

February 2023

More about our four national audio archives and books and women in
parliament historic photographs

The British Library: 2004 to 2005. (82 interviews)

http://cadensa.bl.uk/uhtbin/cgisirsi/x/0/0/5?searchdata1=CKEY7012165&library=ALL&_ga=2
.64408234.400880054.1628621377-1403776849.1628621377

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Harman-Shephard collection of interviews with women Members of Parliament

SHELFMARK: [C1182](#)

Collection title: [Harman-Shephard collection of
interviews with women Members of
Parliament](#)

Collection inventory: 95 mini-discs, 1CD-R

Collection descripti: Interviews with 83 female and 3 male Members of Parliament, most of whom entered the House of Commons at the 1997 general election (Labour 61 women, 1 man; Conservative 12 women, 1 man; Liberal Democrat 7 women, 1 man; Ulster Unionist 1 woman). The interviews were conducted by Boni Sones, Deborah McGurran, Eva Simmons, Linda Fairbrother and Angela Lawrence as part of the research for the book 'Women in Parliament : the new Suffragettes' by Boni Sones, with Margaret Moran and Joni Lovenduski, London, 2005, and for the BBC Radio 4 broadcast 'A monstrous regiment', 10 Sept. 2005. Interviews were conducted on the basis of a list of standard questions (seen by interviewees beforehand), with further ad hoc discussion in certain cases. Also included is a CD-R recording of the BBC broadcast 'A monstrous regiment'.

Documentation: correspondence with donor, documents on conduct of the project

Product copyright: BL (content copyright); recording copyright retained by donor

Access restrictions: Private research only. For publication or broadcasting of this material refer to curator.

Copy note: Playback CD-R dubbings of mini-discs also supplied with the donation.

Acquisition date: 2005-08-20

Terms of deposit: gift

Holdings**PRODUCT Copies Material Location**

C1182

1 Collection description Store

The London School of Economics: 2007 to 2014 (approx 350 interviews)

- SONES - The Boni Sones Archive of Women's Parliamentary Radio and Parliamentary Radio broadcasts - <https://archives.lse.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=SONES&pos=1>

Discrete Collections	Politics, economics and social science collections
Title	The Boni Sones Archive of Women's Parliamentary Radio and Parliamentary Radio broadcasts
Ref No	<u>SONES</u>
Level	Collection
Date	2004-2011
Extent	1 box; digital files
Admin Biographical History	<p>Women's Parliamentary Radio was founded in 2007, growing out of the publication of 'Women in Parliament: the New Suffragettes' by Boni Sones, Margaret Moran and Professor Joni Lovenduski. In the book women talked about the nature of life in Parliament for women, the difficulties they faced and the achievements they made. After the project Sones et al realised that despite 90 years of women having the vote, only 1 in 5 MPs were female, prompting them to consider how the voice of female MPs could be better heard.</p> <p>Boni Sones, a former political editor for BBC TV and Radio in the Eastern Region, consequently set up Women's Parliamentary Radio as a mechanism of broadcasting audio and video interviews with women MPs of all parties. Taking advantage of the changes to broadcasting law and new internet technologies, Women's Parliamentary Radio pioneered the first "as live" online broadcasts. Broadcasting as radio, rather than as TV or film, also ensured that Sones and her colleagues could</p>

	<p>record all over Westminster without requiring formal permission. Since 2007 over 350 interviews and 30 documentaries have been broadcast, all with the stated aim of being "the Woman's Hour of Westminster, reporting fairly and accurately on policy issues of concern to women and their families".</p> <p>Other people who collaborated on the WPR project include journalists Jackie Ashley, Deborah McGurran and Linda Fairbrother, and MPs Gisela Stuart, Barbara Keeley, Caroline Spelman, Eleanor Laing, Penny Mordaunt, Baroness Susan Kramer, Jo Swinson and Anastasia de Waal.</p>
Description	<p>Archive of Women's Parliamentary Radio, an online broadcast service run by Boni Sones. Contains audio files of interviews with female MPs, and related administrative files (digital and paper). Also recent material from parliamentaryradio.com, also run by Sones, and various other works produced by Sones.</p>
Related Material	<p>The British Library houses the "Harman Shephard" collection of 82 interviews conducted by Sones.</p>
Access Status	<p>Closed</p>
Copyright Type	<p>Copyright is held by the depositor</p>

The History of Parliament Trust 2015 to 2017

(approx 115 interviews now to be housed and publicly available for the first time at the Churchill Political Archives.)

<https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/news/womens-parliamentary-radio-archive-deposited-history-parliament>

History of Parliament:

[Home](#)

Women's Parliamentary Radio archive deposited at the History of Parliament

The History of Parliament is pleased to be the repository of the archived interviews collected by Boni Sones, Jackie Ashley and others for Boni's [Women's Parliamentary Radio](#), as well as other interviews collected by Boni for projects including a series of interviews around the general elections of both 2015 and 2017 in Cambridge. They include many with women MPs leaving Parliament in 2015, who talk about the challenges they faced in establishing themselves as strong and independent voices in Parliament, and with MPs from all sides on moves towards equality within politics. The election interviews provide a comprehensive picture of roles and activities in an election, from the candidates to the canvassers to the election administrators.

www.parliamentaryradio.com has collaborated with Dame Caroline Spelman, Barbara Keeley MP, Jo Swinson MP and former MP Gisela Stuart and journalists Deborah McGurran and Linda Fairbrother and others to create this archive. The History of Parliament has agreed to become the repository of the archive because the interviews very well complement our own interviews, carried out for our [oral history project](#) in partnership with the British Library. We are delighted to have this important collection alongside our own.

The archive may be accessed at the History of Parliament by arrangement with us - please contact Sammy Sturgess at [ssturgess@histparl.ac.uk](mailto:ssurgess@histparl.ac.uk). No material may be published without the prior permission of both the copyright holder and the History. All applications for copying and publication must be made to Boni Sones in the first instance.

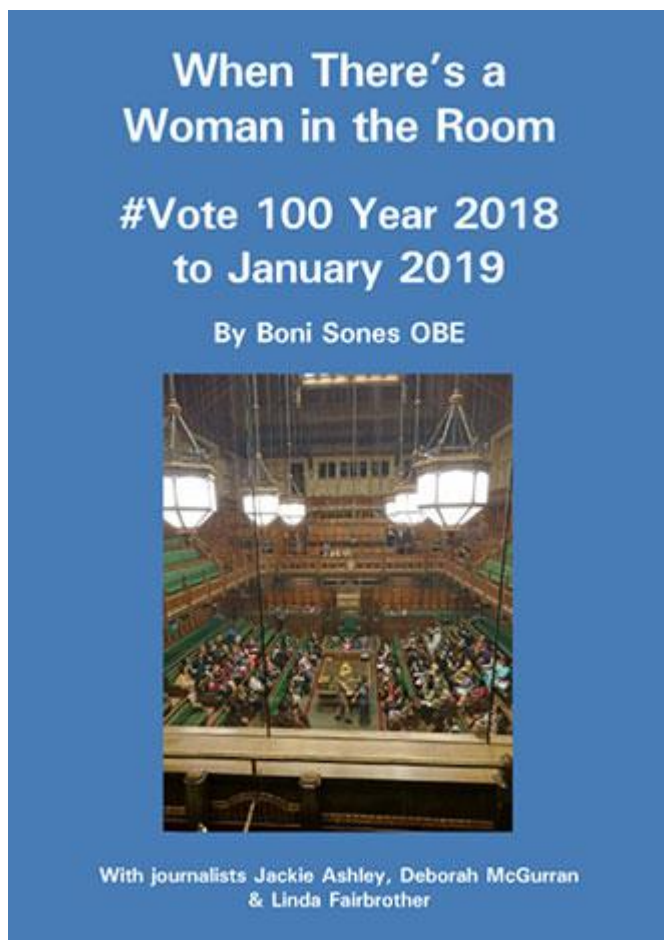
For more on our oral history project and to listen to clips from our interviews, see the project's [Research Pages](#).

The Churchill Archives, University of Cambridge approx. (approx. 110 interviews).

Churchill: <https://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/news/2020/jul/13/interviews-boni-sones/>.

Interviews with Boni Sones OBE in the Centenary Year of Women's Suffrage

13th July 2020 in Archives Centre



A focus on MPs who champion public policy reforms in Westminster

One of our Archives Assistants has been cataloguing audio podcasts which make up a new collection: [SOBA](#). The collection includes recordings made predominately by journalist and broadcaster Boni Sones for [Women's Parliamentary Radio](#), interviews were also conducted

by Jackie Ashley and co-produced by Deborah McGurran. Sones speaks with a range of MPs, academics, journalists and others. The first set of interviews, 76 in total, focus heavily on the centenary of women's suffrage and were recorded from 2017 to 2019. The interviews cover a range of issues including Brexit, Theresa May's government, issues of child welfare, the economy, green issues and most importantly, issues concerning women in Parliament. Sones hears from female MPs who continually note that issues that concern women specifically have for too long been left in the periphery of Parliamentary focus. Indeed, many of the podcasts cover the progress, or lack of, made in the last 100 years. The second set of interviews [SOBA 2] were conducted throughout 2019 and cover a turbulent time in British politics. Sones and Jackie Ashley hear from female and rebel MPs and academics to give a 'side-ways' look at events week-by-week in Westminster. A key theme of the interviews in both SOBA 1 and 2, is the concern that debates focusing on the European Union have distracted from key issues across the country concerning health, education, equality, and infrastructure and voting. These interviews present a unique opportunity to hear from MPs outside of the House of Commons as they discuss about issues that concern themselves personally or those that affect their constituents closely.

Cataloguing audio files presents different challenges to cataloguing paper or born digital documents. At a basic level, the metadata (data about data) is completely different – it is a great help to researchers to have the length, location, and other contextual information to understand what they are listening to. It presents a balancing act between capturing enough information for researchers to understand the crux of the recording and simply transcribing the entire interview. This was a challenge one of our Archives Assistants, Tom, took on during the lockdown period whilst we were working from home. Cataloguing digital material was something a lot of the Archives Centre team took on during this time as it does not require access to the archives centre itself. It was a great pleasure to be able to catalogue this material. Not only do these recordings offer a fascinating glimpse into what MPs were predicting would happen throughout this period in regards to Brexit and the role of Parliament, but they offer a succinct, detailed summary of where a range of MPs across-party stood on key issues.

Many of Sones' interviews discuss the celebration of the centenary of female suffrage in 2018. One of the first recordings in the collection is a reading from Elizabeth Crawford

[SOBA 1/2], in which she reads from her book, 'Enterprising Women: The Garretts and their Circle', the book tells the story of the Garrett family and involved themselves in politics. Crawford is looking to recreate the lives of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, Emily Davies and Millicent Fawcett as they moulded themselves within a male dominated society.

The interviews give us an interesting insight into how Parliament celebrated the centenary, whilst we cannot see what Parliament put in place, we are guided by MPs alongside Sones as they tour the various displays. During SOBA 1/9, we hear from Dr Lisa Cameron MP and Jo Swinson MP, as they look at five important tributes to the suffragettes. During the tour of Central Lobby, they discuss life as a female MP, with Swinson contributing that there is a need for a coherent policy regarding maternity leave in politics to ensure more women consider it as a career. At one point, Sones walks them into the broom cupboard where Emily Wilding Davison hid during the 1911 Census to enable her to record her address as the House of Commons. On International Women's Day 2018, Mother of the House, Harriet Harman MP gave a speech to the Works of Art Committee – this is recorded by Sones. As a longtime member of the House, Harman is able to offer worthwhile hindsight on what it was like entering the House of Commons in 1982. She speaks about feeling out of place, especially in a maternity dress. Harman reflects on being told that economics and foreign policy, not domestic violence and women, were the important parts of the political agenda. Harman held a Q&A session after her speech, when asked about getting more women and black, asian, minority ethnic MPs into Westminster she responds: *"What are we training them for, to become Winston Churchill in the Darkest Hour!"* noting the strange atmosphere Westminster represents for new MPs and making the important distinction, that this is not about doing different groups of people 'a favour', it is a necessity that Parliament is representative. This is echoed in an interview with Rachel Reeves MP, Reeves was made Shadow Secretary for Work and Pensions in 2013 but did not return to the role post-maternity leave. She tells Jackie Ashley that *'it is a bit of a club being in Westminster and women haven't always fitted in'*.

At one point, Harman mentions all women shortlists (AWS), we hear from Angela Eagle MP, Catherine Smart, Clare King (Labour candidate in Cambridge), and local councilors Jerri Bird and Carla McQueen in Cambridge, Nicky Massey and Katie Thornburrow on the topic of shortlists. McQueen in particular recognizes the criticism she has received for being selected

from an all-women shortlist. AWS is a practice that looks to increase the proportion of female MPs, currently only Labour and Liberal Democrats have this in place. Harman discusses this in as Neil Kinnock was a strong support of the idea. A key theme of the discussions is that whilst it is important to get more female MPs into the House of Commons, the processes need to be in place to ensure a level playing field once they arrive. Interviewees discuss everything from the works of art in the House being predominately male, to creating and opening a nursery in the Houses of Parliament, and maternity and paternity leave.

A strength of this collection of interviews, is that Sones hears from MPs of all parties and sides, across different topics and issues that concern a range of people. The interviews offer a unique perspective on Brexit and the different experiences that female MPs have had in the House of Commons. As well as celebrating the centenary of women's suffrage, Sones provides a space for MPs to discuss issues that are often away from the spotlight. Jo Swinson speaks passionately about Proxy Voting, she made history by taking her 11 week old son Gabriel into the House of Commons and has previously spoken about the difficulties of feeding your babies whilst working in Parliament. Sones also covered the 'WASPI Women' as she covered a march from Hyde Park to Westminster. The recording hears from two women about the march to protest pension age increases for 3.5 million women.

In all, these interviews present an interesting perspective of this period, allowing MPs to discuss issues close to them. Hearing predictions and forecasts from MPs and commentators on Brexit, Party leadership and the economy tells us that contemporary politics is both unpredictable and uneasy. Indeed, across the two years these interviews cover, political allegiances, commitments and opinions change drastically and there is a shift in the priorities of MPs. This is all expanded upon in these recordings.

If you have any questions please email archives@chu.cam.ac.uk.

Our four photographs of women in parliament taken in 2009

by Kieran Doherty taken at 90 Years of Women and the Vote in 2009 and they can be found in the parliamentary art collection party by party.

Lib Dem: https://heritagecollections.parliament.uk/collections/getrecord/HOP_WOA_6928

Labour: https://heritagecollections.parliament.uk/collections/getrecord/HOP_WOA_6929

Conservative:

https://heritagecollections.parliament.uk/collections/getrecord/HOP_WOA_6930

Clare Short: https://heritagecollections.parliament.uk/collections/getrecord/HOP_WOA_6931

https://heritagecollections.parliament.uk/collections/getrecord/HOP_WOA_6930

Books

All our four books on women in parliament can be found in the National Libraries of Britain: The British Library, the Bodleian Library Oxford University, The Cambridge University Library, National Library of Scotland, National Library of Wales and Trinity College Dublin.

<http://bonisonesproductions.com/books.html> (published by Boni Sones)

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Women-Parliament-Suffragettes-Boni-Sones/dp/1842751409>

(published by Methuen)

End.