

www.parliamentaryradio.com Report to Advisory Board

November 2019 to November 2020

Dear Supporters,

Short update about our work during the #covid19 pandemic and our achievements.

The 2020 #Covid pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns have given the www.parliamentaryradio.com team time away physically from Westminster and we have used this to continue the cataloguing of our interviews with the archive world.

We continue to tweet regularly about British politics across party to highlight the work of women MPs @bonisones2.

All the interviews we have conducted as a team over 15 years are now housed in one of four national audio archives at the British Library, The LSE, the History of Parliament Trust and now the Churchill Archive Centre, University of Cambridge, too.

The Churchill Archive Centre accepted all of our 80 podcast interviews conducted throughout 2018 as part of #Vote100 year. Thanks to Dr Allen Packwood, Director and his team. <https://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/db/node.xsp?id=EAD%2FGBR%2F0014%2FSOBA>. A further 27 podcasts with women MPs have now been deposited with the Churchill Archive Centre covering April 2019 to November 2019 when the General Election was called. These cover a turbulent time in British politics. You can read about these in last years' annual report.

The audio archive at the History of Parliament Trust houses all our podcast interviews from May 2014 to Jan 2018. Thanks to Dr Paul Seward the Director. <http://historyofparliamentonline.org>.

Our fourth book on women MPs charting our 70 plus interviews in #Vote100 year was published in February 2019. These include all our #Vote100 documentaries. You can read more about it on our books page. <http://www.bonisonesproductions.com/books.html>

It follows on from our Third book: "When There's A Woman in The Room - Part 2" which was first published in April 2017 and updated in March 2018. <http://www.bonisonesproductions.com/books.html>

All our books 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.

The Churchill Archive, University of Cambridge, used the #covid lockdown to fully catalogue and list all our podcasts and I was delighted when it tweeted about this work publicly. Thanks to all.

@ChuArchives “The full catalogue of audio recordings of interviews conducted by @bonisones2 and held by us here: www.archivesearch.lib.cam.ac.uk/repositories/9/resources/1846. The interviews were conducted during the Centenary Year of Women in Parliament (2018) and throughout 2019 with Female MPs, Rebel MPs and Academics.”

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Lucy Cavendish College, University of Cambridge jumped at the opportunity of taking approx. 75 of our political books and publications we had used to conduct our research and writings over the years and will be naming a library shelf in honour. It has also taken some of our important historic personal papers.

@LucyCavColl wrote to thank us saying: “This collection will provide our students with incredibly useful resources providing an opportunity to enrich students’ learning, ensuring they can develop a fuller understanding and appreciation of the world at Westminster. We look forward to including a special bookplate in these works so that readers can appreciate your close links with the college and the histories covered in the collection.” Tom Hawker-Dawson, Deputy Development Director.

When #Covid allows we will resume fully our podcast reporting of the work women in Westminster do across party.

We keep copyright to all our work, and do not accept sponsorship or donations. We do all the research, production, journalism and post production technician work ourselves therefore have minimal costs.

Thanks to all our supporters and advisory board members over the years. We’ve quietly got on with our work and together we have left a considerable political legacy to historians of the future when researching the work of women MPs in Westminster.

We would still love to have a final interview with Theresa May MP after standing down as the second only female prime minister. She was an early supporter of ours and co-founded W2W with Baroness Ann Jenkin.

Thanks to the team and our journalists Jackie Ashley, Deborah McGurran, and Linda Fairbrother. Thanks to our long standing Advisory Board of MPs, Vicky Ford MP, Conservative, Jo Swinson MP, LD; Dr Lisa Cameron SNP and Sharon Hodgson MP, Labour. And to Rich our web manager.

Our MPs have been good twitter followers and supporters which is all we ask of them.

After leaving parliament Jo Swinson will be standing down from our Board and we have asked Baroness Sal Brinton to take her place.

Boni Sones OBE

Executive Producer, www.parliamentaryradio.com

You can read below the Churchill Archive Blog about our work written in Spring 2020:

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

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.

Tom Wales, Archives Assistant

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