

4. First Academic Position – Lecturer in Agricultural Economics

DA: Which years were they?

MA: That would be [19] 27-29. In 29 I needed a job. Well, Allan Dudley, a member of the original group said, "I think that could be arranged. My uncle is head of an agricultural college near Evesham, and they are looking for a Lecturer in Agricultural Economics. You know economics. Go be an expert on agricultural economics." I went out and was interviewed. The uncle knew nothing about economics. He didn't know a great deal about agriculture either, but what he was interested in was someone who would play duets with him on the piano. Could I play the piano? I said, "Well, sort of in a way, yes". And he said, "Good, good. How well could you, for example, play the piano for hymns in the morning?" I said, "Oh yes, that's easy, it's just vamping most of the time". He said, "okay, you've got the job".

DA: Well qualified, I see?!

MA: That's right, and I became a lecturer in agricultural economics. I don't know if it did the students any good. They seemed to enjoy it. It was rather unusual as a course in agricultural economics but it did me good because I was expected also to do research. And the first year's research was in an unknown subject ... then unknown subject ... the marketing of fruit and vegetables. It was the first marketing study I have ever heard of in this country, because all the people around there were growers of fruit and vegetables. And so I studied the way they actually marketed their produce, and then suggested how they ought to market it. And they said, "Fine, that's useful. What are you going to do research on in the second year?"

The second year was a slightly different subject. I wanted to do a research on social mobility among children of agricultural labourers. It has nothing to do with asparagus or brussels sprouts or anything like that. And I said, "I suppose it is alright, might as well." And so I went round all the villages within a radius of 80 miles and said, "What I would like is your school registers of leavers in 1921". Most of them had these. They gave me them and said, "What did I want them for?", and I said "I want to see what has become of them." So they gave me the names and addresses of the children who had left these elementary schools in the villages in 1921. And I proceeded to try and track as many as I could, to see whether there had been in some sort of social mobility ... if so, what kind. Was it different for girls and

boys? One of the things that always puzzled me is that everyone that has done a study on social mobility has done it exclusively among men. I mean, I automatically took it for granted that there could be social mobility among women too, so I covered girls, as a matter of course. Anyway, some of them I couldn't trace at all – they had just emigrated or joined the army and never come back. But quite a lot of them could be traced: either they were still living locally, or they had gone off to the nearest big town, which was Birmingham. Some of those boys got jobs as policemen, some of the girls had gone off to big towns and got jobs in shops, or serving in the markets and so on. Some of them simply stayed behind and got jobs as skivvies in halls and there are plenty of big halls in the Vale of Evesham ... big house.

Audio Note¹

MA: We were on..... social mobility among the children of agricultural labourers. And social mobility had almost invariably necessitated geographical mobility. There were no opportunities for upward mobility in the villages.

Then, I decided to get married to Una. And this raised a great problem, with my parents.

DA: Why was that?

MA: Because she was not Jewish. And they thought, you know, it was wrong. So I thought the best thing was to clear out of the country.

DA: That's rather drastic.

MA: Yep.

DA: Was this having married her or before you decided to?

MA: No, having married her². But fortunately I was able to go to Harold Laski, tell him the position and then he said, "Well now it's Monday now, in the middle of August, come back on Friday, and I think I may have solved your problem."

¹ Tape 2, Side A;, audio file: Marktape3

² Paul Walman notes that Mark and Una married at the West London Synagogue