

the  
**OVERSEAS  
PENSIONER**

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*Overseas Service*



*Pensioners' Association*

**OSPA'S  
FAREWELL YEAR**

**1960 – 2017**

# Overseas officers and development today

## Project VOICES - an interim report

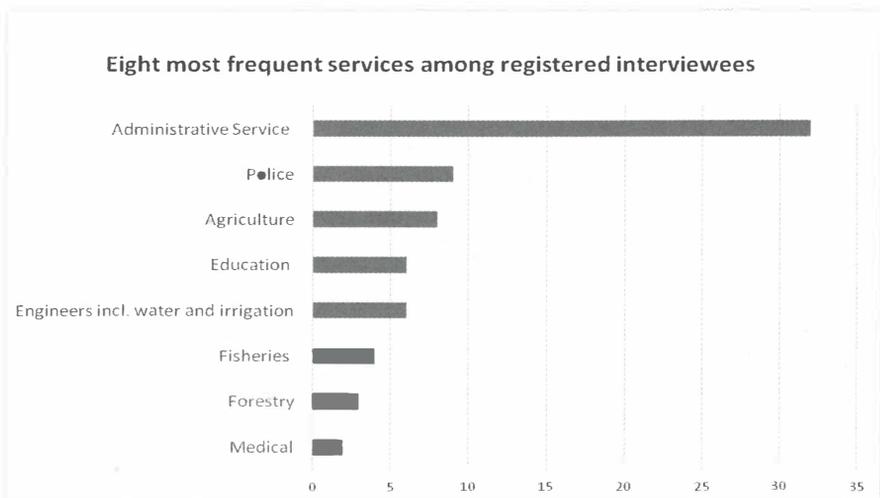
by Valentin Seidler<sup>1</sup>

In the previous number of *the Overseas Pensioner*, I directly addressed former overseas officers and readers of this journal. I hoped to raise interest in my research programme and, even more, to motivate OSPA members to participate in a series of interviews. A hundred former overseas officers have responded and our work has begun. I am deeply grateful to all those who have volunteered to record their biographies and to the OSPA office for their immense commitment and support.

This article gives an interim report on Project VOICES.<sup>2</sup> At the same time it aims to expand the project in size and in quality. I repeat my invitation to all remaining former officers to take part in an interview in the coming months. **We are now also ready to receive any document, piece of correspondence or photo that you would like to have published for future academic research.**

### An interim report

So far 92 OSPA members have registered their wish to be interviewed. Ten interviews have been conducted so far. In a message to all applicants I apologized for the delays in getting started. It took some time to build the organization and collect the necessary funding. The table below gives a first descriptive information on registered OSPA interviewees. As you will notice, some services remain under-represented in our sample. Registered interviewees have served between 1949 and 1993. Two thirds of them (67 of 92) served in Africa and roughly one third in Asia and the Pacific Islands.



We have trained a group of seven graduate or post-graduate students of either British history or administrative history in conducting the interviews. All of them are fluent in or native speakers of English. Our project assistant, Ms Veronika Hammerle, is in charge of arranging individual appointments for the telephone interviews. She also collects documents which OSPA members want to share or publish. Veronika can be contacted at the following email address: [voices@univie.ac.at](mailto:voices@univie.ac.at)

## **How interviews are conducted**

The interviews follow a broadly chronological structure starting with your education at home and your recruitment into the Colonial Service. There is time for you to freely elaborate on memories important to you. In some places, we ask you to rate specific experiences on a scale from 1-10. This aims to facilitate later quantitative analyses. An average interview takes between 90 to 120 minutes. Typical questions would for example ask you to describe your recruitment process and your motivation to join the HMOCS. The interviews aim to contribute and hopefully advance today's academic debate on development. Therefore, we have put a special emphasis on questions related to the preparation for independence and to state-building efforts in the colonies. Depending on the final number of applicants, I expect interviews to last well into autumn this year.

## **The goal - a digital archive for future academic research**

Your recorded interviews, your photos and documents will complement the digital collection of over 14,000 biographical entries which appeared in the Colonial Office Lists. Building this will take a few years. In its final stage, the resulting online archive will be fully searchable. One could request specific names or functions - say for example all foresters in Nigeria who had served in the war. Related documents and photos (e.g. interviews given by other foresters in West Africa) would be suggested by the system. Because such a digital platform is expensive to establish, I have explored a potential cooperation with universities in the UK and in the USA and with the Academy of Science in Vienna. The academic interest so far has been tremendous. I am currently preparing a grant to the European Research Council which asks for more than 1.4m EUR over a period of five years.

## **A final appeal**

In closing I would like to urge all OSPA members who have not yet done so to register for an interview. Sadly, the OSPA office is closing this year and this may be our last possibility of informing the future generations of your unique work across the globe!

Different from my appeal last year I would ask you contact us directly in Vienna by email or by letter using the details below, instead of registering your interest first with OSPA. Please be sure to give your full name, your service (function), territories you served in, the period of your service and your telephone number.

**Please also feel free to send biographies, manuscripts or other documents which you would like to see published even if you cannot or do not want give an interview. In particular photos that illustrate the work of the HMOCS are an invaluable contribution to the digital archive.**

I remain very thankful for your interest and for the possibility the OSPA has given me.

### **Contact details for Project VOICES**

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<sup>1</sup> I am a member of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Historical Social Science in Vienna. I am currently a visitor at the University of Warwick, Department of Economics. Please visit my website for more information  
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