be the husband of the woman. On this occasion, Mrs Simpson thought she'd qualified for this position. But it wasn't so. But there was this lady, then His Lordship, then a gentleman, then another lady. She wasn't even on there, on the left of him; then another gentleman, *then* Mrs Simpson.

On this particular occasion, we had Chicken Maryland. Now if you know Chicken Maryland at all, that was not the same thing as today, a little lovely leg of chicken with a little bit of corn, you'd say, that's Chicken Maryland. This was a silver dish, a huge dish, and we had white, little white gloves, thick gloves, to stop you putting marks on the silver. You laid, you had a cloth underneath, the dish was very hot. But as you know, the old trick is you put a napkin on the table. I always did, took the thing very close, never high up as you see 'em serving today. So that nothing fell, if anything fell, nobody'd get hurt. You'd lay it tight to the plate and let them help themselves. And there was no handing like you do at the present time. Half of them try to help you with a knife and fork, which always looked ugly to me; you served off the plate. I'd been to the lady on his right, to His Lordship, been to the lady on his left. I'd been to the gentleman who was a very nice fellow, name of McKay. Mrs Simpson went on talking ... (*audio interruption*)

Interviewer: So you've got this big flat silver dish with Chicken Maryland. [30:00]

W.H.: I'd been to his Lordship, lady on his left, then the gentleman next to the lady, always a very nice gentleman, then next to him was Mrs Simpson ... and Mrs Simpson *kept* talking. It is a rule, the gentlemen stopped talking whilst a person is handing them something. But she just ignored me, completely, she didn't want to know. She was in a foul temper, because she was sat, not next to His Lordship. So I waited and I quietly edged the silver plate to her bare arm. The silver dish was very hot, but I didn't think it was *as* hot as *she* made out. And I just caught her, and she threw her chair back on the floor and rushed herself out of the room. Rushed to the bedroom, came back a couple of minutes after, all apologetic, with a great pink strip on her arm. So for that, the next morning, 10 o'clock, if there was any trouble, His Lordship would have you on the carpet at 10 o'clock. So 10 o'clock, he rung the bell – two, which was me. Butler said, "Go on you." Off I go. His Lordship looked at me, and said, "Now William, you didn't *really* burn Mrs Simpson, did you, deliberately?" And I said, "Now would I do that? That's like putting a big old hot poker up into a big fire...and she come in and it come up all on her arm. It was just that she was not in a very good mood, and I burned her and you saw the consequences." [His Lordship said,] "Ah, good. I had to tell you I *knew* you wouldn't." But I have to tell you I *really* did. I did it *purposely*. (*laughter*)

Interviewer: So there's an example of a visitor that wasn't so welcome. Can you recall somebody who you were really *pleased* to see?

W.H.: Yes, there were several. But there was one we called, he was Colonel Mike Scanlan. He was up at the American Embassy and he used to fly a little Red Moth and he had a girlfriend who used to come to Lord Sackville's. He wasn't married, he was a bachelor. He used to always come with this woman. This weekend, he couldn't come but she was there. We were having tea on the lawn and he dropped a box of chocolates, a huge box of chocolates on the lawn. And if you ever saw anything, never saw anything so funny in your life. There was these chocolates, some had soft centres, some were smashed up, all over the place. We were picking them up with a shovel.

There were several. There was again a man named Fairburn. He married Lord Ashley's daughter. He was a fellow who'd made, if you know, he made machines. The first chap to put the ring bell, take away the button-finger thing you had, he made the proper machine. He invented the machine on the buses. He invented all different things. He was a very nice man. He was always hard up before he married the Ashley - she'd be the Honourable Mrs Rutland - and been married before. And eventually he married her, and of course in a way, he was having the money. But he was a very nice fellow.

And there was another one called Colonel Arthur Evans, who was made, he was knighted. He held Cardiff South for many years for the Conservatives. Sir Arthur Evans. He was a very nice fellow. He, during the war, he was frost-bitten; he had special shoes on his feet. He walked very lame. Big, tall, fine, handsome man. He was another one; there was another one from America, two or three American s I liked. Didn't like them all.

There was one, Warner; Jack Warner. He was very good. And another one, named Tomlinson, who was, or so we knew, or knew afterwards, sort of a half-brother to Lady Anne. He was very pleasant fellow.

[35:00] I waited on Ramsay MacDonald. He was a rather funny one. Ramsay MacDonald. Mrs Simpson did the menu. Everything was ... (*indistinct*). And he was a big tall man, long legs and he sat in the centre of the table. And the day before he came, Derby, the old man Derby, Lord Derby. They were cousins, Lord Sackville. He rung through to His Lordship and said, we're doing well, because he was coming over on to our side, meaning the Conservatives. They did him well. He liked the ... (*indistinct*). The meal was over, and he went to push his chair back. You've got to be very careful because the chairs were rather high-backed. You could easily go over. And he went on the floor. The next day, Lord Sackville, I heard, I was in the room, when Lord Sackville was on the phone to call to inform Lord Derby to say the day had got quite well. He said he'd kept his word and, "I really had him on the floor!" (*laughter*)

Interviewer: Now when the end of the year came, there must have been some special way of marking it at Knole. When it came near to Christmas time, for example, was the house decorated?

[36:32] W.H.: They weren't much for decorations. Bit of holly and things like that. But mainly flowers. We had a gardener called Stubbs, and the man who worked under him then, died on him just a day at 80. He was at Knole from the age of 11, and funnily enough, the man who worked with him as well, Levett, also buried at the same time but younger than him though, I'd say about 67. They'd bring in all the flowers for the dining room. Nice window, with the sill, that was all done out. And the main flowers for their Christmas would be orchids. All the Colonnade was decorated out with flowers. And the Music Room with flowers. The Great Hall was palms. The Great Hall, on the rise in the Great Hall that was done; all here and there, but no chains or papers or anything like that. One servant, though, was a bit game: he had one string, with a bit of paper right through. But the holly, no more.

Interviewer: I suppose the fire risk was one consideration.

W.H.: One of the reasons was that he didn't like too much because of fire. He didn't like too much holly because of fire, because you know holly would go up quickly. There was always the threat of fire, and they didn't go in for decorating much. Flowers was mainly the...

Interviewer: On festive occasions, would there have been buttonholes for the family?

W.H.: Every weekend, weekends that we had; there wasn't many we didn't have. Ours was a weekend house. Again, Charlie Beavin, he was the man who became the head gardener, who I just said he died, and was buried 3 or 4 weeks ago. He used to come down on a Saturday morning with carnations for the weekend: white for the ladies, red for the gentlemen. Lord Sackville was always partial to a red carnation. They were on little buttonholes, little vases - what we call buttonhole vases - on the dressing tables in all the bedrooms. He would place in there; come down on Sunday morning and replace them, fresh on Sunday morning for Sunday night.

Interviewer: And then, just before Christmas, would there have been a party for the staff?

[39:35] W.H.: Christmas, they'd have a party for the staff. Now in those days, in particular the days I'm talking about at this particular moment, this was about the first one I did when I went to Knole, there was about 40 children. Working on the estate at that time were about 50 people or more. The children would come with their parents for a tea in the servants' hall. The servants' hall was all laid out with jellies, [40:00] and Dundee cakes and everything you could whip up. Marvellous tea they used to give the staff and their children. Then we used to go into the Great Hall. And in the Great Hall, there was a Christmas tree and I'd stand by the side with a big bucket with a big stick with a sponge at the end, just in case one of the candles went. But my job was to give the nuts, and the bag of apples and oranges. They first collect their present from Lord and Lady Sackville to the left of the tree, near the door that came in from the parlour passage. Then to me, have their apple, and go back to their parents. When the Sackvilles had given their present, then the staff and everybody used to mix in and play played Postman's Knock, Kissing the Rings, and calling, and

everything that, games until about 7. And then the men used to come and pick their families up. And the butler's pantry which is opposite the Great Hall, which is now a workplace of the National Trust head workers. That was the butler's pantry. In the butler's pantry, each man, they each had what they wanted to drink from the butler. And when he'd had what he wanted, he'd take his children home. [41:30] The next day...

Interviewer: We're coming up to Xmas Eve now.

W.H.: We're coming up to the Christmas Eve, which was the next day. We'd have the tree for a party for the ...

Interviewer: Ah that's what is called Emily Jackson's...

W.H.: Emily Jackson's now. Again, I was Number One because Lady Sackville, Lady Anne thought I was very good with children. So didn't matter whether it was my day off or not, I had to give it up for that day, so I had to attend these children. And another great party was given for them. They were given a nice tea and a present.

Interviewer: And did they have tea in the servants' hall?

W.H.: No, they had it in the Great Hall, because some were in chairs and some were with their nurses and what have you. They weren't all on their feet, as it were. So they didn't have the Kissing Ring dance, they just had their tea and present and that was all over in half the time of the other party. [43:00].

Then in the evening of Christmas Eve, it was the servants' turn: the butler would have his staff on his side. The housekeeper would have hers. The chauffeur would come in, the odd men, and the lorry driver, Dinham. They'd all come in for their presents. Your present was: you'd have a pound for the first year, regardless if you came there afterwards, halfway through the year, it didn't matter, and you'd have your pound for the first year. So mine ran out a pound a year, and I always managed to get 7, 10; I suppose I'd had 7 years' service on one occasion, and it ran out at 10 pounds. I must have gone up in the world. More than a pound a year! His Lordship and Her Ladyship would give you that, wish you Merry Christmas and that was it. The tree then was taken down and taken to the hospital. It was given to them for the rest of Christmas.

Interviewer: So that was Christmas Eve. Christmas Day was pretty quiet?

[44:10] W.H.: Now Christmas Day, we, the staff would have a lunch, turkey and whatever. We had a stewards' room as you know. In the stewards' room was the butler, housekeeper, lady's maid, cook, any visiting ladies' maids and any visiting valets, they always used the stewards' room. And on this occasion, Mrs Jeffrey, the housekeeper would come and help to - on the table with her lady's maid and Mr Booth, the butler, and His Lordship, would serve the staff. The staff, all in that room, in the servants' hall at the time, always anyway,

was the First Footman used to sit in a chair, at one top end of the long table; at the bottom of the table was the head housemaid, and there was forms along the table, for the rest of the staff. And on this particular occasion that I'm talking about, there were on one side 10, and on the other side, 11, the little hall boy being the 11th because he had to get up and bring our food in from the kitchen which was a fair way down. So His Lordship would just show up and there was a glass of white wine or red wine, and a glass of port, with your pudding. That was your Christmas Day.

W.H.: Christmas lunch was very quiet, ours. Theirs, they would have very little in through the front. They'd give up that. They'd have people in, local people mainly, in the evening. Christmas Day would have being very quiet.

Interviewer: In your time, was the chapel much used?

[46:10] W.H.: Not at all. I don't think it had been cleaned. Not at all.

Interviewer: Wasn't there one occasion when, was it Her Ladyship who was laid...?

W.H.: Yes, that was the only time; my memory failed me then. When Lady Anne died, His Lordship was very ill at the time and they laid her – Young's did the funeral – they brought her up the night before and laid her in the chapel, before the burial the next day. She was buried in Sevenoaks churchyard and the only one of the – no, there's one more I think of the family – but apart from that, she's the only one from the Sackville family that's in the churchyard.

[48:11] end of Track 1

Track 2 (recording has inherent partial intermittent hiss)

[0:005] Interviewer: Now let's go back to Xmas and more cheerful things. The day after Christmas, Boxing Day. The family had a quiet day on Christmas, what about Boxing day

W.H.: They were back on us then – they'd have mainly family friends, in for lunch, and equally for dinner. Nothing gay. They would keep it low-key, as it were; we'd have mainly local people.

Interviewer: And what about the dinner in the evening?

W.H.: They'd have their turkey and all the things running to a 7-course meal. They'd have that. They'd have a very good meal.

Interviewer: I suppose the silver was out then?

W.H.: Not for that one, not for Christmas Eve, we'd only have the ordinary stuff for Christmas, for that Christmas. But what we did have - *their* big do was - the New Year and then, all the gold used to come out.

Interviewer: The gold?

W.H.: All the gold. Everything was gold.

Interviewer: My goodness.

W.H.: And if you read Mrs Simpson's book, you'll find that she says that. There's a book called 'Gossip'...you'll find on page 198 of that book, exactly what I'm telling you. It's mentioned for that particular year, Lord Sackville had given a party, a New Year's Eve party, and all the gold was brought out. How they got hold of all that, I don't know.

Interviewer: Whose responsibility to look after all this precious stuff?

W.H.: The key was mine. It was my terror. I used to sleep with that thing underneath the pillow. And many, many times when I'd gone to London, I had a girlfriend; she used to work for Monckton, parlour maid. If I'd go to London, and if I'd ever go out, when the girl made my bed I'd to remove it. After she'd made my bed I'd have to slip it back under the pillowcase. It was my nightmare.

Interviewer: What about cleaning gold? Was it a problem?

[0:40] W.H.: Not a problem really. It was mainly washing it. You mainly wash it and leathered it. You don't use anything on it; a good wash, a lather, and a good leather. Leathering mainly.

Interviewer: Just this one occasion?

W.H.: No, several occasions. Several occasions.

Interviewer: So that was a big evening?

W.H.: That was the big one.

Interviewer: What happened a bit later in the evening?

W.H.: They'd have their dinner. All very nice and quiet-like. And then at 12 o'clock, they all used to change. And they called it a "Cambridge Rag". They all came down, and nobody was to know. It was a secret what they wore. Our Lady Sackville was a Catholic, very nice person and *she* told them in the stewards' room when they were having their supper, what she'd laid out for later. And it was a bathing cloth with a big rising sun across the front. So Mrs Jeffrey was very, very – a little short person – very, very staid. All our fruit used to come from there – absolutely spot on with this fruit. I'd have to lay it out. She'd come down and have a little look to see if I'd done it the fruit absolutely as she'd left it. Well, she popped in this particular night, just before the meal and she said to me: 'Oh dear we must come down tonight.' And it was 12 o'clock. There was a lovely screen, which is still there now – and there was a just a split down the middle it was broken. You could see through this thing.

Margaret had told her what Her Ladyship was going to wear. And she came down. The butler and I was getting all the drinks ready to go through to the end of the house. They'd had their dinner. A lot of them had gone to change, and we were re-stocking. And she comes to the door - she uses for her bedroom; she'd come down the stairs and into the dining room. And as she come into the dining room, she flung one leg up in the air, she said: "Whoopee!"

[5:00] And she stood herself to the screen. Behind the screen was the head housemaid, another housemaid, and the other lady's maid, the cook and the housekeeper. And poor Mrs Jeffrey nearly fainted. That's the type of the person she was. She knew darn well they'd be behind the screen and how they'd squinted her. All behind the screen - so they all had their - when they finally came down, all except one woman, Mrs Loeffler, she still remained in white. And she was a friend of Sir Edward Ward; if you remember perhaps way back, Mrs Loeffler, Mr Eddie Faversham, and two or three others in the plane - all the crew - crashed over Meopham. And they reckoned that the fields were scattered with jewellery. Mrs Loeffler was the wife of Mr Loeffler, who was a South African jeweller, gems and what-have-you merchant, very, very wealthy.

Interviewer: I think you told me once of a surprising costume that one of the ladies wore which had something to do with you.

W.H.: That's right. They were playing a game called 'Murder' and all the lights were out. You know it was a game I always called - what people do today, morbidly; they'd done behind the scenes. They had their eye on somebody they fancied and this was a way of getting where they planned, they knew where they were going and they'd arrive there. Your guess was a good as mine. I was carrying a tray of drinks. I put the tray down and then somebody was crawling on the floor and they got my trousers. Now down the side of my trousers was a braid, which was what Sir Edward Ward had, I mean he was in the Irish Guards. And she thought: "Hang on, I've got Sir Edward Ward..." Very smart, handsome man. And I said: "Let go." It was a woman, Mrs Kemp. And Mrs Kemp was most kind, lady friend. So I said, "No offence." Very pleasant person. She said, "Now William, come on please." I said I couldn't go along to the pantry from there without my trousers. Anyway I was game and I let my trousers go; and when I got back to the pantry they wondered what the devil had gone wrong. (*laughter*) When the lights went on, and they were all in their clothes, Lord Sackville - very, very set man - didn't like the staff to see much what was going on - very prim and proper. He was the only man who didn't get out of his evening dress. He'd never do anything turning up. He was wonderful figure of a man. He wondered and asked me how Mrs Kemp got my trousers. I had to tell him. He took it as a joke, but he didn't like it.

Interviewer: So that was the New Year's Eve. It must have been a great show. Would the party have gone on till quite late?

[7:00] W.H.: All the young staff would go, and the butler and I was left. And the butler – as you know – he slept outside the house. And we had a night watchman. All the doors would be locked, particularly on these occasions. And Mr Ashton was the night watchman and he was little bit on the ball, so around about half past 12 he'd come along and say to Booth come on I must lock up. And Booth was only too pleased to go. And so then I was left the remainder of the morning, and I would probably go on until quarter to 4, half-past, the 4 o'clock time and then his Lordship wouldn't be finished. He could probably go on another hour after me. Anyway about 5 o'clock in the morning. But these people didn't want to be disturbed until they rung the bell. And I was to have an extra lay-in in the morning. I wouldn't get up the same time as the others.

Interviewer: I should think so.

[8:23] end of Track 2

Total duration: approximately 57 minutes;

Transcribed by Veronica Walker-Smith, 15 August 2014.