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CMG 1996

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BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

RECOLLECTIONS OF MERRICK BAKER-BATES CMG

RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY MOIRA GOLDSTAUB

25th February 2019 – Moira Goldstaub in conversation with Merrick Baker-Bates about his life in the Diplomatic Corps for the Diplomatic History project.

MG: So, Merrick, you have given me your outline, can you fill in your early life before this character's talk: Frank Ashton Gwatkin?

MB-B: I am a doctor's son. My father was a consultant at the Liverpool Royal Infirmary and various other hospitals in the Liverpool area. I was born outside Liverpool, place called Crosby. When I was a small boy we lived in a large house in Southport in Lancashire. My father used to take me to visit these hospitals where he was surrounded, a bit like James Robertson Justice in those films you may remember, by students in white coats. He would turn up at a patient's bedside, poke the man and say to the students: 'What's wrong with him?'

And, at the end of each ward I would stagger out, loaded by the patients with chocolates, oranges and all sorts of other goodies which I then had to dump in the Sister's Room while we went on to the next ward. I am sure this wouldn't be allowed nowadays. But when we got home my mother was unhappy that I was being stuffed with chocolate and sweets by patients and tried to ban my father from doing that.

We lived in large houses, first in Southport during the war and then in Liverpool, houses which were staffed by a nanny, a chauffeur and one or even two maids. It was a rather Victorian household in a way in the terms of the staffing, and I didn't see my parents very much. We had an upstairs nursery and a downstairs nursery. We had breakfast, sometimes together. My father liked black puddings and pig's trotters and tripe, which he ate at breakfast I remember. Every day the chauffeur would pop in and say: 'Where are we going today, Dr B-B?' My father drove a Rolls Royce left to him by a patient, which today would be unthinkable too. He had at one time a green Rolls Royce – my mother called it the Green Goddess but she didn't really like it because it made her feel sick to ride in it.

I was sent away to a prep school called Charney Hall in Grange over Sands on the edge of the Lake District, which was about two hours' drive from Liverpool at that time. And then in 1949 my parents separated, for reasons which I am never quite sure about. My mother left and took with her my youngest brother, Christopher, and my elder sister Wendy (later known as Erica). I was left with Nigel and Rodney who were younger than me and we lived for a while in this large house outside Liverpool. Then my father sold it and parked us, as it were, on other people, known to him. Effectively, I was a foster child – fostered by somebody who was a friend of my father, also a doctor in Southport, called Kathleen Nicholson-Smith. Unusual in those days to have lady doctors. She graduated in the war years from Manchester University – in about 1943 I think – and was herself at that time a single mother, her husband having left her.

So I was with her; my brothers were parked elsewhere and we spent the school holidays with these people who looked after us. 1949 I remember very well because my birthday party took place at Kathleen Nicholson-Smith's house and she invited various local children there. I think my father was hoping that eventually he would marry her but that never happened. So I spent all my holidays from prep school and then subsequently at Shrewsbury School, where I went after the age of 13 ½, with Auntie Kath as we called her, until the age of 16.

My first Speech Day at Shrewsbury, which was 1954, my father told me he would be coming to take me out because it was the custom for parents to come down and attend Speech Day events at the school. Unfortunately, he didn't do that and I was left behind in the school, virtually the only boy left behind. Subsequently I found out that he had got married on that day (my parents having divorced earlier in the year) to a Miss Hunt who, funnily enough, came from not far from here in Northamptonshire. She was the sister of one of his patients.

My father was much in demand as a diagnostician and not only in the Liverpool area. People would ask him to come to see them as far away as Hereford. I remember he went to see Mrs Bulmer of Bulmer's Cider and various other people of that ilk. He even went as far as the Isle of Wight at one point. He met this person, whom we always called Miss Hunt because we couldn't quite get our heads around the idea of calling her Mrs Baker-Bates 2. Subsequently, in fact, they were divorced, and he married a friend of his second wife. So he had a fairly colourful private life.

The patients were devoted to my father. They thought that the sun and the moon shone out of his face. He was a very good doctor, there is no doubt about that. He had a way with

patients. The students also loved him. Even now, I meet people who say: 'Are you the son of Dr Baker-Bates, the man who used to give those wonderful lectures at Liverpool University?' They remember him. But as a father he was absolutely inadequate by today's standards. He never did anything with us at all except drive us around in a Rolls Royce.

He went from one Rolls to another, and he ended up with a 1938 Phantom III, a huge car, in which he took me and my brother to Scotland in 1952 or thereabouts. I remember that we used all the petrol there was to sell at a garage near the ferry that would take us to on the Isle of Skye. His petrol tank took 50 gallons. I could go on about that but you probably don't want to hear very much more.

So that was my childhood. When I was 18, I left Shrewsbury School where I had studied history particularly. I had started with Classics, Latin and Greek at 'O' Level. Then I gave that up and wanted to concentrate on history, I had always wanted to study History. I was lucky enough to have had brilliant and inspiring teachers, two of whom are still alive in their 90s. They brought me up to standard, getting me an Open History scholarship to Oxford. When I was just 19 I went up to Hertford College.

On my last day at school, my father met me and in the front seat – by this time he had given up Rolls Royces and he was running Jaguars – he had a lady whom I had never met before and was introduced to me as Mrs Mobbs. I had nothing to say to her on that my last day at school. Subsequently he married her, I heard. On our way back to Liverpool he lost his way and stopped to ask somebody for directions. While they were describing the route to take, father pointed me out in the back of the car and said 'Tell my son, he's the clever one'. So the relationship between my father and me was not a particularly happy one, as you have probably gathered.

I didn't see my father for some 10 years after that. He told me he had paid for the school fees and that was the end of his support. On my first day at Shrewsbury he took 5 years' worth of schools fees in cash packed in a suitcase in the back of the car. When we got to the Bursar's office at Shrewsbury School he told me to fetch the suitcase. We then had to count out five years' worth of fees in pound notes, which by today's standards again, would be something probably unacceptable. What had happened, of course, was he had asked some of his private patients to pay him in cash and just stuck that money in the safe.

So Dr. BB was quite an eccentric character whom people remembered very well. He took me round with him as a small boy to meet patients which played a major part I think in the

formation of my character I suppose, for what that is worth. While he was upstairs examining the patient, he would leave me downstairs talking to the wife or the children. So from a very young age I was always talking to strangers and being introduced. One day when we were in the back streets of Liverpool he had a GP with him, because in those days the GPs sometimes used to ask the consultant to come to the house of the patient with them. He left me in the Rolls Royce. So there I was like Little Lord Fauntleroy in the front of this huge car. in the back streets of Liverpool. There were two men nearby digging the road up. They had a little hut where they made their tea and ate lunch. When father came out he threw his attaché case on to the seat beside me and then all of a sudden he jumped out of the car and he said to one of them 'Would you like one of these then?' Pointing to the car. They said laughingly 'Oh, aye'. 'Well if you fill in t' Pools right you can 'ave one' says father. And then he gets back in the car. 'Pair of bloody fools', he said, 'here am I working my backside off and they call me a plutocrat , whereas if I had won it on the Pools to buy the car, they would have said 'good on you''. In Lancashire that is how people talked to each other.

I had an uncle who had a paint factory, Fred Jones, whose distinguished grandson was Robin Butler, later Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service. The factory was in Leyland, Lancashire. I first met Robin, I recall, when I was about 13 and he was at Harrow. He was wearing a boater and bought me a poached egg on toast at a local café. I see him quite regularly nowadays.

I went up to Oxford, in October 1958, with the £100 Open Scholarship. But it became clear at the end of the first term that since my father had declined to pay anything further towards my upkeep or fees of any kind, I wasn't going to be able to survive financially. There was a danger that I would to have to go down from the University. While the scholarship helped, it certainly didn't cover all the fees or living expenses. I was fortunate however, to have a history tutor there, called Felix Markham, who knew a former Professor of Geography, Professor Mason, who was at that time also involved with the Drapers Company. I think he may have been the Master of the Drapers Company in London and he arranged for me, and subsequently for my brother Rodney some years later, to get a scholarship from a fund called the Frank Buttle Trust. Frank Buttle was an Anglican vicar who went around in second-hand clothes and rode bicycles. He invested shrewdly and when he died in about 1953 he left about £3million or so. This Trust was designed to help people from broken families and although you could say my father had plenty of money. Of course he did, he was driving big cars and lived in a large Georgian house in the middle of Liverpool – but we were

undoubtedly a "broken family". He had effectively put me into foster care although after the divorce in 1954 I had to live with a mother whom I barely knew.

My childhood was, then, quite fraught. When I look back on it, I think that being away at boarding school was probably my salvation because the school, Shrewsbury School, was excellent, providing a very high standard of education. I met lots of interesting people and made new friends there. As a result, I wasn't really involved in the turmoil that was going on between my parents, my father's friends, the courts and solicitors. Fortunately for me I didn't have to appear, as my sister did, to give evidence in the divorce case. I think I was considered too young.

I was sent to live with my mother from the summer of 1954. She herself was not a tremendously sympathetic character. There was no real love between us. We got on all right but there was a balancing act for me between my biological mother and Kathleen Nicholson-Smith with whom I had lived for six years and whom I regarded as the nearest approximation to a mother.

In my last year at Oxford my tutor said to me 'What career do you have in mind?' and I said I hadn't really made up my mind yet. He was clearly interested in steering me towards the Civil Service. He mentioned the Home Office first and I said what do they do? And he said 'Oh it's prisons, children and things like that' and I said I was not sure I want that. From being a small boy I had always loved history. I had been given a book called 'The Nursery History of England' when I was about six. It had vivid illustrations of English historical highlights: the Druids, King Alfred and the cakes, the Wars of the Roses and General Wolfe, Wellington and all that stuff. Then I read Marshall's 'Our Empire Story'. I loved it. So that kindled my interest to read history more seriously. I specialised at school and got the scholarship to Oxford I suppose because the past was something that had always fascinated me.

Felix Markham told me that if I didn't want to consider the Home Office, I could think about the Foreign Office. So that was when Frank Ashton Gwatkin and diplomacy came into my life. At Hertford we had a discussion group called the Tyndale Society. Speakers would come down, whether they were politicians, lawyers, industrialists, journalists or whatever, to talk about themes that interested them. Ashton-Gwatkin was one of them. He talked very interestingly about his time as Head (I think it was called) of the International Economic Department of the Foreign Office in the 1930s. Apparently this was the first department set

up in the Foreign Office to deal with international economic affairs. He had met Hitler's finance minister or economics minister Schacht and told us how they had tried to work out some sort of economic agreement between the German and the UK governments. He told me that he and Schacht had met in some hotel, I think it was in Switzerland, where they had decided to write kind of joint paper which would discuss bilateral economic relations. Then Schacht apparently got cold feet about putting things in writing so they decided that what they had scribbled out must be destroyed. Schacht was worried, I suppose, that it might be sound too friendly towards the UK. So they apparently put the paper down the loo in the hotel, set fire to it and resulting flames cracked the bowl of the toilet. They had some explaining to do to the hotel's management.

Ashton-Gwatkin's talk fired me up with the idea that a career in diplomacy would be fun. I didn't know at the time that Frank Ashton-Gwatkin in his early career in the 1920s had been in Japan, which is where I was to go subsequently. So I then asked my tutor, about getting into the Foreign Office: there were two ways, one was to take an academic exam, I think it was called Method One, it was like re-taking a B.A. degree finals all over again. I didn't really want to do that, go back to school, cram and then take it. But Method Two was much more diverse and I opted for that thinking that I ought to have as wide an experience as possible before I took the exam. Felix Markham agreed and recommended postgraduate international experience at the College of Europe in Bruges, where he had connections. .

MG: And where was that, because I have never heard of the College of Europe?

MB-B: The College of Europe was set up in the early 1950s. It was designed to train people who would then join the European Commission, it must have been the late 1950s, and work in the secretariats of the various Common Market institutions. The College was presided over by an extraordinary, quite charismatic, Dutchman called Hendrik Brugmans (1906 - 1997) He spoke wonderful English, perfect French, and German and of course Dutch.. The College, at the time I got there, had been in existence for about six or seven years and each year, called a Promotion, was named after some European figure – Henry the Navigator, de Gasperi, Saint Exupéry etc. We were the Promotion Leibniz and there were about 40 of us from 14 different countries. We, that's to say the Brits of whom there were five, were the representatives of one of the few countries, the Swedes were the same, who were not actually members of the Common Market.

MG: Well that's what I was wondering because we weren't in the Common Market. So were there any tutors and administrative people from the UK, or was it entirely staffed by the Europeans?

MB-B: There was a John Bowle, Professor Bowle (1905-1985). He was a political scientist, the only British person who lectured at the College. We worked in two languages, English and French and John Bowle gave his lectures in English. Other than that, the staff were all Common Market nationals. Some lectured in English but most of them spoke in French and the unspoken idea was to make us all into Federalists – the United States of Europe being the aim. That was the agenda behind it all, in Hendrik Brugman's time anyway. He was an interesting person, prolific author, a convert to Roman Catholicism and what was clear to the Brits and to the Scandinavians, was that among the 40 students who were in the College, there was a division between those who were Protestants and those who were Catholics. Brugmans, as a devout Catholic, used to go to Mass with the French, Belgians and the Italians on Sunday. We Protestants were slightly out in the cold, at least that is what I always felt. But he was a very delightful man, devoted to the 'European Idea'. He had, I believe, been a Minister of Education in a post-war Dutch government so he had some political background himself.

I stayed in Bruges for an academic year. We had all sorts of people that came to talk to us students, academics, journalists and politicians etc. Princess Beatrix was one. She became Queen of the Netherlands. We went on Voyages d' Études by bus for a week at a time. We went studying the coal mining and steel production in the Ruhr. We went to Berlin I remember on May Day and later to Provence. The Berlin Wall had just gone up and we were all very excited about it. At that point my friend and fellow student Ulrich Mohrmann told me that he and some of his friends in West Germany were trying to get more people out of East Berlin. They needed passports and he asked me to lend him mine so that he could use it to get someone across the border. This appealed to me and so I let him have it – an absolutely foolish gesture now I think about it. Whether or not anybody used that passport to get out of East Germany I do not know. It came back to me looking exactly the same, about a month later, just before the Christmas holidays of 1961, at which point we both took the train from Brussels to West Berlin and went to stay with Ulrich's parents for a few days before Christmas. This was a very interesting experience because I had to travel through East Germany and then spent three or four days in West Berlin with Ulrich and his parents. For the homeward journey, they put me on the train in West Berlin. It was empty. We trundled

through in less than three minutes I recall, into East Berlin. No one got out or on. Guards along the platform made sure of that. Then the train went back again into West Berlin, where there was a huge crowd of hundreds of people waiting. They couldn't go to West Germany any other way. So I sat on that train, with thick ice on the windows. It was a very, very cold winter in 1962, and we went through East Germany across the border to West Germany and from there I got home for Christmas. So that was for me a very interesting, formative experience, seeing a little of how Communism actually worked and what was really happening on the ground. But I didn't give my passport away again.

At the College of Europe I had a very enjoyable time. Chrystal Goodacre whom I knew from Oxford days came to see me regularly, later to become my wife. She took the boat and always crossed to Ostend from Dover. Towards the end of my time at the College, I suppose it must have been in the spring of 1962, I still didn't know what I was going to do. I couldn't join the European Commission because we were not members of the Common Market as it was then called. Fortunately for me, a friend from Oxford days, Martin Gordon, was a regular visitor to Brussels where his parents lived. His brother had been at Hertford College, Oxford, with me. He himself was at Oriel College. Martin had been at Harrow with my brother-in-law and others I knew.

Martin's father was a journalist in Brussels. He was a 'stringer', meaning someone who is not on the regular payroll of the newspaper but who reports to them as and when they want, or if he thinks there is a story they might be interested in he sold stories to them.

Martin mentioned that his father, Gavin (known as Gay) needed some help in the office and so I joined him in Brussels. He had an office in the Place des Barricades and he sent copy regularly by telephone to the Daily Telegraph and the Financial Times mainly. But he also wrote for the Jerusalem Post, New York Journal of Commerce, the Statist magazine and various other publications. Some of the articles he let me write, the rest he did himself. The main theme of the journalistic work, was the negotiation between Britain and the Common Market, led by Edward Heath, with a view to the UK joining. So being there in Brussels with Gavin Gordon in this international, highly political, society I met not only people who were involved with negotiating with us, Germans and Frenchmen and so on, but members of the UK delegation which Edward Heath led. One, John Ashton, was a relative by marriage of Chrystal and the Professor of Agriculture at Newcastle University.

That negotiation came to an end, you may remember, in January 1963 with General de Gaulle's veto. We wondered then what was going to happen next. Much of the writing that Gay had been doing was Common Market related, so a chunk of his income was in danger of diminishing, if not disappearing, But I continued because he had a second string to his bow which was a book called 'Eurotariff'. This was a vast directory listing the tariffs on all items in the Brussels Nomenclature of products traded between the countries in the Common Market. The Single Market of today did not exist. If you wanted to sell for example asses and hinnies from Belgium to the Netherlands, you could look them up in this book and see what the tariff was on an ass or a hinny. That was before, of course, all the tariffs were harmonised.

MG: So were they were harmonised when we had the Single Market?

MB-B: Yes, that's right.

MG: That was quite a long time later under Mrs Thatcher was it?

MB-B: They began well before that, they did it before that, yes. Most of the tariff harmonisation went on I recall in the late 1960s.

MG: Was there a customs union then?

MB-B: There was a Benelux customs union, yes. Then there was the Coal and Steel Community and then it grew gradually into the Single Market. So I did Eurotariff as well. You had to look at these published tariffs and correct them as they changed and bring them up to date with other documents, in French and German as well, to make sure you got them right. And to make a bit more money I did some translations at the Agence Europe in Luxembourg and helped them with some translations for their daily news bulletin. So I was was getting experience in all sorts of ways.

MG: And you would be fluent in French presumably?

MB-B: Yes, I could speak French reasonably well.

MG: You had been in Bruges and Brussels but before then, at school, had you done schoolboy French? So you had become very fluent from living there?

MB-B: I could do it from living there, yes. I wasn't brilliant, but I was ok, I could get through because I used to be sent off to interview people for the Journal of Commerce. What happened there was that somebody wanted to advertise, say, their biscuits in the Journal of

Commerce. So the newspaper would take their advertisements and then I would have to write a piece generally supporting the biscuit industry in Belgium, without actually linking it to the advertisement. So I used to visit, say, a biscuit factory where I interviewed people and as a result my French became quite good. I used to come back and write the story and Gavin Gordon would correct it and off it would go to the Journal of Commerce.

He sent me off on another interesting assignment which was to go to Antwerp where there was a court case involving a woman called Madam Vandenput. Madam Vandenput had killed her baby and that fact was not in dispute. My recollection of it was that after hearing all the evidence the Judge would put questions to the jury, the first being 'Did Madam Vandenput murder her baby?' He would put several direct questions to the jury and they had to respond to those. In this case the jury felt very sympathetic towards this woman whose child had been born I recall without arms. So they said no, she didn't murder the baby. It was, I think, the only way the jury could get her off a murder charge. This was a bit of a sensation at the time and we were reporting on this for the News of the World who liked these sort of stories at the weekend.

The News of the World on Friday, probably Friday evening, would ring Gavin Gordon and ask what was going on, any sensations about the Belgian Royal Family, or that sort of thing and he would write pieces for them, mildly titillating stuff. Well Madam Vandenput's case was of course food and drink to the News of the World. It was only later, nobody realised it at the time, that it became known that this deformity in the baby was caused by Thalidomide, a drug used to combat morning sickness among pregnant women. The Sunday Times ran that story a few months later and we realised then what the Antwerp case was all about. So that sort of experience was interesting. I enjoyed doing it.

Then Gavin Gordon had business connections. One was a man, who claimed to have Queen Victoria's sausage recipe. He managed to get money from the Department of Trade and Industry to invest in a factory in Scotland to make sausages according to the recipe. But actually I don't think they ever produced a sausage. There was some criminality involved, I recall. There were quite a lot of shady, colourful, characters around Brussels at the time, one way and another. One was Norman Barrymaine, who had, as he described it, "handled" the Princess Margaret/Captain Peter Townsend affair for the Daily Express. Gavin Gordon introduced him to various people in the Belgian Royal household after Barrymaine told him that he was going to write a piece for the Italian glossy magazine about the Dowager Queen

Elizabeth, wife of the Belgian King Albert I. She was a respected lady whose name was associated with a violin contest. When Barrymaine's piece came out in Italy it was more about how she, as Queen, was alleged to have pushed her husband off a mountain in 1934. The King, who had led Belgium during the First World War, had officially died in a 'climbing accident'. Whether that was true or not I have no idea at all. But Barrymaine was kicked out of Belgium and Gavin Gordon got a lot of stick for introducing him to the King's secretary and various others. So there were colourful things going on, but they were all part of my experience which helped greatly when it came to taking the Foreign Office exam.

MG: When did you finally decide to do that?

MB-B: In early 1963 it must have been. I had already applied to take the exam because I remember that the first part was just after I got married on the 6th April 1963. I had that hanging over me, that I was going to take this exam. We left Brussels after our honeymoon about the end of April '63 I think because I had to take the Civil Service exam and then return to pack up in Brussels and say goodbye to Gavin Gordon and his delightful wife Peggy. Incidentally, during the Common Market talks, I met quite a lot of young British diplomats: Martin Morland, Nicholas Barrington, Reg Hibbert and various other people who were part of the UK delegation. They interested me in the Diplomatic Service as well, I was rubbing shoulders with them in my capacity as a hack. They were doing serious things with the delegation.

So off I went, to take this first exam. I went to stay with a friend of mine from Oxford days living in London called Ian Barnett who was training to be a solicitor. He was doing his articles. We had a mutual acquaintance called Stanley Houghton. Stanley had been at Christ Church College, Oxford, and studied English. He was a flamboyant character who I believe saw himself as a latter day, Oscar Wilde type; wore colourful clothes, made a waistcoat out of the rug in his room, and went around with a lily in his buttonhole and affectations like that. Stanley Houghton was supposed to go with me to the Marylebone Public Baths where we were going to take the exam. I was going to take a taxi there, but I didn't have much money so Stanley had agreed to share a taxi with me. Well he never came. I took the exams which lasted, I think, for two days. The swimming baths themselves were covered with wooden boards and trestle tables, quite a lot of them. There must have been 50-60 people in the room and the invigilator asked if anybody objected to smoking. Someone did: 'No Smoking.' That was a severe blow because I was keen on Gauloises in those days.

I took this written exam which consisted among other things of analysing statistics and writing a one-word essay, as I remember. I think it was about evidence.

I took that exam and went back to Belgium. I had to pack up there, slowly, I was still working a bit for Gavin doing bits of this and that and by then I was married so Chrystal was living with me. She was working at the European School as a teacher, in Brussels. We stayed a bit longer because of that, until her term ended.

Having got through the first written bit of the Civil Service exam, I then had to take various tests during a two-day interview at the Civil Service Commission in London. We had various interviews, psychological and intelligence tests and we had to chair discussion groups. So I did that. It was then that I found out that Stanley Houghton hadn't turned up at the first exam at the Marylebone Public Baths because he had been arrested for forging cheques. He was convicted and locked up. Later he played a part in my life again in various unhappy ways.

Would I be asked to come for final interview? Happily, I was invited to meet the Final Board, headed by, I think, Sir David Scott, a former ambassador. He didn't really take too much part in the interview as I recall. I only found that while the candidates were being interviewed he would be doing a sketch so that the members of the Board would remember the faces of the interviewees. 'That fellow Baker-Bates, you remember the one with the …' and all that sort of thing.

Then we just had to wait and by this time it had come to the end of Chrystal's school term. I was still hanging on with Gavin in Brussels. We must now be talking about June 1963 when a letter arrived from the Foreign Office saying that I had been accepted. So, of course, I was delighted about that. We packed up and came back to England. And that's how my Foreign Office career really started. I had never actually been inside the Foreign Office building. I didn't even really know where the building was because all the exams and interviews had taken place in other buildings and I was not familiar with London. What I did know was quite a lot about diplomatic history because I had studied it when I was at Oxford in various contexts,

MG: So now you are in the Foreign Office. Was it the Foreign and Commonwealth Office then?

MB-B: Just the Foreign Office.

MG: Where did they put you? Which room were you in?

MB-B: Well I didn't know where the entrance to Foreign Office was actually. During our New Entrants course we were never in the building. We were always somewhere else. I didn't penetrate the Foreign Office building itself until about 1966. When I joined I went first to the Personnel Department in Carlton House Terrace where I met Christopher Everett who was a Personnel Officer. He asked me whether I would like to learn a "hard language". So I asked what those languages were. He listed Arabic, Chinese, Amharic – I wasn't quite sure where that was spoken but it turned out to be Ethiopian so I should have known I suppose – Persian, Thai, Russian of course, and Japanese. And really out of the top of my head I said that Japanese sounded quite nice, I don't think I wanted to do Arabic as I had heard it meant going back to school again in Beirut. And as for Chinese, well it sounded all right but the trouble was that you could not travel anywhere easily inside China. You could go to the Great Wall and after seeing that a few times I thought I would be a bit bored. Japan sounded all right. And so Christopher Everett made a note of it.

I remember being particularly, how when I entered this building in Carlton House Terrace for my talk with Christopher, I had to take a lift with two gates. You closed one and then you closed the other to make the lift go up. On the wall of the lift the instructions on what to do in an emergency were written in German. I remember asking Christopher about this and he explained the building used to be the German Embassy before the war. The FO hadn't got round to doing anything about it. I thought to myself what an extraordinary organisation. Here we are in 1963, 18 years after the end of the war and they still hadn't changed the emergency instructions on the lift!

Not long after the interview I got a letter saying that I had been 'selected' as a language student, which was a wonderful way of implying that there had been a competition: but there were no obvious selection procedures. I had just pulled Japanese out of the air. But I was sent round the office to talk to a few people who had been in Japan. One of them explained that the teachers came to your house, you did not have to go to a school. The students spent a month each year with a Japanese family and it was all quite relaxed. So that made me feel more confident about leaping into the dark.

And I then enquired how we were to travel to Japan. It turned out that the 'approved route' was by sea. We were to go the P&O office in Piccadilly and book tickets and say we were on a Foreign Office posting. So we booked on the SS Chusan, a passenger ship leaving

Southampton in the second week of September. I really had very little idea other than what people had told me briefly about the teachers who came to the house, what the language training in Japan amounted to.

3rd, later 2nd Secretary, Tokyo, 1963–68

Chrystal and I had never been out of Europe before. We met the other language students, John and Renny Field, a very nice couple who are still great friends of ours, Derek Bleakley who now lives in Japan himself and is married to a Japanese and Tom Preston who also married a Japanese. The latter two were bachelors at the time. I was told the reason why they sent the married couples to do language studies was because the salary in London was so low that you couldn't afford to live there. They sent married new entrants abroad to have some years having rent paid and saving a bit of money before coming back to London to face the financial music later on.

So off we went on the "Chusan". One of the people we had to look after, it was made clear to us before we left, was a lady called Mrs Montague Ellerton. She was the mother-in-law of Sir Paul Gore-Booth, British High Commissioner in Delhi. Mrs Montague Ellerton's late husband had been a businessman in Japan. We were expected, it was more or less said to us, to look after her on the voyage. So when we stopped at Port Said and Aden we took her with us. She knew a great deal about Japan having lived there many years which was helpful. She got off at what was called in those days Bombay to visit her daughter and son in law in Delhi.

MG: How long was your voyage meant to last? How long does it take to go to Japan by boat?

MB-B: It took six weeks or so and was an amazing experience really. We went to Port Said, to Aden and watched a camel race there, to Bombay where we went and did a bit of tourism, visiting the Dhobi Ghat watching people washing clothes by hitting them with stones and stuff like that. Then we went down to what was then called Ceylon, to Columbo and then across the sea to Penang, south to Singapore, across to Hong Kong where there was cholera. We were only allowed to eat in six restaurants there, so we had to be very careful what we did. We went to one of the floating restaurants in Aberdeen.

In Singapore, I bought an airmail copy of The Times and read an article by their correspondent in Tokyo headlined 'Japan Fashions a New Society'. It began 'Tokyo rebuffs: in the caverns of the world's largest city there is a deafening failure to communicate'. I almost knew it off by heart by the time I got there. The gist of it was gloomy. He described

the Japanese as ‘drooping under their fading courtesies’. I remember phrases from this piece very well. I have still got a copy of in my scrap book. I thought to myself I am not going to fall for that. I am here to learn Japanese and I am going to study with all my heart and try to get into as much as I can of the Japanese mind and society. Tokyo was not going to rebuff us. ! …

I didn’t mention this to anybody else. But I showed Chrystal the article. And on we went. That was the first opinion I had heard about Japan: that it was impossible for foreigners and Japanese to get to know each other properly. Foreigners were never invited into Japanese houses because their houses were too small and mean, and they didn’t like foreigners to see the difficulties they were living under day to day.

We got to Hong Kong and finally ended up in Yokohama after six weeks. On arrival all passengers were asked where they had eaten in Hong Kong. Someone foolishly mentioned a restaurant which was not on the approved list. So there was a tremendous kerfuffle and quite a lot of people had to have a stool test to make sure that they weren’t infected with cholera, which delayed everybody’s disembarkation for some hours.

We were met by the friendly Adrian Hohler who was a language student in his final year (it was a two-year course) . He took us to the Sanbancho Hotel in pouring rain, across bumpy roads. There was a typhoon in the area. By this time, it was about October 25th, the typhoon season in Japan. The Sanbancho Hotel was a great disappointment. I had thought that there would be an oriental atmosphere about it, cherry blossom and people wearing kimono and all that sort of stuff so the Hotel would be something quite unusual. But it wasn’t. The Hotel was a boring American style antiseptic motel with iced water at every meal. I had never had iced water on the table before at breakfast. And we had tasteless white bread toast and jam and some sort of eggs. The Sanbancho was the Embassy’s preferred and conveniently placed hotel. It was painless, perfectly ok but also faceless. . However, it was only about five minutes’ walk from the Embassy. The British Embassy itself was a concrete Queen Anne complex built after the earthquake of 1923, very formidable looking houses. A tram passed in front of the gates. The Imperial Palace’s Moat was opposite. So as not to make a noise as it went past the Embassy, the tram crossed the road against the traffic. The power of Britannia was such. I can see the conductor leaning out, putting his hand out to stop the traffic as this tram crossed the road and went back again. That manoeuvre was stopped about

the third week we were there because they took up the lines and all the trams were gradually abolished I think soon afterwards.

There were no detailed maps of the Tokyo area that we could read or guides about how to get anywhere: but we had our car. We had ordered a Ford Cortina which had come by sea separately and was waiting for us. .Rather embarrassingly, I thought, it was painted in 'ambassador blue'. Fortunately for us as the Japanese drive on the same side as the UK: it was slightly easier to hit the Tokyo roads. But we didn't know where we were going at all. On the first public holiday we decided we would explore a bit. How we didn't get lost to this day I have no idea, because we had no language, we had no maps and we couldn't read most of the signs. Everything was in Japanese. But off we went. I looked at the sea and said 'Well we have got to keep the sea on our right' as we drove around, I thought 'gosh this is a dismal looking place'. We managed to escape from that ok and got back to the Hotel. I think it was about the time of the assassination of President Kennedy, because I can remember coming back to the Hotel one day and seeing headlines in the English language local papers.

After we had been there, a few days, now at the beginning of November I think, the language teacher turned up at the Hotel. We were told his name was Mr Nakasato (Nakasato-san) and we met in the hotel bedroom. Mr Nakasato was serious, but quite relaxed. He was a man of about 45. He had been a soldier in the Second World War. He had also been a prisoner of war in Australia for part of the time. His English was fine but he only spoke it once to me, opening his acquaintance with me by saying 'My name is Mr Nakasato'. So I said "oh, hello, I'm Merrick Baker-Bates." He replied 'Watakushi wa Nakasato desu. Anata no namae wa nan desu ka?'

Me: 'Sorry I didn't quite catch ...'

Nakasato: 'No! No more English. Watkushi wa Nakasato desu. Anata no namae wa nan desu ka?'

After what seemed ten agonising minutes I was able to say 'Watakushi wa Baker-Bates desu', thus introducing myself. He said 'yoroshii' (good) and then he moved on to some other sentence and, again, agony while I worked out what he was actually saying to me in Japanese and then responded using his words. That is how we started our conversation. It was very hard work which went on for three hours. The lessons were all that long at the beginning, and after about a week or two of this I began to think 'Can I do this?' I mean this was completely different from any other language I had ever heard. Japanese is a very

complicated language. But gradually I began to get the idea of it. We also had to start reading and writing at the same time. And then absorb kanji (Chinese characters used by the Japanese). It was a really serious intellectual challenge. I was stretched to the absolute limit because it was so different. I hadn't realised how difficult it was going to be at the beginning.

And then I realised that being in the Sanbancho Hotel was doing me no good. I had to get out of there and live outside. We knew we were going to because the Embassy was looking for a place for us to live. Then somebody from the Diplomatic Wireless Service went home and we moved into their rented house. It was in the centre of Tokyo, about ten minutes by car from the Embassy. As we went around I began to realise that living in the centre of Tokyo was not going to be much use either because either people were living in tiny houses, small flats or very swanky houses. Either way they weren't going to be interested in a 23-year-old English Japanese language student and his wife. However, we moved in to this DWS house. Christmas Eve we felt– our first earthquake. I darted out into the garden, Chrystal laughed at me and said it was only an earthquake, nothing very serious. But it felt quite strong.

So that was our beginning. The house was ramshackle and cost a fortune in rent. I thought 'I don't want this place at all', so we started to work on the Head of Chancery to allow us to move somewhere else. From a Japan Times advert, we found a house, a Japanese-style house in the suburbs, a place called Shimouma. It was owned by a German who had slightly westernised it with a couple of chairs and I think he had a bed. But the floor was tatami mats, the straw mats: you take your shoes off and walk on these mats. The house was very small but it was at least Japanese-style and I knew that was what I wanted. There was no sewerage, no flush loo or anything like that. It was quite primitive in that sense. And we had a wonderful woman (I don't know where we got her from,) called Goto-san who came to do some washing for us and a bit of cleaning. After a while Goto-san decided that she didn't want to wash our clothes any more and gave us a washing machine. So we had a washing machine courtesy of our ex-washerwoman, which lasted all the time we were there – amazing. We were probably the only foreigners in Shimouma area. Then the question was how were to get to know the neighbours, as by this time I was able to say some coherent sentences in Japanese?

I should go back a bit. Because when we were in the first house, the ramshackle one, it was right in the centre near a narrow and colourful shopping street. I said to Nakasato-san, that I needed to meet Japanese people and talk Japanese with them, even if I only knew half a

dozen sentences. We had incidentally three different teachers: Nakasato-san, Mrs Nishi, an old-fashioned beautiful old lady wearing a kimono who had just one tooth in her lower jaw sticking up. She eventually got false teeth. Her father, General Minami, had been I think Governor of Korea before the war. A rather high-born Japanese lady, then, and she had obviously fallen on quite hard times. I think after the war her father had probably been purged by the Occupation authorities as being military.

So she was teaching Japanese. Her spoken Japanese was clear, she wrote beautifully and she was an interesting woman in many ways. And so was Nakasato-san, a brilliant teacher, I mean a really hard driver. My goodness me, he made us work. And so we were in this ramshackle house, these teachers were coming and Nakasato-san said to me 'Well you can do one of two things. You can go and learn how to play mah-jong – go to a mah-jong parlour.' 'But that's going to take a bit of time.' 'And then you could go to one of the public bath houses and see whom you can meet'. So, with some trepidation, I said, what do you do? He told me to take a little plastic bowl and a tenugui, which is a little cloth, with your own soap. The price of the bath was regulated by the Government. It was 23 yen a dip because most people didn't have baths. I had noticed this, people going to these bath houses. So I decided to take the plunge.

I went into this local bath house and I didn't realise how hot the water was. The form was to wash outside the bathtub so I entered this room. There was the bath for men on the right, women on the left and in between us a wooden wall and sitting high above was an elderly crone who took the money. In I go and then I watched what other people were doing and I put my clothes in a locker with a key which I put on an elastic band around my wrist. Then I had my tenugui, and took that in with the soap. I watched people sitting around in this very large room, with taps around the walls and little stools for the bather to sit on. Following what others did, I spread the tenugui on my thigh, put plenty of soap on it and gave myself a good wash all over. Then, taking the small bowl, I spooned hot water from the tap on the wall all over myself, plenty of it so my body got accustomed to the water temperature and the soap all washed away. Then I got in to the bath – clean. No soap on my body. It felt boiling hot about 37 degrees centigrade or something. As I slid into the water alongside a whole lot of other naked bodies, it felt like a pan scrubber was going down my back.

I sat in there with the tenugui folded on top of my head, as others did, to keep it clean and away from the water …. And then after a bit you suddenly greet the person next door. By this time your pulse is racing, at least mine was.

MG: You shouldn't be in there for very long.

MB-B: No. Well you get used to it. Old men are in there mostly because their hearts, I suppose, are more accustomed to it. You have got to be careful. But in to the bath room, into the pools skipped a whole lot of younger people and one of them Ryuichi Yano who just talked to me in Japanese in a perfectly normal way. He was a guy of about my age, about 21. I was 23. Yano-san was a student at the university and I got to know him. His father had what we would call an ironmonger's shop, I suppose, selling pots and pans and ropes, buckets etc. and bits and pieces like that in the street right where this bath house was located. As we got to know each other, he took me out in his little Mazda car. He used to come to the house, and he became a very close contact of Chrystal and me. We never spoke a word of English together and my Japanese took off straight away, thanks to him. It was just amazing how my confidence grew. At last, I realised I was going to be able to do it.

Yano-san introduced me to his friends and then we were in and out of people's houses and I realised that Tokyo was not going to rebuff me. That if you went out to look for it, you could find the real Japan. Subsequently I became a go-between in his marriage, but that's another story. Anyway he took us to Lake Hakone and the sights around Tokyo and so on, always talking Japanese. He had friends who came and they all talked Japanese. They were just interested to talk to us and meet foreigners and find out what we were like, blundering away in our Japanese, but gradually getting there.

MG: Was your wife Chrystal learning Japanese as well?

MB-B: Oh yes she was, she was a very good learner

MG: Was she a linguist?

MB-B: Well she had been confident in French when we were in Brussels and she picked it up very quickly, she has got a very good ear. She didn't do so much of the reading but the spoken: oh yes, she could speak it all right. This was a huge benefit to me later on because most wives in the Embassy did not speak Japanese and Japanese ladies had little English, which made social occasions quite difficult. If a Japanese man turned up with his wife and she didn't speak English it was going to be difficult so you needed Japanese-speaking wives.

Chrystal was one of the first seriously competent Japanese-speaking wives. She passed two Civil Service Japanese exams and was an enormous help to me. She could make people relax and she could laugh at herself. The pair of us had teachers, paid by the Embassy. Chrystal, she had lessons but not as many as me. We began to enjoy it. Then we realised that there we were in the middle of Tokyo, Akasaka the place was called, where Yano had his little shop. But we needed to get away from there because it was either apartments, not high rise but apartments, and it wasn't really a neighbourhood that we could get to know. We just met Yano-san because I had been sitting in the bath and he had the shop. But the other neighbours we didn't really know. Next door to us was a well known Kabuki actor, well we weren't going to be in touch with him very much. So we then looked for another house and that's how we went out to Shimouma, having seen the advertisement in the Japan Times.

When we got to this suburb, which wasn't very far out, about another 20 minutes by car I suppose, then we got into the neighbourhood and we really got to know people. One such was Hisao Tamada, whose mother ran a students' hostel. She had quite a big house where seven or eight students rented rooms. He became a great friend. We rented his garage. Then he did something which was hugely helpful to us – introduced the neighbours. We went out with him, we took him out. He introduced us to the family living opposite and so on and we really got to know the neighbourhood always using Japanese. We are talking now about the end of my first year, September 1964. Hisao taught me mah-jong. I don't know if you know this game, it's originally a Chinese game. I loved it and sometimes played with Hisao and some of the students all night.

Then we decided that we would look for somewhere to go to at the weekend. One of the students whom we met, and I am still in touch with him, called Hiroyuki Enomoto said his mother knew somebody in a village by Lake Yamanaka who had a house to rent and asked would we like to rent it for weekends? Remember there was no air conditioning around at that time in Tokyo and the Japanese summer is stinking hot and very humid. So going to the mountains in summer was a good move. But it was winter when we drove 70 miles in three hours over crowded, often unpaved, roads to see this house. By British standards, it was just a largish garden shack, I mean it was nothing. We stayed there the first night. The temperature was minus 17 centigrade, it was very, very cold, but we had prepared for this. We had futons, because we used to sleep in the house in Tokyo, we always slept on futons on the floor and rolled them up and put them in the cupboards. We lived Japanese-style in Shimouma.

We went there in about February 1964 to meet the landlord, a wonderful old boy who was drunk most of the time, a carpenter by trade. He introduced us to a neighbour whose his sons were school boys and he had a daughter. The neighbour, Osada-san, was the caretaker of a weekend house owned by Chiyoda, a big construction and chemical engineering company. They had this large house by the lake with modern facilities. Ours was a little shack next door, which still exists because I saw it two years ago (2016) when I was there. We got very friendly with them so we were gradually getting ourselves involved with all sorts of people. My life outside the Embassy circles was effectively Japanese, which is what I wanted to do after I first saw that article in the Times. Our spoken Japanese improved by leaps and bounds.

MG: When you were having these lessons, you say it was about two years the course, were you going in to the Embassy and performing roles at the same time, or were you just full time learning the language?

MB-B: It was, in principle, full-time learning the language except that we had certain representational duties. One was that when the Queen's Messenger brought the diplomatic bags, we were on duty occasionally and we had to open up the strong room. Then we were invited by the Ambassador to various cocktail receptions. It wasn't an invitation so much as a 'royal command'. There were a few farcical incidents involving such parties because I had never really been to anything like that before. Sir Francis Rundall was the Ambassador, a lovely man. He and his wife had arrived in Japan very recently (September 1963). He wasn't a Japanese speaker but he was very helpful to me later on and he included us in, I think it was a reception for the British delegation at an international Ports and Harbours conference. We went into the Residence for the first time, hand in hand. And I can hear Lady Rundall's voice down the corridor after she had greeted us – 'Not together!' Merrick to the left in the Drawing Room, Chrystal in the Ball Room. Get on with it!

We had to mingle with the guest on our owns. So we learnt rather rapidly about diplomatic receptions where we were often asked to act a greeters and ushers at the front door. We had one or two other irregular duties at the Embassy as such, checking accounts and weeding out old files. But the language study in all its forms was the principal task.

Sir Francis Rundall was known as Tony Rundall to his friends but to us he was always the Ambassador of course, or HE. He had a rule that nobody, but nobody, was to be introduced to him at an Embassy reception without having their name bawled out loud and clear. So I

used to intercept people to ask their names. One Japanese man came in who looked a bit worried so I went up to him as pleasantly as I could and said ‘Come this way please. Could I have your name sir,’ and after asking him twice he told me it was Watanabe. So I called out ‘Mr Watanabe’, in a loud voice. He shook hands with the Ambassador and Lady Rundall, and the Foreign Secretary – that was Rab Butler – he met Mrs Butler, and he was then introduced to the Counsellors waiting to field him. They passed him to the First Secretaries and eventually he found his way to the bar, where somebody asked what he would you like to drink – wine, gin & tonic, whiskey, juice or whatever. And the fellow said ‘No’ or words to this effect I gathered later – ‘No thanks, I am the Foreign Minister’s chauffeur and I have come to collect my car number’! So we had made an embarrassing cock-up with that.

This sort of misunderstanding happened quite regularly. Those receptions were quite a new experience. Another one, held in a hotel, which was completely farcical was … I can’t remember quite when it was, but it was another of those big international conferences where there was a British delegation. We went to represent the Ambassador and the organisers had been told in advance that Mr and Mrs Baker-Bates would be coming to represent his Excellency, because his Excellency had a prior engagement. So when we get there and for some reason which I never fathomed – and I would love somebody to tell me why this is – when you are a guest of honour at a reception in Japan, you are given a large white paper chrysanthemum on which your name is pinned to the bottom and this is attached to a plastic paper knife with a magnifying glass at the end. The paper knife fits in to the top pocket of your suit very neatly. So you have got your name and white chrysanthemum displayed prominently on a card also indicating your country – everybody had their country indicated. Chrystal and I went to this party, she was given one that was pinned separately on her dress, and we went through the evening ok, we met a few people, everybody was smiling and it all went off very well. When we got home I was absolutely knackered. I took my badge off and looked at it for the first time. It said ‘Mr Baker-Kingdom, United Bates!’ Wonderfully ridiculous.

So we were learning rapidly some aspects of diplomacy!

MG: This is ’64 by this time?

MB-B: We had arrived in October 1963 so by this time we were in early summer of ‘64. The Head of Chancery who was Hugh Cortazzi (1924-2018). He was a very knowledgeable Japanese scholar and a great influence on me. I had respect for him. He was about 40 in

1964 I suppose. I was 23. Hugh had arranged for language students to spend a month away with a Japanese family because he realised that quite a lot us weren't having enough day to day contact with the Japanese whereas, dare I say it, I had managed largely to get away from western style living and moved in to the suburbs and just buried myself in local society. Lady Rundall came to see us at our little house, a visitation that we viewed with some trepidation. I can remember her saying 'I always drink tea, I never eat it'. Then she turned up at our house, I think she was a bit surprised – what are Merrick and Chrystal doing in this house, tatami mats and sleeping on the floor and all this sort of stuff? But she didn't make any comment about it.

I had arranged my month with a Japanese family for August 1964. I got to know the family because the son had originally been introduced to me, I think by someone in the Japan-British Society, as wanting English conversation. I had to explain that I couldn't do that because I was learning Japanese. So we forgot about the English lessons. His mother, a lively widow, invited me to stay with them. They had a very beautiful unusually large Japanese style house in the suburbs of Tokyo. The August weather was very hot and very sticky. In those days when you were in the house, you didn't have any shoes or socks on of course, so you were barefoot and you just wore a vest, a string vest or cotton vest, plus mid-calf length shorts called suteteko, which were longish cotton drawers. So you had your underpants on but on top were these almost ¾ length cotton drawers which were designed to absorb sweat as you sat cross legged on the floor. So we used to sit there watching TV. I can remember seeing on tv the first trip of the so called Shinkansen, the Bullet Train. It went from Tokyo to Osaka. The weather was humid and sweat dripped off me. You had to fan yourself because although there were electric fans as well, you needed both sitting there in these suteteko.

Even in this beautiful house there was no proper sewerage.

MG: What did you do? Was there a bucket or an earth closet or what?

MB-B: There was a long drop as it were, like they have on the continent or in Turkey and places like that and you just stand, squat and do your thing. And then somebody would come along with a lorry and long tube with a tennis ball on the end and suck it once a week and you paid them. The guy came to us in Shimouma and did that. But here the 'kumitoriya' as he was known, carried wooden buckets on his shoulders for the 'night soil'.

MG: So there was just kind of a hole in the ground?

MB-B: Yes a hole in the ground, that's all there was, and at Yamanaka you created your own, what do you call that … the farmer threw a piece of meat into it or something and that created some sort of biological process**.**

MG: An anaerobic type of thing?

MB-B: Yes that type of thing because they didn't have anybody to suck them out in the country that was only in the city. In the county it was done by anaerobic action, he put something in there.

MG: Then you get all these bacteria to break it down.

MB-B: Yes so that was how it worked.

MG: Well when did sanitation arrive in Japan, do you know?

MB-B: Well, by the time we left in 1967/68 it was still very uncommon in Tokyo suburbs. By the time I came back in '76 they had made big strides, I think most people in the centre of Tokyo probably had sewerage by that time, flush loos and things. And now, of course, it is virtually universal.

MG: But they had electricity – you were watching TV and so on?

MB-B: Oh, they had electricity, yes.

MG: So it was a decision that they had made that they wouldn't install sewerage.

MB-B: I think they had either made a decision, or they just hadn't got round to creating sewage pipes or whatever you need, I am not an expert on how you deal with all of that.

MG: Well, no neither am I but you think of … in England you would have in, well, most places didn't have sewerage, but they had sort of earth closets and things like that. But they didn't have electricity either. A lot of places didn't, certainly in the rural areas until perhaps just before or just after the war. You hear about these accumulators and things like that and they had oil lamps.

MB-B: During the War we had oil lamps. I was in Wales in the country.

MG: You think of all these things going together, so it is a bit unusual to have mod cons in terms of television and electricity but not in terms of sanitation or baths.

MB-B: Yes that is interesting. It was very uncommon to have mains sewerage in my first tour in Japan. But it was something that I hadn't really expected, no. It did create an atmosphere; I mean some days you could smell things. It wasn't very nice in the hot weather. But I loved the baths.

MG: Did Chrystal go to the baths as well?

MB-B: Yes, she did. What happened in the summer of 1964, there was a drought and we didn't really get very much water in the house in Shimouma, owned by the German who was in Europe for twelve months. We had our own bath in the Shimouma house, a lovely tub of scented wood. We would fill that with cold water and there was a boiler that heated it up. You washed outside seated on a stool and there were duckboards on the floor and drains.

They didn't cut the water off but they reduced the water supply very heavily so we had to go to the public baths. Which was fine because by this time I knew what to do, having bathed with Yano and his friends and also been to a hot spring resort.

In August 1964 I was with the Enomotos in the suburb of Ishikawa, these people in their beautiful house, albeit without mains sewerage. They were helping me with my Japanese. I used to have to practise kanji characters every day with Mrs Enomoto. But I was no good at writing because I was left handed and when you write Chinese characters you are supposed to draw the pen from top to bottom of the page, and I was pushing up with the left hand. I was never very good at writing, that's for sure. But we were practising and learning to read more widely.

One day she told me that she knew some people in the country who had a discussion group, and they would like a talk from this Englishman about the European Common Market. By this time I had been studying Japanese for about nine months, having started in the previous October. Somehow or other I got myself involved with this talk and off I went on my own in the car to go to a village about 2-3 hours' drive away. It was quite remote [Ibaraki ken] which was further north. How I found it to this day I have no idea. We had no detailed maps and Japanese names are often very hard to read. They sometimes have local ways of writing names and pronouncing them. So, anyway off I go and a typhoon comes. The rain was horrendous, so this must have been end of August early September. As I tootle along, the drains are open on either side of the very rough roads. All of a sudden the road becomes like a lake and you can't see where you are going and – oops! - the car tipped into the drain. I got out and was completely drenched wondering what to do. Then people came running out of

nearby houses and helped me lift the car out, 1-2-3 heave – and they were all laughing. The crowd saw that it was a foreign car, and there were very few of them in Japan at that time. They put it back on the road for me and off I went. I parked in a temple courtyard whose name I had been given with an address in Japanese. That evening I had to give a talk in Japanese about the European Community. How I did I have no idea because my vocabulary must have been absolutely minimal for such a talk. It must have been torture for them to listen to this 23-year-old young man blundering around in their language, dealing with a topic which was really quite complicated to say the least. You know, the Common Agricultural policy – I had little idea what these words were in Japanese. But somehow or other I got through. Next day I drove back to Tokyo on a beautiful morning, as so often happens after typhoons.

So that was my first experience of really getting out into the country north of Tokyo. But more extraordinary was that a few weeks later Chrystal decided that she wanted some help in the house. It was getting a bit difficult to run even this quite small house, and she thought 'Why don't we see if we can find an au pair girl, or the equivalent thereof, somebody who would like to practice maybe a bit of English or learn a bit about European customs and so on' So we put the word out to this group of friends we had asking whether anybody who would like to come. We could not pay them anything but if they would like to come and stay with us we had a very small spare room.

So I was introduced to someone called Mr Ebine who brought his daughter wearing a sailor's suit, the uniform of High School girls in Japan and still is. She was there, we were drinking green tea and we were agreeing that she would come and stay with us for a while. And she should learn about western cooking, how we made shepherd's pie etc, and we would learn from her. She would help around the house. Then her father said to me – and this is the way things happen in Japan – as a throwaway line: 'Baker-Bates san, we have met before'. Met before? I don't think so. Yes, he said, I pulled your car out of the drain. He was one of the people who lifted my car out on to the road, and the chances of that happening in a population of 100 million were incredibly small. It was like some sort of strange fate had happened in our lives. That girl now lives in this country, in Bedford. It's a long story about how she got here. She didn't speak any English at all at the time. We became very friendly, she taught us a lot of Japanese.

We had, then, this group of Japanese friends. But our German landlord came back and we had to move. We then found a house in the neighbourhood, another house, a bigger one, lived in at the time by a couple who were in the Polish Embassy. It was a very beautiful Japanese style house, Chrystal and I thought, but they treated it as a western one. They carpeted all the mats, and there were sofas and chairs and things so it wasn't really a Japanese house inside at all. Then we had to find friends in that neighbourhood. Shimouma was not far away, that was alright. Friends there could come and see us. They arrived all the time to see us in our new home, which by Japanese standards was enormous. It was very beautiful, a big passage around and the bathroom was wonderful. At the Embassy they all thought that we were quite eccentric, and they kept suggesting we might move to the centre of Tokyo but I didn't want to do it. We had two lives, one involved with the Embassy and one with our Japanese friends in the suburbs.

In the small garden of this house, there was a little house which somebody had built for the tea ceremony. We made enquiries to see if somebody would like to come and live in the tea house, and help us with our Japanese.

MG: You had moved to a bigger house and you were trying to let it out?

MB-B: Yes, we needed somebody to be with us. We wanted somebody to live with us to share our life a bit. We needed someone who was not an English speaker at all and who knew nothing about England, had no interest in Britain at all other than maybe what we mentioned from time to time. I found him. He was a barber called Yoshiyuki Yamada. He was learning the trade in a local barber's shop. I went for a haircut and I got to know them quite well. By this time I was able to speak quite well. I asked whether he like to come and live in our garden house? He agreed and we learnt a lot from him. I used to play mah-jong with him and his friends and I got to know him very well. The sad thing was I didn't know this, but after we had left Japan in August 1968 I didn't hear from him and I thought well he's not the sort of person who writes letters. I had helped him set up his own barber shop. He wanted to be independent. We called it 'Barber Beau'. I didn't tell the Embassy anything about this. It was just that I invented the name and I used to go and see him quite a lot in his shop. He died young of stomach cancer, which was rather common among young people in Japan in those days. That was very sad for me. He was the first person of my own age I knew who died. He was just interested in doing his job and, for me, that was what I wanted to be part of the scenery. The first year I had been with the Enomotos for the month. The

second year, I went to the northern island of Hokkaido to stay with a farming family, one of whose members was an English teacher at a university in Tokyo where I had met him. He subsequently became one of the Embassy's language teachers. He never spoke English to us, everything was always done in Japanese even though he was an English teacher. He invited me to come and stay with his family in Hokkaido and we had a fascinating time. We travelled by train, that was the main way to get there, well, there was a plane I think. But one could not get to Hokkaido by car easily. So we went on the train, the coal was dirty so that you had to pull down blinds over the window to keep the smuts out. Even so, we were filthy by the end of the journey. I stayed about three weeks with this family in Hokkaido. They had no telephone line, only a radio telephone. I got a message that Chrystal had had a miscarriage so I had to return to Tokyo. Our doctor was a German, Dr Eitel, and, not only was he a GP, but he was also a surgeon. He took out her appendix and helped her recover after this miscarriage, a jack-of-all-trades medically speaking. Not long before, David Simon a First Secretary at the Embassy, had had a ski accident. He injured his leg, got a blood clot that was not detected and died. Looking back on it now, medical services quite primitive really. There were American doctors, one of whom used to smoke during consultations.

So I had to come back from Hokkaido and we just continued with my language studies because the Higher Japanese exams were in the October 1965. Then I was to work in the Embassy before going on mid-tour leave.

But before that we had a unique experience in 1964, when we language students were assigned to be liaison officers with various teams that came to the Tokyo Olympics that did not have embassies in Japan. These were Commonwealth countries and I was assigned to Northern Rhodesia who sent a small team of about six or seven; a couple of boxers, a wrestler I think, a runner of some kind. I was their liaison officer with a special badge that got me in to anything I wanted to see at the Olympic Games in 1964. Northern Rhodesia was unique as it fielded the only team so far in the Olympic Games that came into the stadium at the opening ceremony as Northern Rhodesia and it marched out as Zambia at the Closing Ceremony after independence. Chrystal made a Victoria sponge cake to celebrate, and we had some rather lukewarm white wine to toast independence. So that was a unique experience in itself. We went to the Opening and Closing Ceremonies as well as numerous other events, whether or not our Northern Rhodesian athletes were competing.

MG: When you were secretary to the Ambassador what were your duties?

MB-B: My first job when I went in to the Embassy was briefly in the Information Department which was really a lot of sending out press releases and bits of information about Britain or Britain and Japan. That job lasted about six months, because I just worked there until I went on leave in March 1966. It was after leave, that I became the Ambassador's Private Secretary. It wasn't secretarial work in the sense of 'take a letter'. Tony Rundall didn't speak Japanese so when he went on official calls or out meeting people who weren't in the Foreign Ministry – all the people in the Foreign Ministry with whom we dealt spoke English – when he did things that required interpretation or had visitors sometimes who didn't speak English very well, then I sometimes had to do the interpretation. The other part was helping to run the Residence, liaising with the servants, making sure that the Social Secretary, Miss Abe, was happy and was getting what she wanted; making sure the drivers knew what was expected of them etc.

I also occupied a place at the ambassadorial dinner table from time to time. On one occasion I sat next to the former wife of the conductor Herbert von Karajan, a lively lady who seemed to change her wig twice a day, judging from the colour of her hair. On that evening a splendid pudding appeared in the form of a blancmange shaped like Mount Fuji. Around it were lakes of blue sugar dotted with tiny chocolate boats. It looked wonderful as a work of culinary art and tasted delicious. In due course the butler brought round the mousse for a second helping. I was so busy talking that I did not notice that other guests had declined seconds and helped myself to a generous portion. As happens occasionally, the conversation around the table fell silent for a few moments and I then heard HE's voice 'When you are ready, Merrick, we'll move into the next room.' I wanted the floor to swallow me up.

That Private Secretary job was proving a useful and pleasant experience. The Ambassador would sometimes show me draft letters that had been put up to him and explain why he was correcting the wording or adding to the draft. So I benefitted from a tutorial in drafting.

One day HE pressed his buzzer and asked me to come in for a moment. After he told me to sit down in front of his desk, he asked me whether I knew someone called Stanley Houghton. I said that I did and explained that he was with me at Oxford and at the time of our first exam to which he didn't turn up, and subsequently he went to gaol. HE asked if I had seen Houghton when he was in prison. I explained that when he was on remand I was allowed to visit him and that I had told the Office of the visit. They saw no problem. So I went to see

Houghton in Wormwood Scrubs in August 1963. Subsequently he got two years for forging cheques and I had no further contact with him.

Whilst I was in Japan, George Blake, who had been revealed as a Russian intelligence officer, escaped from Wormwood Scrubs. The Mountbatten Commission, headed by Lord Mountbatten, was set up to enquire into how this debacle had happened. Stanley Houghton, I subsequently discovered from the Ambassador in Tokyo, had told the Mountbatten Commission that somebody he knew was deeply involved in this plot, but they were now in the Far East working for the Foreign Office. Well, you can imagine what alarm bells rang in London, given all the scandals there had been in the past about Burgess and Maclean and so on. So Tony Rundall questioned me closely. I was in shock. I said that Houghton's claim was absolutely preposterous. I didn't know about George Blake, I didn't even know where the Russian Embassy was. Tony Rundall told me, however, that as things stood, two people from the Security Service were preparing to fly over the Pole to interview me. But I managed to convince him that I was the victim of a fantasist and was entirely innocent. He must have told the FO, as I heard nothing more. I said the man's a fantasist; he always has been a fantasist. So fortunately they accepted that but, looking back, it is interesting to think that I was probably, for a very short time, the most wanted man in Britain!

MG: That must have been terrifying.

MB-B: Oh it was, it was really quite worrying because also I was told not to speak about it, never to say anything until I was told I could. The whole episode was just awful.

MG: Did the Security people interview you?

MB-B: No, they didn't, they never did. I never saw them. Then, about a year later I got a sanctimonious letter from Stanley Houghton dripping with homosexual sentiments and telling me how sad he was to hear I was in trouble. And I said to myself this is too much and I asked the Ambassador if he could get in touch with the F.O. and stop Houghton's correspondence. I never wanted to hear from him again. So that stopped, but it was a very unpleasant interlude. And then about ten years later, maybe longer, when I was having one of the routine vetting checks that they have in the Office, I mentioned this episode and asked whether I was allowed to say anything about it or was this all forbidden? I was told there would be no objection because I think by that time they had found out how Blake's escape had happened or something like that. I thought that Houghton was going to wreck my career

completely. Unfortunately, I had known him quite well in a sort of jocular way as a student, as an undergraduate. He had even invited himself to my wedding.

MG: He was a bit of a bad egg though.

MB-B: He was a bad egg, yes.

MG: Is he still alive? I had better not call him a bad egg if he is still alive.

MB-B: I don't know. He's maybe still alive. Curiously enough, years later, talking now about the late 1970s, I was working in a building opposite the Old Bailey, used by the Department of Trade and Industry for their trade promotion work. I happened to go across the road to the Old Bailey and glance at the Notice Board to see what cases were on. And there it was 'Regina -v- Houghton' again. It turned out he had got on to a very good racket. Driving around in a car, parking it some way away, walking up various leafy lanes in the Home Counties and seeing people in their gardens or going up to the front door, and saying 'I'm terribly sorry my car has broken down' and asking to use the telephone to call for help.

Usually, a trusting householder would let him in to the house and Houghton would then engage them in conversation about the house and its contents, information that he would pass on to the professional thieves. He was a con man basically, very plausible. .

I finished being the Private Secretary and went to work in the Chancery where I was following Japanese politics and other domestic events. At that time we were involved in bringing back the remains of Japanese soldiers who had been killed in the Solomon Islands, those islands being still a colony. I remember George Brown paid an official visit to Japan and toured the Chancery offices as part of his programme.

MG: He was Foreign Secretary.

MB-B: He was Foreign Secretary. By this time we had a new Ambassador, John Pilcher (1912-1990) who had previously been in the Philippines as Ambassador.

MG: Did he speak Japanese?'

MB-B: He did speak Japanese, but he spoke in a pre-war style, very florid, using honorifics, which the Japanese found rather amusing. He and his wife were a very pleasant couple who enjoyed entertaining and took a great interest in the arts. We prepared in advance for his arrival. The Head of Chancery was a conscientious officer called Dick Ellingworth. Dick told me to co-ordinate the briefing for the new Ambassador. When he had read all the briefs

over about a week, I suppose, HE sent them back, and I can see his writing now, beautiful Victorian copper plate with a note that read: 'Thank you for these briefs, most helpful. The circular on toilet rolls I shall reply to myself'. So we all wondered what that was about, and we didn't think any more about it. It was only some 35 years later, I suppose it was about 2005, that I discovered what this cryptic note was really about. Somebody at Hanslope Park in error had released correspondence between the Ambassador and medical advisers in London to the effect that Pilcher thought the staff needed Delsey toilet rolls rather than Bronco. Some people had piles and needed a soft roll.

John Pilcher and his wife were amusing characters. Tony Rundall was delightful but very Ambassadorial and rather more remote, although he knew me quite well because I had been his secretary. John Pilcher was more personable and amusing. He liked telling stories and jokes. When George Brown turned up, or shortly before, a series of despatches had been commissioned, about Japan so as to bring the Secretary of State up to date. John Pilcher liked despatches about the position of the Buddhists in Japan and where Japanese literature was going and so on. He wasn't really interested in trade or economic policy and issues like that. It was said that when he was told by Hugh Cortazzi (Commercial Counsellor) that a Sheffield Cutlers delegation was coming out , whether this is apocryphal or not I don't know, he pulled out a spotted handkerchief from his pocket, mopped his bald pate and said 'Oh not another load of peddlers. What am I supposed to do?' Probably unfair, but it was that sort of attitude anyway.

George Brown held a meeting of all the Embassy staff and told us that he had read the despatches. But he had noticed that those covering trade and economics were signed T.R. Shaw. Tom Shaw was the Minister, the number 2. But the truth was John Pilcher didn't find them very interesting and he used to get the Minister to sign them off. So thereafter a whole lot of important economic despatches were carefully signed by John Pilcher.

MG: Was he on his best behaviour, because he had a drink problem, didn't he? That's well known.

MB-B: He had a drink problem, yes he had quite a serious drink problem. I can remember he met the staff, he came in to the Drawing Room and he said 'Whom haven't I met here?' So Chrystal and Valerie Summerscale, another young lady whose husband was working there, said, I think rather cheerfully, 'Well you haven't met us'. So he came up to them and gave them both a big kiss, which I suppose nowadays would not be allowed. Everybody laughed

and it was all good fun. Then I was at a lunch where interpretation with the Foreign Minister was being done, but not by me. The Foreign Minister was a rather staid character. But George Brown thought he'd said something a bit witty. By this time he had already had several pre-lunch drinks, he smacked the Minister on the thigh and said to him 'You know, you're not as dull as they told me you were'. Later he toured the Chancery offices and asked me what I was doing. I explained about war graves in the Solomon Islands. George Brown said, 'bones from the Solomons – what the hell are you doing with bones from the Solomon Islands?' Then he moved on, fortunately.

Robert Maxwell turned up, I remember, and wanted the Ambassador to give a reception for the Pergamon Press. It had to be this, it had to be that and the Ambassador was really fed up with him but he couldn't do anything because Maxwell made it clear that he knew the Prime Minister.

MG: Was that Harold Wilson?

MB-B: Yes, it was Harold Wilson. So it really made life for the Ambassador quite difficult. I remember, that was John Pilcher too. Maxwell sacked the local representative of Pergamon Press, an expatriate who gave me a set of Chambers encyclopaedias when he left his office.

MG: So that sort of more or less brought First Tour to Japan to an end. You didn't have any Royal visits at that stage?

MB-B: Princess Alexandra came but I didn't have much to do with that. She was I think the first, almost the first, Royal to visit Japan after the Second World War.

Just before leaving I drafted a despatch for the Ambassador. He asked me to do it because when George Brown's wife Sophie was there with him she wanted to see some 'ordinary' Japanese houses and meet the people. The Ambassador asked Chrystal and me to introduce some of our neighbourhood friends. We went out to the suburbs, sat down on the floor, drank green tea etc. I think she rather liked that. So later John Pilcher asked me to draft something about day-to-day life for the average Japanese family, based on our experiences. I wrote a piece called 'The Plain Man in Japan'. This was about living standards, their interest in politics or not as the case may be, how students were living, the huge pressures of everyday life and so on. Hugh Cortazzi didn't like it. He thought it too 'downbeat'. He was the Commercial Counsellor by this time, arguing that would put British exporters off the

Japanese market. It did go to London in the end but not as a despatch: it was sent as a memorandum by me.

Leaving Japan in July 1968 and all our Japanese friends was a tremendous wrench because by this time we were really into that life. Friends came down to Yokohama to say goodbye to us on the boat. I realised that I had to be careful because one of the important things about diplomacy is that you mustn't get emotionally involved with the country to which you are accredited, you have always got to keep HMG's goals in mind which I was trying to do, but, always in the back of my mind, was 'Tokyo Rebuffs' and we had proved that it did not. There was always something of a contradiction between my wish to bury myself in 'ordinary' Japanese society and the need for professional reasons to move in the elitist circles that surrounded an Embassy, hobnobbing with the men and women who graduated from Tokyo University and didn't want to speak to me in Japanese. I had to keep that balance and I like to think I did so.

1st Secretary, United Nations Economic and Social Department, FCO, 1968–73

MG: But then you hadn't had any time in the Foreign Office in London before you went out so basically all you knew of diplomatic life was what you had made for yourself there**.** You didn't really know what you were going back to, did you?

MB-B: That's right, that's quite right. No I didn't have the slightest clue, not really. I had quite serious doubts as to whether I wanted to continue. In fact I asked my father, by this time I had got in touch with him again, would I be better off as a doctor? I hadn't found my footing – as you rightly say, it was a completely unknown quantity going back to London. What I was doing and what happened subsequently reinforced that. So we went back on the SS Iberia – the Suez Canal was closed because of the Six-Day War – and arrived in Southampton and I didn't quite know what I was going to do next.

MG: Did they give you any leave before you started?

MB-B: Yes, I had some leave. Then, they asked me, to join a course. I had to do a course at the Treasury Centre for Administrative Studies. While looking for a house to buy we lived in the country near Chrystal's family farm. We stayed there, but it was a tiring commute to London from Rugby and the course was held near Regent's Park. I didn't know much about what the course was but it turned out to be macro and micro economics, sociology and

statistics. A recent report on the Civil Service had recommended that Civil Servants should be familiar with these subjects.

I started on the course which was to last about eight months. It did not last long for me as one Saturday morning I ran into the bank in Lutterworth, caught my foot on the front doorstep, went flying and put my back out quite seriously. The GP sent me to hospital, St Cross Hospital, Rugby and I was put on traction. I don't think that's a form of treatment that is now regarded with much favour. It is akin to a medieval torture. You have weights attached to your legs and you are drawn apart. I was on traction in the hospital for two weeks – very unpleasant but it worked. So I asked to join the next course. I got better and, fortunately for us, I suppose by this time it was early December 1968, we found a house on the top of Sydenham Hill in London. It was, a three-bedroom Wates house. Many civil servants lived in the area. Behind us in a slightly grander place were Charles & Carla Powell. He later became Margaret Thatcher's Private Secretary and a life peer.

MG: That was brother to Tony Blair's assistant?

MB-B: Yes. He lived behind us with Carla, his ebullient Italian wife.

I survived the next course and graduated in June 1969. The Director of the course was Donald Derx, an Under Secretary in the Department of Employment. We didn't see him very much. He didn't teach us. The teachers were people like Maurice Peston and other economists and statisticians, Keith Yeomans who had written a book on statistics for Penguin and so on, so they were pretty high powered people teaching us. Maurice Peston's view was that we were all bright so it would be very easy for us to understand his methodology. It was not!

After about six weeks, Donald Derx said that the staff needed to assess how much we had managed to understand so far, and to do that a little test was needed. We were asked to pick up a test paper the following morning and give it our best shot completing the test in one of the rooms. When the results came out about a week later, Donald Derx called me to his office and told me that I had rated only C in the test. He had got the impression, he told me, that the people from the Foreign Office were not pulling their weight. People from other Whitehall Departments had got better marks. What we didn't know was that two women, participants from the Government Statistical Service, who were on the course had said to people that morning as they arrived that if they found the test difficult, they would help them out. So a whole lot of people had, to put it crudely, been cheating. But being British gents,

of course, the unwritten code kicked in and we held our peace. I was pretty irritated quite frankly.

MG: Well it's very irritating to say it doesn't matter we are just seeing how it's gone down and then to mark it and call you in, and give you a rocket, yes, that's pretty British as well.

MB-B: It left a bad taste in my mouth. Donald Derx is sadly no longer with us. He, poor man, featured in Alan Clark's diary in uncomplimentary terms, being regarded by him as dull. Anyway we survived the course.

MG: The other thing that strikes me is that it was obviously at a time when you weren't given a lot of choice about what you did, because you were put on this course, as you have explained. Nothing in your previous life fitted you for going on it – and nobody explained to you why you should.

MB-B: Well, in a sense they did. The background was a Government review of the Civil Service where Lord Plowden (I think) had said that civil servants needed to know more about mathematics, economics, statistics, Critical Path Analysis, Decision Trees and all those modern tools of business, which is probably true. But nobody really explained the background and I felt really that I was being pushed into something for which I wasn't well prepared. I think you have to prepare the ground. Some of the others on the course had done slightly similar things. We had the two statisticians. There were other people from the Treasury and so on. They had some of that background. I didn't. All I had was a History degree, European studies at Bruges, French of a certain fluency and now Japanese. I wasn't good at numeracy. Was I really going to be able to do all this and enjoy work? I went to see the head of the Training Department and told him that I did not think these studies were quite my thing. Was there anything else that I could do in the Diplomatic Service which would be more suited to my experience and talents? His view was that if I didn't feel up to it I had better think whether I had a future in the Service at all. His was a take it or leave it type of attitude.

I thought some more about it and decided to carry on as best I could. I didn't fail hopelessly at it, but it clearly was not my thing. Subsequently, in the next 30 something years, I never did a discounted cash flow, nor created a decision tree, nor wrote a computer programme. However, at least I knew what these techniques were. Diplomacy, as I experienced it, didn't use those techniques.

MG: Well mathematicians would find it easier of course. Well I think we will leave it there because from then on you plunge in to an awful lot of commissions, international conferences and so on. I think we will leave that and see you settled in Sydenham with, you know going in to the Office more easily and do that next time. So thank you.

13th March 2019. Moira Goldstaub and Merrick Baker-Bates on the second session recording his recollections of his diplomatic career.

MG: We were back in London, 1968 and you had got through your strange economic series of lectures which you managed successfully and you are living in London, on the top of Sydenham Hill, near the Powells and you were about to tell me what it was like to be in the Foreign Office at long last.

MB-B: What I forgot to mention was that one of the supervisors who ran my course, Mark Marshall, subsequently had to retire early from the Diplomatic Service because a member of his staff when later he was Ambassador in the Yemen got away with a great deal of public money, whereas the other course supervisor, Peter Middleton from the Treasury, later rose to be Permanent Secretary and later Chairman of Barclays Bank.

My office was in King Charles Street and the first thing that struck me about it was how grimly Victorian, the whole place was. The Chief Clerk of the day called it an 'administrative slum'. We had open fires and one of the things that I most regret is that I failed to take a copy of an Office circular which said that the firelighters were being stopped as an economy measure. In the morning in winter we used to have to light our own fire, which was laid by the Office Keeper. We drew it with newspapers and sat in our overcoats for quite an hour and half to two hours on cold days until these hugely thick walls warmed up. Every lunchtime the messengers would deliver buckets of coal. These were a subject of contention with the Assistant to the Department, John Wilberforce, an amusing and clever man, whom we suspected used to come and take the best bits of coal out of our bucket and put them in his own. We got fed up with this and in the best school-boy fashion, we decided to mark our displeasure by putting a dead pigeon on his windowsill to rot away.

John Wilberforce was my boss, a direct descendant of William Wilberforce: he lived at Markington Hall, Markington, Yorkshire. He was good at teaching me, albeit indirectly, how to draft. I shared my office with a young woman, Sue Binns, who was very pleasant and fun to work with. . After a few weeks I asked whether we could have a painting in our office

because I had noticed that quite a few offices had paintings on their walls. The Office Keeper told me the choice was limited to 'men or horses'. When I asked why, he explained that members of the East India Company used to have themselves painted in uniform with their horses. So there was quite a collection of those pictures in a room at the top of the building. He took me up and there was a minor Aladdin's Cave of paintings. I chose one, I think his name was Charles Sydenham with his horse, he was holding his horse. We stuck it on the wall. I don't think they do that anymore. Pictures started to disappear, I was told.

So there I was in the United Nations Economic and Social Department. When I asked the Head of Department (Hilary King) what were my duties, he told me that the main part of the job was to brief our delegations at the UN in various specialised committees and agencies, that is to say the Economic & Social Council's Human Rights Commission principally, but also the Status of Women Commission, and one or two other minor bodies there. I was really a non-stop briefing machine.

Besides doing that, I was also assigned the task of ratifying various international conventions. The Genocide Convention of 1948, which, following the Second World War, outlawed genocide, and was the first for me. HMG had somehow not got round to ratifying so I was put in charge of that process. I had to send out a Circular Despatch, as it was called, to all our dependent territories. I can't think how many, but there were at least 15: the West Indies, Mauritius, all sorts of places, the Seychelles, St. Helena, they were there. We asked these colonial governments to outlaw genocide in their territories and to make it an extraditable offence. No replies came back to the best of my recollection for the first few months. Our Legal Adviser then recommended that we send them a reminder, and probably send them an example of the sort of legislation we wanted them to enact. More often than not they replied saying they couldn't find our original communication, so would we please repeat it. We did that and in the end a whole lot of Governors did send back legislation relating to genocide and the outlawing thereof. But it was quite often wrong, legally speaking. And so they had to be declared "void for repugnancy" under the Colonial Laws Validity Act of 1860-something, and we had to do it ourselves. I wondered why we hadn't done that in the first place.

Anyway, we ratified the Genocide Convention, all seemed to have gone well until I had a phone call from the Ministry of Defence who said they had seen my report about the ratification of the Genocide Convention, but pointed out we had forgotten to include the

Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus. By this time it was too late to do anything about it, I think the thing had been signed off, maybe even by the Queen. I am sorry to say that, as a result of that error, genocide is not (so far as I know) an extraditable offence in the Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus.

The next international instruments (as they were called) that I had to ratify were the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and Economic & Social Rights which, as the name implies, laid down basic rights. Now the problem was that we had to make a number of reservations relating to certain colonial territories where we could not comply with the provisions of the Covenants. For example, in those days, no woman could be the Bailiff of Guernsey, nor could a woman be a juror in the Isle of Man. There were no lawyers on St Helena so there was no free legal aid there, as the Covenant laid down. We had therefore to make declarations saying that the Covenants would only apply in these Territories subject to reservations on those rights.

Then there was the Marriage Convention. I can't quite remember what the Marriage Convention was all about but I think it was to do mainly with registering marriages. Some turmoil was caused by the Foreign Secretary (Sir Alec Douglas Home) when asked to sign this off wrote on my carefully worded submission in his red ink 'Does this make sense?' So, of course, the moment the Secretary of State writes something in red ink on a submission – it throws the FCO Department into turmoil. The Head of Department called me to his office and asked what it was all about. I explained that this was a UN obligation and so on and so forth. And then we had to send back another carefully worded explanation, on one side of A4 blue paper, double spacing, to the Secretary of State, who then kindly signed it for us.

It was in that Department that I first got my l interest in collecting amusing bits and pieces from Foreign Office documents, an interest that I followed for the next 30 years. Other people got to know that I was collecting them and used to send extracts to me. I started off the collection because in the United Nations Department, as you can imagine, we got communications from all over the world, some of which were hardly relevant to the UN, but they just were copied to us for information. The first one that I can remember cutting out and pasting inside my cupboard, was a telegram from Sir Andrew Gilchrist who was Ambassador in Dublin at the time. He had been well known as Ambassador in Indonesia where his Military Attaché had played the bagpipes outside the Embassy in Jakarta during anti-British demonstrations. Well, one of his telegrams from Dublin, I think I can remember it verbatim,

began ‘I saw the Minister of Finance, Mr Haughey, today. (He later became Prime Minister as you may remember). I saw the Minister of Finance Mr Haughey today and I told him that this nonsense about Irish marks of origin had to cease. I said that from now on every pig imported into the United Kingdom would have to have the Union Jack embroidered on its left testicle. I think he got the point.’ And I thought well, that’s lively stuff. We needed more of that colourful kind of reporting. Then I picked up another telegram where some over-excited Ambassador in Africa reported that ‘elephant cropping in the Limpopo Valley’ had become ‘an international hot potato’. For security reasons, we cut them out of the telegrams and stuck them inside our lockable cupboards so that we could see them but, of course, people coming in couldn’t. I went to that office by chance some 20 years later, and guess what I found? ‘I saw the Minister of Finance, Mr Haughey today …’ still sellotaped to the door!

I was the Human Rights Desk officer for about two years. My predecessor was David Mackilligin who is now a distinguished retired diplomat. David had a mischievous sense of humour. He rang me, after I had been in the job for about a week, claiming to be an MP and asked that I was doing about White Slavery? And I explained that I had only been here a week and was not briefed on the subject. ‘You don’t know about white slavery!’ cried the so-called MP. ‘Good Lord, what is going on in the Foreign Office?’ He blew me up on the phone before revealing the hoax.

David got a posting to Warsaw but he never took it up because we had a spat with the Poles and they refused him before he had even arrived. So the Office then said to him they would find him another posting shortly. He explained that he had already bought a car with a loan from the Office. Unfortunately, his next post turned out to be Anguilla, one of the few places in the world where you did not need a car. But you could spear a barracuda before breakfast apparently.

David’s job when he was in Anguilla, he told me, (besides spearing barracudas) included writing speeches for Mr Webster, the then leader of the Islanders, or helping him to draft them. To make these sound authentic, they had to have a reference to religion and cricket. So David used to send us a telegram that arrived on Monday mornings, reporting that after Church on Sunday Mr Webster spoke as follows to the Islanders and the speech always had these references. One day he went a bit over the top I recall and reported Mr Webster as saying to the islanders ‘The next ball is to be bowled by Mr Godber (FCO Minister of State): please remember him in your prayers!’ Down came a message from the Minister of State’s

office saying 'please ask Mr Mackilligin to drop these references to me, God and cricket.' David subsequently went on to have a distinguished career.

I then moved to another desk in the UN Department, giving up the Human Rights side of it and … oh perhaps I ought to mention one other thing. One of the things that I did, after about a year, my Head of Department, Hilary King, sent me to Geneva to take part in the UN Status of Women Commission. It's hard to believe now that they sent a man to the Status of Women Commission, but our main representative was an amusing lady called Guinevere Tilney. Guinevere was the Chairman (sic) of the Women's National Commission and had been appointed by the then Labour Government. But her appointment was confirmed by Ted Heath when he became Prime Minister in 1970. Her husband was the Conservative MP for Liverpool Wavertree. So she and I, with me providing the briefs, went off to Geneva where we sat for two weeks in the Status of Women Commission basing ourselves at the Beau Rivage Hotel. Lord Curzon used to stay there in the 1920s, so we had a discounted room rate as a result of our long association. In Harold Nicolson's book of essays, 'Some People', he brilliantly describes how a drunken butler accompanied Curzon to the Beau Rivage Hotel.

Anyway, there was I in the Beau Rivage drafting speeches with Mrs Tilney. The door of her room would be propped open with a chair to make sure that no passing concierge could claim that something untoward was occurring.

One problem was that there were a lot of visitors to the mission in Geneva and in those days the Status of Women Commission did not rate very highly, at least compared with Disarmament and social issues of other kinds. After we had been there about a week we hadn't heard anything from the mission in Geneva at all. So I had to phone up the Head of Chancery, who I think in those days was Michael Butler, the late Michael Butler, and say to him I thought it would be prudent to get the Ambassador to invite Mrs Tilney to lunch – don't forget her husband is a Member of Parliament and she was appointed by Ted Heath and she could make trouble if she felt neglected. So that was accepted and the Ambassador, Sir Fred Mason, invited her and all was well. I did not get invited to lunch. I don't really blame the mission for that, they had an awful lot of visitors.

Guinevere Tilney was a keen smoker. We agreed at the first weekend that we would take some time off and we would go to Caux, down the lake from Geneva, to visit the Headquarters of Moral Rearmament in what had formerly been a vast hotel, high in the mountains above Caux. This was because, as I remember, one of Mrs Tilney's neighbours in

Victoria Square, London where she lived, was Bunny Austin, a tennis player from the 1930s who was a keen supporter of Moral Rearmament and he had persuaded her to visit Caux. So off we went by train to the Headquarters of Moral Rearmament where to her dismay Mrs Tilney realised that smoking was not permitted. Gradually her temper got a little shorter as the day wore on.

We successfully completed the session at the Status of Women Commission and I wrote a report about it afterward. I think it was all pretty satisfactory and I remained a friend of the Tilneys ever after. Mrs Tilney ended up a Dame and her husband, John, a knight. She became Margaret Thatcher's unofficial fashion advisor at the beginning of her time as Prime Minister. Neither Guinevere nor her husband are any longer with us but they were very pleasant and considerate to me. So that Geneva meeting was my baptism at the UN. I had no briefing on how you should conduct yourself at those meetings. But I had the briefs, I knew the briefs were there for each item on the agenda and so on. I kept my head above water.

So that was the end of my time as a Human Rights desk officer.

MG: Can I just ask you about the Mission because the Ambassadorial set-up would presumably be in Berne wouldn't it, the capital?

MB-B: Yes it was.

MG: So you then had a Mission in Geneva?

MB-B. Which dealt with UN and Disarmament.

MG: Oh I see, you wouldn't have a Mission in other parts of Switzerland, it was just because of the UN being there.

MB-B: Yes it was. There were in fact two Ambassadors in Geneva, one was Ambassador to the Disarmament Conference, essentially with the Russians. Then there was the Ambassador to the UN: he was Sir Fred Mason. We also had an ambassador to Switzerland, based in Berne. There was also a Consul General in Geneva whose main job was to liaise with the Red Cross who have their headquarters there. So that was how it worked: two Ambassadors in Geneva, another one in Berne and a Consul General who dealt with ICRC as we called it, the International Committee of the Red Cross.

I ought to add something about the Red Cross. The British Government has always had a pretty close relationship with the ICRC and we agreed that we would take part in an

international conference relating to the revision of the Geneva Conventions on War Victims (of 1949) The principal issue at this conference was to decide whether or not these Conventions in their Article 3 would apply to conflicts 'not of an international character'. Article 3 related to the way you treated prisoners, this was the particular point we were making under Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions. The problem there was that HMG wanted to appear forthcoming but at the same time it was quite apparent to us, and to almost all the other major powers, that we couldn't let this happen. We couldn't let the Geneva Conventions apply to conflicts not of an international character because most of us had difficulties with terrorist groups in our own countries. In Germany they had the Baader-Meinhof gang; in France there was a group, I can't remember who they were; we had the IRA of course. In Spain there were Basque separatists. The Americans had the Symbionese Liberation Army. There were also were terrorist groups in Italy. Nobody wanted to give any of them Prisoner of War status. But at the same time, the UK didn't want to lead the pack in opposition.

So we put together a delegation. I, as Desk Officer, was one member and Audrey Lush, a Legal Advisor, now Dame Audrey Glover, was the other member from the FCO. Audrey was great fun and we enjoyed our time in Geneva very much together. But before that the FCO had to find (i) a leader for the delegation and (ii) some experts (or one expert) who could be advisers on the legal issues relating to the Laws of War. That latter person was Colonel Gerald Draper. Colonel G.I.A.D. Draper, a formidable figure who had been a Nuremberg prosecutor. By the time I met him he was severely disabled with a back problem which almost bent him double, but he had an immensely sharp mind and a pretty sharp tongue. He could be rude about all sorts of people and was not inhibited about expressing himself.

My job was to put together the briefs for this conference, and then give them to Col. Draper. I wrote the briefs in consultation, as you can imagine, with all sorts of other people. Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Office Legal Advisers, and the Home Office and so on – I was really just putting them together, there was nothing very original coming out of my head because I was not an expert on the Laws of War, I was just the person coordinating. Col. Draper used to come every week to collect his brief. After a few weeks he asked me who would be leading this delegation. All delegations at international conferences of that kind need to be led by somebody with plenty of experience. And what we needed was somebody with a handle on their name who had done a few good things in international affairs.

There was a shortlist which the Minister of State, Mr Joseph Godber, had on his desk, but he hadn't made any decisions. My conversation with Colonel Draper went something like this. 'Well, Colonel Draper, the Minister hasn't made up his mind yet, I am sure he will do very shortly. There are, as you can imagine, a number of well qualified candidates.' So Draper says, and I can't remember the names now (and in any case they have been changed to protect the innocent as they used to say on the television): 'I hope it's not Sir George M, the man's a total fool. I met him at dinner the other night and he doesn't know a bee from a bull's foot, but he is quite interested in international affairs. I hope he is not on the shortlist.' I made no comment, gave Col Draper his brief and he left after a cup of tea. Then I sent a message to the Minister's office explaining that Col Draper, a key figure in our delegation and one of the world's top experts on the Laws of War, seemed to have taken against Sir George M. and the Minister might care to take this in to account when he came to make his choice. There was no response from the Minister's office.

Next week, Col Draper turned up to collect more briefs from me and asked again whether a decision had been made. I reassured him that the Minister would be deciding shortly. Col. Draper then said that he hoped it would not be Sir Charles S. because he was a complete fool. I said: 'Charles S. Don't you mean Sir George M.?' 'Oh no, Sir George M. He's a wonderful fellow, very bright. He's just the sort of person I want.'

Oh dear! So eventually we chose somebody who turned out to be excellent and that was Sir Harold Beeley (1909-2001) who had been an Ambassador in Egypt. In fact I think I am right in saying that he is the only British Ambassador to Egypt who has been Ambassador twice. He was asked to come back by President Nasser after we restored diplomatic relations with the Egyptians at the end of the Suez Affair. Beeley was very bright, an extremely nice man, very distinguished in many ways, but he had one difficult aspect, which was that he had a facial tic which after a bit when you were talking to him you found yourself inadvertently copying. But he was so charming that it didn't really matter except that you had to concentrate quite hard not to be making faces yourself.

MG: What did Col. Draper make of it?

MB-B: Gerald Draper certainly respected Harold Beeley who, as I said, had already done two stints as Ambassador in Egypt. Draper just wanted somebody who had a bit of a handle to their name because there were receptions going on during these conferences and you needed a heavyweight to be glad-handing and leading your delegation. The previous weekend

Distinguished Delegates (as we were known) had been invited out by the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit Gruyère Castle. This was hardly a formidable fortress, but it was rather beautiful with lots of flowers all around it. We went in a bus. Draper said to me 'Right Merrick, Col Shabaan, from Egypt, is an important figure. You are to sit next to him.' When I got off the bus at Gruyère Castle in best Arab fashion, Col Shabaan seized my hand and we walked hand in hand with Col Draper making mildly ribald comments behind us. Then the next day we had a plenary session and Col Shabaan got up to the podium. Col Draper says to me 'Oh Shabaan, I taught him when I was at the University of Cairo, you know, I had a sabbatical there: sound man, Shabaan.' And after a bit it was perfectly clear that Col Shabaan is now more interested in liberation movements in colonies. We didn't like extending Article 3 protection to what we regarded as terrorist groups. Draper grumpily noted that Shabaan had changed his ideas a bit since he had first met him. After another few minutes suddenly Draper pulled his earpiece out, because Col Shabaan was talking in French. 'Another bloody Wog lawyer' he said loudly and stormed out. Fortunately, that remark wasn't heard by others. The Conference was successful in the sense that I think it was the first of several conferences where the laws of war were revised to some extent. But we were able to keep the IRA out of them.

MG: Tell me about Lord St Oswald and the Third Committee.

MB-B: Oh yes, Lord St Oswald (1916 – 1984). The UN's Third Committee dealt with Human Rights, it was the custom of the Foreign Office to invite senior figures from Parliament or academia to lead our delegation in the Third Committee. The reason for this essentially PR exercise was that the Foreign Office wanted Parliamentarians to get to know what a lot of hard work was going on in these committees and how these civil servants were beavering away in the public interest and so on, and hopefully the Member of Parliament would then mention that in some debate. The trip to New York for the General Assembly was in effect a bit of patronage. We had previously had before St. Oswald, Peter Archer who was a very able Labour MP.

Lord St Oswald was appointed by Alec Douglas-Home. He was living in Spain at the time. He came into my office carrying a despatch box which he said, as I recall, had belonged to his grandfather who had been Private Secretary to Disraeli. I remember it well because unlike most despatch boxes it was square with a handle in the middle. He had come over from Spain to meet me and the various people concerned with the UN General Assembly.

And it turned out from conversations with him that he had very right-wing views. Whether or not the Foreign Secretary, was aware of that, I am not really sure. His family seat was Nostell Priory in Yorkshire.

Lord St Oswald went to the UN with the briefs that I and others had put together for him. Unfortunately, he didn't pay too much attention to our efforts. Instead he pulled out other briefs produced by right wing non-governmental organisations, for example supporting ex-King Zog of Albania, and various right-wing groups. His comments at the UN Third Committee debates were regarded as extremely anti-Soviet. This came unfortunately at a time when we were trying to improve relations with the USSR and I seem to remember that the Foreign Secretary was meeting Gromyko. Eventually, St. Oswald was withdrawn by Sir Alec Douglas-Home who clearly didn't realise that he had these extreme views. So Lord St Oswald's tenure in the Third Committee was a bit of an embarrassing farce, quite frankly.

MG: So now you have got UNCTAD – what's that?

MB-B: The Third UNCTAD, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, was the principal forum at the United Nations for the developing world to express their views to the developed world and to try to extract from them a better deal in trade relations. And there were all sorts of different aspects to this, but for me it was quite a formative experience because I was the coordinating officer for our delegation to this Conference which was going to take place in Santiago, Chile. Every morning when I got off the train at Victoria, I used to go up Victoria Street, call at the Overseas Development Ministry, then at the Department of Trade and Industry, then further down, once I got to Whitehall I would stop off at the Treasury. We discussed the UNCTAD agenda, rather than sending each other messages. It was just easier for me as coordinator to talk face-to-face.

The delegation was headed by Martin Lam, Under Secretary from the Department of Trade and Industry. Off they went to Chile. But there was a debate scheduled in the House of Lords, to discuss our delegation's brief for this Conference. The new Minister of State, was Lady Tweedsmuir, Priscilla Tweedsmuir who, as I recall, had joined the Government on a Sunday and was then appointed Minister of State on the Monday, or something of that kind. She had only been involved in foreign affairs for a very short time.

MG: Was she something to do with John Buchan?

MB-B: Yes John Buchan, 2nd Baron Tweedsmuir. She was the wife of famous novelist John Buchan's son. She was a very nice woman, a Baroness in her own right, experienced in many ways. But she had no recent experience of foreign policy. Soon after her appointment as an FCO Minister she was faced with this formidable debate in the House of Lords, which was very testing for her I imagine, but also for me, because yours truly had to do most of the briefing. The delegation with its pundits from the Department of Trade and Industry, the men from Overseas Development etc were now on their way to Santiago, or already there. I was going to join them but had to deal with this debate first. So we had to brief Lady Tweedsmuir about all the issues and it was quite a task for somebody who had only just joined the FCO literally days before. But she did very well.

During the Lords' debate various issues were raised and Lady Tweedsmuir sent me notes asking questions. For example, 'who is this member speaking and what has he done?' She had to wind up the debate and answer points made by various Lords and so on. One of her notes read 'What is a Special Drawing Right?' So I then sent her a somewhat lengthy explanatory answer. Whereupon I got another note back, carried by messengers, saying "Lady T likes her notes written very clearly, and very concisely". We giggled about this, without realising that the microphones that hang down from the ceiling would pick up the noise. Our laughter from the Civil Servants Box boomed around the House of Lords, Lady Tweedsmuir looked round at us. Somebody then came up and said that if we made another noise like that we would have to leave the Chamber. We were contrite, very serious-minded after that.

I was sent off to answer another question, I can't remember what it was now, and left the chamber to make a telephone call to the FCO, there being no mobiles in those days. I picked up a telephone thinking I would get through to an operator. But a man came up, tapped me on the shoulder and said that the telephone was for Peers only: more embarrassment. I got the answer eventually on another telephone.

Lady Tweedsmuir went off to Santiago, followed by me carrying some of the briefs. It was a long way; in those days, a flight of 27 hours to get to Chile. When we got there we found a state of some near panic because Peter Gent, who was a very knowledgeable expert on commodities from the Department of Trade and Industry, had developed a bad swelling on his face and he really wasn't capable of doing anything at the time. Two officials called Steele and Hacker were insurance experts from the Department of Trade and Industry. I

knew nothing about Steele and Hacker's business and insurance because that was a very jealously guarded area of expertise. I was told by Anne Warburton, later Dame Anne Warburton, (1927-2015) a formidable senior Foreign Office diplomat, that they had to return to London because the Vehicle and General Insurance Company had crashed and there was a great deal of Parliamentary interest, with the Prime Minister involved etc.

Anne Warburton summoned me and said that the delegation needed somebody to man the Insurance Committee and that I was the man to do that. Well, I knew nothing about insurance other than that I had to get it for my car and house once a year, but as for the technical issues in this Committee I had no knowledge. I did meet Steele and Hacker before they left. They told me not to worry. I was to send a report every evening; they would send instructions overnight so I could take it from there next day. And what's more I would have somebody from Tokyo Fire and Marine, an insurance company, a non-governmental person, to advise me and somebody from the OECD was there too and he would help me.

So I turned up on this Committee and most of the discussion was about the location of technical reserves, which was a highly sensitive point for the developing countries because money to pay out insurance claims normally would be kept in the developed world. And the developed world's insurance companies did not want to transfer large sums of money to meet claims in developing countries where it would be difficult to control payments. Theoretically, it was to meet claims, but there was a danger it would disappear. So there was a sort of tug of war going on about these technical reserves and I used to go every day, listen to what was said and if there was something I didn't understand I'd turn to the Fire and Marine man or to OECD man and ask what they thought of that, and they would say OK or no, totally unacceptable.

'Mr Chairman I am afraid this can't be accepted by the British Delegation!' was increasingly the tenor of my interventions. I got this reputation for negativity. I really got in to this, not that I really knew anything, but these two advisers were feeding me and I was becoming a bit of an actor. I would just act on their behalf and the DTI's. In the end, we had a resolution that was being discussed and I sent it with great excitement to Steele and Hacker in London, thinking this was a triumph after two weeks. Steele and Hacker came back saying 'totally unacceptable. You have to vote against it.' I said we can't vote against it, nobody has ever voted against anything at the UNCTAD: it was all done by consensus. So we explained that to them. Anne Warburton, she was normally based at the UN mission in Geneva so she knew

all about UN practice. Anne agreed that we could not vote against. ‘All right, we will have to have a paragraph vote then’, said Steele and Hacker from London, which means that you proceed from Paragraph 1; everybody has to vote whether they agree or not with each paragraph. There were many paragraphs in this Resolution. Well, this paragraph vote took something like an hour, because there were 120 odd delegations each having to vote. And at the end of it everybody was in a pretty bad temper because they had been kept there for a very long time by the UK delegation demanding a paragraph vote, so that we could vote against certain paragraphs but not against the Resolution as a whole. Well, we survived that one. But I was pilloried in the local press as ‘The Last of the Mohicans’.

While I was there something else occurred which I have always remembered. We’ve finished now with Steele and Hacker and the insurance. I was manning the UK desk at the end of the Conference whilst we are winding up the whole thing. I am just there to make sure that nothing is said that we can’t live with, such as countries laying claim to Gibraltar, or the Falklands. At about midnight, because these discussions always seem to go on until 3 or 4 in the morning on the last day in an attempt to get consensus, one of the messengers came up to me and said (I am alone now on the UK desk) that somebody wanted to speak to me. Apparently they had been waiting to speak to me for six hours.

I went out and I found two academics, I think they were professors from a University. They gave me a piece of paper and on it were the titles of various physics textbooks which they needed for their classes. They couldn’t buy them because there was no foreign currency available to them in Chile. The economy was in meltdown. This was during the time of Allende. So I chatted to them and asked why they could not come and see me earlier. The guards wouldn’t let them in, they told me, but they changed the guards’ shift at midnight and the professors persuaded the new ones to contact me. I said we would get those books to them through the Embassy and they wouldn’t have to pay for them. So we arranged that, which was gratifying, but it is something that I always remember when people talk about the revolution in Chile and what happened at that time. I doubt whether people realise quite the chaos that was going on in Chile in the last few months of Allende’s regime. In the hotel, for example, with my two words of Spanish, we had very little on the menu. Pavo and corvina were always available it seemed. Pavo being turkey and corvina, which is a kind of cod, were the two main items for dinner. And it was pavo, corvina, corvina or pavo and then in order to prevent scurvy, this is literally the case, we had lemons to squeeze on our food because there were no fresh vegetables. The whole distribution system had collapsed. It was

an extraordinary impression that we got of an economy that was going down the tube. Bear in mind that in 1972 the economy of this country with 3-day weeks looming and all that sort of thing was also in a very poor state and one had to wonder what might happen in the UK. So it was a very extraordinary situation and eventually Allende was overthrown by Pinochet.

MG: Do you think there are any parallels with Hugo Chavez, who died, and his great revolution in Venezuela and now what's happening with Maduro, his successor and the economy in freefall. People are dying of hunger, it sounds similar.

MB-B: It's very similar in the sense that Allende had thrown out a whole lot of foreign investors. He kicked out all the Americans and companies and made it very difficult for people to invest. Yes, it seems a similar situation. And yet Pinochet came in and people were I think, at the beginning certainly, pretty happy that somebody had stepped in to stop the rot. But then things went wrong there too, as we know.

When we finished Conference after six weeks, I was pretty exhausted. Every morning we would have a delegation meeting where Martin Lam, the Under Secretary from the Department of Trade and Industry, at about 8 o'clock in the morning would appear smoking a smelly cigar, which I found rather disconcerting at that time. And it was only after a few weeks that somebody in the Embassy who knew about these things told us that with the nationalised Banco O' Higgins below us and on the floor above a Russian " film company", it was fair to assume that we were being bugged from above and below. But we then assumed, too, that if we were talking about tactics in the Conference during the coming day nobody could get the word around quick enough to frustrate our moves.

Santiago was, then, quite a memorable experience for me. I was the junior member of the delegation. One day Anne Warburton, the senior FCO member, asked me to arrange some light entertainment for the delegation. We decided that we would go to see a film and have dinner together first. So I found a cinema where *The Sound of Music* was advertised – that shows you how long ago it was. It said Sound of Music, subtitles in Spanish. Unfortunately it did not turn out to *be The Sound of Music*. Rather, it was a Danish soft porn film called 'The Island of Eggs' about an island in the North Sea where people ate these aphrodisiac eggs and behaved accordingly. What I hadn't realised was that when I looked at the notice, my Spanish then being virtually non-existent, that *The Sound of Music* was 'la proxima semana', i.e. next week. We all left before the end because the sound track was in Danish with Spanish subtitles, would you believe. Anne was not amused.

That, then, was my experience of the UNCTAD. There was a postscript. After about four or five weeks, Tom Keeble, who was by that time the Head of the UN (Ec & Soc) Department passed me a letter written to the Prime Minister by the Chairman of Lloyds of London sending congratulations on the way in which our delegation had conducted itself at the recent UN Conference on Trade and Development in matters of insurance. Tom Keeble congratulated me and all concerned. That convinced me that one didn't really have to know much about anything to be at an international conference because there I was, a mouthpiece of the men from Tokyo Fire and Marine and OECD. It was just a question of listening and realising how to intervene at the right time. I enjoyed it.

MG: At the end of that year, you are back in London, you are dumping waste at sea, or trying to stop it, which again is a live issue.

MB-B: Yes very much so, yes. I once said I was going to write some form of monograph about that Conference because it was so amusing and interesting when I think about it now. By this time I had had experience of the Status of Women Commission, the Red Cross Conference. I had been to the UN Human Rights Commission and I had been to UNCTAD 3, so I was pretty used to international conferences. Tom Keeble was aware of that experience. One day he told me that the Department of the Environment had asked for help to staff a conference that they were arranging about environmental pollution at sea. I think it has got a more expert name now, but we called it the International Conference on the Dumping of Waste at Sea. As for my role at the Conference, I would just help to run it day to day from the back offices. Unlike the UNCTAD, I did not have to appear at the Conference. The experts would deal with that, he said.

The Conference began on a Monday and I was told to turn up on the preceding Saturday to meet the staff and members of the delegations who were going to be there preparing, and take it from there.

What I didn't know was that this was the largest international conference in London since, I think, the first session of the UN which took place in 1946. Lancaster House is very grand, but unsuitable for an international conference. I arrived on the Saturday and was given this wonderful office. . I was also given the grandiose title of Deputy Secretary-General. What I had to do was to make sure that the administration of the meeting went well. I had a personal assistant (PA). I had never had one before and had always used the typing pool in the Department. I was just thinking about that when suddenly somebody announced that there

was a man at the front door would like to see me. So I clatter down these huge stairs in Lancaster House to the front door and met a Mr Faekov, a member of the Soviet Embassy. He announced that the USSR would be sending a delegation to the Conference, arriving next morning and looking forward to taking part in the opening ceremony and the proceedings thereafter. Interpreters would be required, he emphasised. I said to Mr Faekov that as the USSR had earlier decided that it wasn't going to participate, we had made no arrangements for a Soviet delegation. We had no interpreters.

'Well, you had better get some' was the gist of Faekov's response. Otherwise there would be an international incident was the implication. I told him that I would take that on board and be in touch. He left and then I pushed the button on my phone and asked the PA to come in for dictation. Looking out of the window over St. James's Park, I then dictated a Minute to Sir Thomas Brimelow who was the Under Secretary in charge of relations with the Soviet Union at that time (and later FCO Permanent Under-Secretary). I explained the problem with the Soviet delegation's unexpected participation and that we had no budget for interpreters. I was busy dictating this and after a while instead of looking at the birds in St James' Park, I turned around and noticed that the PA hadn't written anything. So I asked if I was speaking too fast. And she said no, but then explained that she was an audio typist. 'Well, let's get an audio machine, could you get one for me?' It turned out that you had to indent for an audio machine, fill in a form, all that sort of stuff. We managed to bypass that within about an hour and a half and get a dictating machine, but what I hadn't reckoned on was that there were three different types of electric points in the building. Downstairs were modern 3-pin square ones, on the second floor that we were on, the outlets were round 3-pin and on the floor where the secretaries were typing the plugs were 2-pin, and of course the dictating machine did not have the right plug, .nor was there an adapter. So we had to get a new plug, find a screwdriver and attach the correct plugs! Eventually, I got the Minute written and it was sent off to Sir Thomas Brimelow. We got the money, and that potential hazard was smoothed over.

Distinguished Delegates arrived on the Monday and early on that day I met the Secretary General, my boss, an amusing man called Dennis Simms, an Assistant Secretary from the Central Unit for Environmental Pollution in the Department of Environment. Dennis Simms was quite a character. The most senior official who was to chair the Conference was Martin Holgate, later Sir Martin Holgate an Under-Secretary. Dennis was obsessed with a piece of trivia in history which was to prove that Archimedes and the Athenians could not have burnt

up the Persian fleet at Syracuse in BC whatever by reflecting the sun's rays off their shields. This was a famous story in antiquity. But Dennis proved that the movement of the ships on the water would have made it impossible for the sun's rays to be sufficiently concentrated to burn the ships. He had written a learned article about this and at the drop of a hat would go over the whole argument, with relevant equations.

Dennis then told me that I must announce a ban on smoking at the welcome reception that evening. There was a Tiepolo painting on the ceiling and Lord John Hope (Minister of Works) had feared cigarette smoke would damage it. This announcement went down like a lead balloon. There was also no smoking during any of the plenary sessions held in that same room. So we didn't start off on quite the right foot, especially as somebody pointed out that Somalia had been put next to apartheid South Africa by mistake in the alphabetical order of seating. We had to change that around at the last minute to avoid an incident.

Next morning when proceedings began properly, two men from the Ministry of Works came to my office to report that we had lost two crystal door handles and three painted eighteenth century doorplates, all somehow stolen at this opening reception. They had been unscrewed from the door!. We had to get the police and all that and make enquiries. I don't know what happened after that.

Then there was a crisis over the Summary Record. Monday was ok, because there was no Summary Record. Tuesday a Summary Record appeared, fine. And this was circulated to the delegates, all of them. Wednesday ok. By Thursday a loud murmur of complaint had appeared to the effect that nobody could understand what the Record was about. For reasons which even to this day elude me, the Department of the Environment had decided to entrust the Summary Record to people, young men and women, who were brought down from the DHSS in Blackpool. The Department of Health and Social Security had provided the civil servants who were supposed to be compiling the Summary Record. They didn't know the first thing about the dumping of waste at sea. Why they were put in charge of producing the Summary Record goodness only knows. So Dennis Simms said we would have to get rid of them. As a result he had to do the Summary Record himself. So that kept Dennis Simms quiet, and kept him away from telling everybody about how the Athenians had not burnt up the Persian fleet at Syracuse.

We got the Summary Record right. Martin Holgate proved expert in the chair. All went well until the last day, as I recall, when Martin wound up the two week conference, everybody

was slapping each other on the back and saying they were very pleased. Half way through we had had a bit of trouble because we lost a marine biologist from Burnham on Crouch, one of the experts employed to help Dennis Simms with his Summary Record. This man was out of action because a few nights earlier he had left rather late and hailing a taxi on the Mall had walked in to a lamp post badly damaging his eye.

On the last night Martin Holgate came to my office and gave me his notes with the text of the final act of the conference. He told me to get it typed up in final form, but not to number the clauses as he would look at the text once more and arrange the clauses in the order that was required. So I took these drafts upstairs to the typists and I explained that Martin Holgate would give the clauses new numbers and the ones on the draft were to be ignored. About 1 o'clock in the morning I went to have a look at progress. And discovered that not only had the clauses of the Final Act been typed in the old, wrong, order, but they had been reproduced and laid out on a table in the basement. In the basement where there was a huge photocopying machine there were, piles of clause 1, clause 2, clause 3, for each of the 100 odd delegations but they weren't of course in the right order because Martin Holgate had not given them the final numbering before reproduction. We had to send out to Mr Tinkler in the Stationery Office (now in bed asleep at home) for a great deal of photocopying paper, junking the copies already mistakenly reproduced. Mr Tinkler brought the paper and we managed to get the correctly numbered text reproduced. About 6am I went home to Sydenham Hill, quite exhausted, for a little sleep. Then, back to Lancaster House for a glass of lukewarm white wine. Then the Japanese turned up and said there was something wrong with the text. I can't recall exactly what was wrong but it was on the lines that in one of the clauses included the words 'sewage dredged sludge and spoils' whereas it should have been 'dredged sewage, sludge and spoils'. So we had to extract that clause from the delegates' copies of the Final Act, have another 120 or so copies reproduced correctly. I was absolutely exhausted at the end. There always seemed to be something going wrong.

All of us involved with the administration of the conference were agreed that we needed a modern, purpose-built, conference centre. The Treasury agreed and eventually the QE2 Conference Centre was built. I believe the 'controlled mayhem' of the International Conference on the Dumping of Waste at Sea finally pushed the Treasury into paying for a proper conference centre.

But there is one other incident which I thought might be worth recording. We decided that we had better give the delegates some entertainment. We had found out that there were a whole lot of artefacts in the basement of Lancaster House which were worth looking at, and rarely if ever displayed. They included the Condemned Cell from the old Newgate Prison that had been reassembled. There was Marshal Blucher's Field Marshal's baton, an old moth-eaten woolsack and various other things which were all destined to go eventually, I think, to the London Museum or some museum in London. There was also a Roman boat.

These historic artefacts were entrusted to two caretakers who apparently had not spoken to each other for some 20 years. They had to be persuaded to allow the delegates in and show us around. The Roman boat, I remember, had holes in it because during the Second World War, we were told, people on fire watch got bored. They had picked up cannonballs, which were in the basement I suppose for museum purposes, and decided to "put the shot" with them, into the Roman boat. This was a 3rd century AD Roman boat and I think unique. As far as I know, that boat is still there because they can't get it out of Lancaster House without knocking a hole in one of the walls, which is not allowed as the building is listed.

First Secretary (Information), Washington, 1973–76

MG: Shall we start off how you got to Washington now? Tell me about the job description that you were offered in Washington, where you went in 1973, and what your accommodation was, how you and Chrystal found it.

MB-B: Chrystal and I were on leave in Wales when told of the posting to Washington as First Secretary for Information. My job was to publicise things British and HMG's policies and to act as a spokesman for the Embassy on occasions and generally try to help produce the best kind of publicity for the UK in this centre of world power. I felt quite confident as I had been a journalist years before I ever started in the Diplomatic Service.

MG: I've got Mills Godwin's criticisms of you, they don't sound very nice.

MB-B: Well, my run-in with him came a bit later. I had been in Washington for only a few weeks. But my name appeared in the Social Register, known as the Green Book, listing the order of protocol precedence for politicians, civil servants and diplomats. The First Secretary (Information) at the British Embassy rated about number 450 on the list, if not lower. Congressman Sibelius of Kansas or one of his staff must have noticed it and invited me to go to breakfast in the House of Representatives. I had a car but I didn't know the first thing

about Washington's geography and I wasn't terribly confident about driving on the other side of the road. But off I went to meet Congressman Sibelius. The breakfast was to celebrate the annual Pancake Race between Atchison, Kansas, and Olney in Buckinghamshire. At breakfast in the Congressional Restaurant somewhere, I admitted to my next door neighbour that I had never eaten a pancake at breakfast. That taught me a lesson as what I had said appeared in the Washington Post next day, in the Style Section's gossip column, via a piece to the effect that the new First Secretary at the British Embassy was learning local customs fast having never had a pancake for breakfast. So as a spokesman you had to be careful: no throwaway remarks. That was the first thing I learned.

I didn't learn fast enough however. Some time later somebody rang me from the Washington Star newspaper which was the evening newspaper of those days, now defunct. She told me that Governor Mills Godwin of Virginia was going to London to ask the Queen to lend him members of the Household Cavalry to take part in a re-enactment of the Battle of Yorktown, which was of course the last battle of the Revolutionary War when we were defeated. What do you think of that, I was asked? So I said something like 'Well, you can rule that right out. I can't imagine that we would want to celebrate a defeat. Obviously I can't speak for Her Majesty the Queen but I can't imagine that anybody would sanction sending British soldiers to re-enact a defeat.'

That day, in the evening edition, on the front page at the bottom appeared a picture of Mills Godwin, the Governor, together with a bit of doggerel which read 'Governor, Governor where have you been. I've been to London to see the Queen. Governor, Governor what did you there? I came away with a flea in my ear'. Merrick Baker-Bates says you can rule that re-enactment right out.'

My forthright comment did not please Governor Godwin who was running for re-election, and he apparently felt it made him look foolish. He rang up the Ambassador, Sir Peter Ramsbotham, and complained about me. But Peter Ramsbotham was very helpful and told the Governor that he just couldn't make those sort of proposals without inviting adverse comment from the British side. But it taught me a lesson about how careful you had to be about saying the first thing that came into your head, as it were – even if sensible comment.

Before that, I had been invited to the White House Correspondents' Club Annual Dinner which was a formidable affair held at one of the big hotels. This was an occasion for the President and members of the Cabinet to meet the press. I had been invited by Virginia

Kelly, a wealthy Washington hostess and member of the White House Correspondents' Club, and her husband, a retired Admiral. I didn't know them, but again they had seen me as a newcomer in the Green Book. We were about Table 50, or so it seemed, in this enormous ballroom. Towards the end of dinner people left their tables to meet and greet others, go to the loo etc. Whilst this hubbub was going on Virginia Kelly said to me, 'Mr Baker-Bates, as you're new in Washington I think you need to meet a few people.' So she took me by the hand and we wandered between tables where she acknowledged this person and introduced that person, in a sort of progress across the room. Suddenly I noticed to my horror that we were approaching the Head Table and there she stood with me at her side in front of the President of the United States, holding my hand saying 'Mr President, Mr Baker-Bates is new in town, I think you ought to meet him.' And I shook hands with Richard Nixon. Henry Kissinger was there, and most of the Cabinet. After I got back to the Embassy and said next day at a meeting that I'd met the President, I think people wondered what on earth I had been doing. What I didn't know was that when Nixon had first gone to Washington, I think in 1948, Virginia Kelly had introduced him to all sorts of people as a new Congressman who didn't know anybody. She knew a lot of people and he was therefore very grateful to her. It was one of those situations. So of course, I didn't meet President Nixon thereafter but it was fun to do it in that way.

Moira Goldstaub Merrick Baker-Bates – Third Session - 26 March 2019

Moira Goldstaub and Merrick Baker-Bates continue their recollections of his life in the Diplomatic Corps.

MG: We've got you to America, Washington '73-'76. I think I have got something about Parker-Bowles but you want to do that later.

MB-B: That's later - the Los Angeles years, before I went to Los Angeles.

MG: Right. So the next thing then I think is Harold Wilson's visit, what date are we at with that? It's after the General Election of 1974 when Labour was returned to power and Ted Heath lost, you remember that election … and they didn't have a very big majority did they?

MB-B: They didn't have a very big majority. Wilson came over in early 1975 for an official visit and talks with President Ford, who had become President after Nixon's resignation. He came with an entourage including Marcia Williams, later Lady Falkender, Joe Haines, his

Press Secretary, and Joe Stone who was his doctor. I was sent to Andrews Air Force Base to meet the plane and meet particularly Joe Haynes because I was the First Secretary (Information) and at that time there was no Information Counsellor, the previous one having been posted. It was in the evening and I went into the Reception area where there was an RAF officer languidly, as I recall, smoking a cigarette, smiling and waving in welcome. I asked him at what time the aircraft would arrive and he said we had plenty of time. I sat down and I looking out of the window, I pointed out that there was an aircraft on the tarmac flying the Union Jack. 'My God it's Wilson', said the RAF Officer. We rushed out and just made it in time to save our careers and to meet the new arrivals. The Prime Minister went off to the Residence. The formalities of the visit began next day.

Joe Haynes had arranged a briefing for the British press at the Mayflower Hotel as I recall. There were always about six or seven British correspondents in Washington representing the major newspapers and including Henry Brandon of the Sunday Times, the doyen of all British correspondents, who had been there for many years. He had, I am bound to say, a fairly inflated view of his own importance which did not include talking to the First Secretary (Information). The correspondents gathered at the Mayflower Hotel with me in Joe Haynes' suite. On the table there were some sandwiches and soft drinks. Stephen Barber of the Daily Telegraph asked if he could help himself to a bit of lunch whilst waiting for Haynes. So, without thinking, I encouraged him to help himself. Suddenly we heard the sound of a flushing toilet and from an adjoining room emerged Joe Haynes who looked at the table, then at Stephen Barber, and said 'what the hell are you doing with my lunch?' Barber had already tucked into a few sandwiches, and Haynes was pretty irritated. So that didn't get us off on quite the right foot, not least because the British newspapers had not arrived and Haynes was unhappy about that as well.

The visit was the first time I had been involved with a Prime Minister. There are certain set formalities on such visits, one being that the Guest of Honour gives an address to the President and the press on the White House lawn. A lectern is set up, a speech is read out, and national anthems are played. I went along for that ceremony with the British press. All went well until it came to be Harold Wilson's turn to make his speech. An aide put the text on the lectern whereupon a puff of wind blew the whole thing all around the lawn. People rushed out to help, but Wilson held up his hand; to indicate that they should not bother. He then gave a fluent extempore speech. It made me realise that after being in the House of Commons for many years and having answered thousands of PQs, he could do these things

off the top of his head. Whereas in America I don't think that members of the Senate or the House of Representatives would be up to extempore speeches in those circumstances.

After his fluent speech and later on in the day we met him again with the British press at the Ambassador's Residence for a drink and informal off-the-record chat. The idea of this gathering, of course, was to get the best possible coverage back home. All ministerial visitors during my time in Washington really wanted out of their public appearances was to get publicity in the UK. They weren't really aiming at an American audience. Joe Haynes wanted the British correspondents to report to London saying Harold Wilson was doing a good job on the Special Relationship; grappling with world issues etc., that sort of stuff.

Later, in the evening, there was the dinner at the White House. Now, this had been quite fraught for me because the Americans had said that there were only a couple of places at the table for the British press and I had to choose between these journalists, all of whom were highly competitive. Henry Brandon had made sure separately that he was there. So I decided, rightly or wrongly, that the best thing to do was to draw the names out of a hat. I drew out Anthony Delano of the Daily Mirror and, I think, Jeremy Campbell from the Evening Standard. That caused angst because some of the correspondents, The Times man for example, thought that they were so senior and influential that they ought to be at the dinner. They didn't want to be drawn out of a hat by the First Secretary for Information. Good Lord no! So there was a bit of row about it, but we managed to calm them all down and most correspondents gathered later on that evening in a cinema in the basement of the White House to hear the speeches relayed to us from the dinner.

We all had to wear black tie even though we were not part of the proceedings, other than being listeners in this cinema. But I think the Secret Service wanted to distinguish us from the rest of the crowd. So we listened to Harold Wilson's speech: hands across the sea, shared values etc., the usual stuff, except that he started talking about being a soccer referee in Huddersfield and I doubt that President Ford and most of the America guests would have understood much of what that was about.

At the end of the speeches we all started to shuffle out of the basement room ready to leave the White House. Whereupon Michael Brunson (ITN) and I, for some reason, found ourselves in the wrong place. We realised to our embarrassment, that rather than heading for the exit we were moving towards the receiving line for the President and Mrs Ford and Harold Wilson and Mrs Wilson. At the White House, at least in those days, guests didn't

greet the hosts before the meal, they met them afterwards. Everybody was presented to the President on their way to the entertainment in the West Room or the East Room, whichever it was. Michael Brunson had with him a quite heavy video camera, I can remember. He was hoping to film, or perhaps already had filmed, some of the general atmosphere surrounding the dinner. We now realised that we were going to have to shake hands with the President and Mrs Ford, the Wilsons and so on. Michael dumped his camera among the pot plants around the Marine Band, which was pumping away at that time, and he and I joined the receiving line, shaking hands with the President and Mrs Ford then with Harold Wilson and Mary.

'What are you lads doing here?' Wilson asked having I suspect vaguely remembered us from the drinks earlier at the Residence.

I said 'I'm terribly sorry, Prime Minister, we got into the wrong queue.'

'Well you go and enjoy yourselves' and he waved us towards the East Room where Beverley Sills, an opera singer of those days, was going to give a recital. I thought to myself afterwards, so much for security in the White House. So that was quite a memorable evening for us.

MG: Now you mentioned Anthony Crosland and someone called Dixie Lee Ray, whom I have never heard of, but that means nothing. Now did Anthony Crosland come with Wilson, or is that another visit?

MB-B: That's a separate visit.

MG: Oh I see.

MB-B: On that the separate visit, Crosland came in his capacity as Secretary of State for the Environment and one of the people he met was Dr Dixie Lee Ray, Assistant Secretary of State with responsibility for the environment. Crosland called on her with the Scientific Counsellor. I was briefed afterwards so that I could speak to the press. The meeting took place after a good lunch, the Scientific Counsellor told me, and Anthony Crosland arrived in Dixie Lee Ray's office puffing a cigar. Apparently he asked her if she minded him smoking and she said quite firmly 'Yes I do'. That slightly fazed him. Somebody called for an ashtray and Crosland stubbed out the cigar. Whereupon, out of the blue, Dixie Lee Ray asked him 'Mr Minister what are they doing about industrial melanism in your country?' There was a pause, then Anthony Crosland hit the ground running explaining this was

considered to be a serious problem, that a Parliamentary committee would no doubt be looking in to fairly shortly etc etc. Then the conversation turned to what was Crosland's principal interest, housing and local government.

However, as he left the meeting Anthony Crosland asked the Scientific Counsellor to let him know what industrial melanism was actually all about, or words to that effect. As I understood, it is one of the measures of pollution, which is visible in moths that change colour because of soot deposits. But clearly it was something that Crosland hadn't previously heard about. He waffled his way through. And the other misunderstanding was that he knew little about environmental issues in general, despite his title, as his expertise was in housing and local government which was part of the remit of the Department of the Environment in those days.

A third highlight of my time in Washington was the Bicentennial.

MG: The two hundredth anniversary of … When they defeated us?

M B-B: No: this was 1776 when the Colonists signed the Declaration of Independence. War followed and we were finally defeated in 1782 at the Battle of Yorktown. So we were marking the Bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence. We had finally buried the hatchet after the burning of the White House in 1814. By 1976 it was all good-humoured stuff. On the American side, the leader of their Bicentennial celebrations in general was a former Secretary of the Navy, John Warner. On our side it was the Marquess of Lothian a former Foreign Office minister. He was the chair of the British Bicentennial Committee. An awful lot of thought had been given to how best to celebrate this event with the Americans, and to make them feel that we were their closest friends. HMG needed to decide on a Bicentennial gift. A number of ideas had been put forward. One was to present the Americans with a triumphal arch erected by a British admirer of George Washington in late 18th century, inscribed with the words 'Liberty in North America Triumphant'. This was located somewhere in a Hertfordshire field, having once been the entrance to a now demolished country house. The idea was promoted by [Baroness] Shirley Williams' father, the very pro-American political scientist, Sir George Catlin. But this proved to be extremely difficult and expensive, with ownership complications and costs of dismantling, transport to the USA etc. In the end it was decided to commission a box containing a 3-dimensional replica made in gold of the Magna Carta. The man who was going to devise this box and the model of the Magna Carta inside it was the noted goldsmith, Louis Osman (1914-1996), who

had made the Prince of Wales' crown for his investiture at Caernarvon Castle. Louis Osman was duly commissioned with a budget of £50,000, a lot of money in 1976, to prepare this highly symbolic box to be placed permanently in the Capitol.

Unfortunately, Osman exceeded his budget. He was fairly cavalier about finance, as many artists are, and he overran his budget enormously. In fact I think he spent the best part of £100,000. He lived down the road from here in rural Northamptonshire where he rented Canons Ashby, a country house then owned by the Dryden family but now in the care of the National Trust. He lived and had his workshop there. John Warner visited him at Canons Ashby I remember. Osman's box was very beautiful, a marvellous piece of workmanship. It included, as I recall, a piece of rock, obtained from a geological museum, a rock that linked the Old World to the New before the continental drift. The whole piece had cost the best part of £100,000 and the Treasury were not going to pay beyond the budget already agreed. . Osman went bankrupt. A friend of mine, a solicitor in Northampton, heard about all this and lent his horsebox to Osman to help him move swiftly to Ireland to evade bailiffs and creditors.

Back to the United States: a delegation of leading British figures came over for the Bicentennial. Among them was the Lord Chancellor, Lord Elwyn Jones (1909 – 1989) and his remarkably artistic, ebullient and extremely talkative wife, Pearl. She did not like flying and had come over by boat and train. She was great fun and very nicely informal. And she told me when we met at a dinner party in Washington how she had visited India with her husband and had met Mrs Gandhi. Before going to meet Mrs Gandhi she had done a bit of sightseeing and bought herself a very pretty ring with a little bell on it. She was intrigued by this and thought it was great fun and was showing it to everybody. She showed it to Mrs Gandhi who looked rather grim and made no comment. It was only later that Lady Elwyn Jones found out that her prized souvenir from the market was in fact a Calcutta prostitute's ring – hence the bell to attract custom. So that didn't go down too well! Shows how careful you have to be about the sort of souvenirs you pick up for yourself.

We had plenty of other visitors and as the First Secretary (Information) I was their first point of contact. The Duke of Argyll was busy promoting his Argyll whisky. He had joined a delegation of other leading members of the aristocracy to celebrate the Bicentennial and to promote their country houses and so on with the American tourist industry. The Duke had with him a locket which he said contained some of George Washington's hair. This attracted

press interest and publicity. All went well until he rang me one morning from the Downtown Holiday Inn to say that after he had checked out of the hotel that morning he realised that he had left the locket containing George Washington's hair in his room, in the fridge for safety. I rang the Holiday Inn but no one had found the locket. I don't think it was ever recovered.

There was always some kind of trouble or disruption or farce about these visits, but I enjoyed the variety of experiences they brought in their wake. I think it was more interesting and fun than writing political or economic reports.

MG: There must have been some banquets and things for this Bicentennial celebration: did you go along?

MB-B: Not so many, beyond some fairly routine entertainments for the official visitors**.** The principal event that we managed be part of was a dinner and reception offered by the Ambassador for the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh and their party. The Residence is a lovely Lutyens-designed building on Massachusetts Avenue. The Embassy's Chancery itself is an unremarkable early 1960s building, looking like a shoebox with gasometer-like annex at the end, known as the Rotunda, where there were regular receptions for visiting trade or conference delegations, and senior officials. The lead-up to the Queen's dinner for the President was somewhat fraught. The French, being among the victors at the Battle of Yorktown who principally supported American independence, were invited first to celebrate the Bicentennial and I think they must have come out not quite on July the 4th but somewhere near that time.

The key thing about these visits always was to get the right publicity in the Washington Post and Washington Star and through them around the country. When Sir Peter Ramsbotham (1919-2010) first arrived in Washington as Ambassador after Lord Cromer, he asked us for advice on how to get himself known around the town. And we discussed this for quite a while with him. We advised him that the main diplomatic players were the Russians and the Israelis. The Brits tended to be taken for granted. There was no Anglo-American society but there was an Israeli-American society, Russian-American society, Greek-American society, Italian-American Society. All the other nationalities more or less have these bilateral societies. But people tended to take our 'special relationship' for granted. We advised Sir Peter Ramsbotham,- I didn't personally do so - that short of streaking down The Mall he was not going to get much reported in the papers as he went around, unlike the Russians or the Israelis. So he had to do something that was going to attract attention, and what would attract

attention would be to get himself into the Style Section of the Washington Post or its equivalent in the evening paper the Star. In the small town atmosphere of Washington, everybody loved a bit of gossip and these sections were very widely read. It was suspected that many members of the Congress would open the Washington Post in the morning and look first at the Style section to see if their picture was in the paper at a particular party or event where they had been the night before.

When it came to the Queen's visit for the Bicentennial, the French had planned what sounded like a most glamourous dinner in the grounds of the French Embassy. I seem to remember that tents were brought in hung with pictures from the Louvre. The next day however the coverage of the Washington Post was anything but good. Madame Giscard d'Estaing's hairdo was no good, the wind had blown and it was quite cold. By the time the food arrived in the tents it, too, was cold and, generally speaking, the evening had gone off at half cock, or this was the impression one got from reading these accounts in the newspapers.

Peter Ramsbotham was very concerned because he too, like the French, had planned a dinner for some 200 in the garden, using tents. That plan was abandoned. I think it wasn't as a result of reading about the party. It was probably he knew what the French were doing and realised we were doing more or less the same as they were. When we saw the critical coverage the French got we decided it was better to do something different. It wasn't me, but I wish it had been, who had what I thought was the brilliantly simple idea of inviting a much smaller number of people to dinner. That's to say a Royal party, as I recall, of 16 and 22 American couples. These people would invite themselves because protocol conscious Washington had the Social Register, the so-called Green Book, which listed anyone who was anyone in order of their precedence. President and Mrs Ford, Vice President and Mrs Rockefeller, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Mrs Carl Albert and then it went down in order. Nobody could quarrel with that pecking order. What had happened at the French dinner was that they invited 200 who I am sure were the right sort of people to include on that occasion, but they had not included any social writers, known behind their backs as the 'Washington Witches' . Evidently put out by this, they had filled their pens with bile and written critically about the dinner as a result.

So we had this 'small dinner'. The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh of course and members of the Royal party plus the top names on the Social Register. Anybody who could do any damage, either as a journalist or any other way, was to be invited to a very grand reception in

the garden of the Embassy where there would be tents and all sorts of refreshment. And that's what happened.

It was a very oppressive, warm, evening. At one point we thought it was going to pour with rain. The wives at the Embassy had been employed to decorate the tents and the building with flowers. The previous evening in Philadelphia, when the Queen had been entertained at the local museum, Mrs Annenberg the wife of the former American ambassador to Britain, had given $13,000 worth of roses to decorate the venue, or so it was said. Most of these 22 couples invited themselves but there were some who had a special relationship with the UK who had to be included, simply by being famous. Senator Scott who was the senior senator from Pennsylvania had to cry off at short notice. So we had to find a substitute and the next person on the 'reserve list' was the actress Elizabeth Taylor, born in Eltham, South London. I was told to ring Elizabeth Taylor's office and ask her if she could come to dinner with the Queen. I spoke to her secretary. She rang me back and confirmed Miss Taylor would very much like to come to dinner. Could she please bring a friend, I was asked. And I had to explain that couldn't happen because there was a fixed guest list of people who had special relationships with the UK etc. I said, however, we had a partner for Miss Taylor on the night and that was the Administrator of the Bicentennial Commission, Mr John Warner. The Secretary had not heard of him. I explained he was a former Secretary of the Navy and that he was running the Bicentennial celebrations from the American side. He is very nice, I said, and what's more he possessed an amazing Hornby 00 electric train collection which I personally had seen in his house in Georgetown. I said to Elizabeth Taylor's secretary that I would of course recognise Miss Taylor and introduce her to Mr Warner, her escort for the evening.

So that is what happened. She turned up with an enormous diamond in her cleavage the size of a pigeon's egg. I don't know where it came from but I heard later that it had been a gift from a previous husband, actor Richard Burton. The Queen was clearly impressed by this. I can remember seeing a photograph of her looking at it as they shook hands. I introduced Elizabeth Taylor to John Warner. And the rest, as they say, is history because she married him some time later as her sixth husband. I always reckon that's about the one footnote in history that I achieved in my career. Perhaps I am being too modest.

Anthony Crosland was there. By this time he was the Foreign Secretary. He was the minister who was accompanying the Queen. Very pleasant wife. We learned later that

during the dinner she didn't feel well, and had to go to the ladies' powder room. She didn't come back. This was a bit worrying for the people who were sitting next to her but they couldn't get up and go and look for her because by that time the President was on his feet making a speech, and the Queen was to follow, or perhaps it was the other way around. It wasn't until later people found out that Mrs Crosland had fainted in the Ladies, banged her head on a wash basin and I think concussed herself.

After dinner, military men in tabards came out into the garden blowing trumpets, and the Queen and the Duke emerged. One of the writers in the garden, whom we had invited hoping to maximise publicity, was Sally Quinn, later wife of the editor of the Washington Post. Sally Quinn was a very good journalist but, my goodness, could she fill her pen with poison if she wanted to.

When earlier in the day the Queen went to the newly completed Washington Cathedral, Sally and I were up in the tower looking down on the Queen while this service was going on. I said to her 'Well, I am hoping you are coming to join our Reception this evening.' Sally said 'yes, yes I will be there don't worry'. So somebody briefed Sir Peter Ramsbotham who knew Sally Quinn by reputation, and probably knew her face pretty well socially, to make a special move in her direction when the Queen came out and into the garden. The Duke went to the left and the Queen to the right or whichever way it was and I can almost hear Sir Peter Ramsbotham saying now: 'Your Majesty, Miss Quinn, a most perceptive journalist.'

The next day, this party - I have the cuttings in my scrapbook - was declared to be the best diplomatic reception since King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visited in 1939. We got the most favourable write-up in the papers. It was a raging success. Admittedly, the garden was also full of interesting people. One was Muhammed Ali. Then there was Eugene Power. His is not a name that resonates very much in Britain. It ought to. I had had a bit of an adventure with him a few weeks before. He rang me out of the blue and said he had heard that the site of the Battle of Hastings was for sale. I said something like 'Yes I think I have read a bit about that, Mr Power.' And he then he told me he and some friends wanted to buy it and present it to the British people. He told me that they were worried that this battlefield was going to become a sort of Disneyland that people would not respect. It was, they felt, such a sacred piece of soil in British history that it needed to be carefully looked after. I made naturally suitable noises of appreciation.

I sent a message to London about Mr Power's proposal. By this time I had done a bit of homework. Of course we didn't have Wikipedia in those days or the internet, but I had discovered that Eugene Power had made a large fortune out of either inventing or promoting the microfiche and he had also created a series of scholarships at Cambridge University and had generally been a benefactor to Britain. So I sent this message to London. I got no reply, no reply at all from anybody in Whitehall and about two weeks later Eugene Power was on the phone again saying he was a disappointed to have heard nothing more about his offer to buy the site of the Battle of Hastings and present it to the British Government. So this agitated me rather and I quickly got back again to London, To cut the story short, a transaction was agreed and he bought the site of the Battle of Hastings with his friends for, I think, £600,000 - £650,000 which in 1976 was quite a considerable sum of money. This got out to the press but he himself was not at all keen on any publicity. But somebody must have mentioned it somewhere, probably in London, and the papers were going mad to find out who it was who bought the site of the Battle of Hastings.

Eugene Power was at this reception in the Embassy's garden. And he had an audience with the Queen himself alone, before the dinner began when she thanked him personally. What I found extremely disappointing was that when Chrystal and I went down for the first time a few years ago to see the site of the Battle of Hastings, we found that the Information Centre run by English Heritage had no mention of Mr Power and his friends. I asked the staff there, whether they knew who had bought this land and they didn't know. It is surprising how memories are so short. I do feel that proper acknowledgement needs to be given to Eugene Power and his friends' generosity.

At the end of the evening you can imagine we were pretty exhausted and in trepidation about what we were going to read in the papers the next day. But as I have said earlier, all was well. And that was the end, I think, of our adventures with the Bicentennial.

MG: Was the Queen staying at the Residence?

MB-B: No, she stayed on the Royal Yacht Britannia. She had been in the Residence before that but was earlier on in her reign. They had been to Philadelphia on Britannia and they then went down to Virginia I think as well.

MG: And was Sir Peter Ramsbotham your Ambassador throughout the time or did you overlap with Lord Cromer?

MB-B: I started with Lord Cromer a former Governor of the Bank of England. Cromer came from a well-known aristocratic family. I think it was his grandfather who had governed Egypt for some years in the late 19th century. But the difficulty with him, Ambassador Cromer, was that he was not really a people person. He was perfectly pleasant to me. His wife, Esme Cromer, was one of the Harmsworth family who were in newspaper ownership, the Daily Mail. When Lady Cromer first arrived in Washington she wanted to meet writers from the Washington Post and other publications. This was duly arranged. This was before my time, but I was told by my boss, John Taylor. It was a disaster. She thought, apparently, that because she came from a newspaper-owning family she understood the press. Well, she made some unfortunate comments, in the context of the Vietnam War, about life being cheap in Asia and the Washington Post picked them up. There were questions in Parliament about the British Ambassador's wife and did she represent government policy when it came to talking about Vietnam? And so on. And thereafter I am afraid Lady Cromer, who personally to me was very pleasant, did not have further interviews with any press people in Washington.

Cromer was my Ambassador until the Heath government was defeated at the General Election of February 1974. Prior to that election he was leaving anyway at the end of his tour. Sir Peter Ramsbotham, who had been High Commissioner in Cyprus, had been appointed. When Peter Ramsbotham arrived there was speculation that the new Labour government, the Wilson government, would rescind his appointment and put in somebody whom they wanted to be Ambassador in Washington. But that didn't happen. It was very difficult, however, for Ramsbotham at the beginning because everybody thought he was going to be moved within a matter of weeks. So that was when we got this idea that the best thing to do was to get him in the Style section and have him seen at the right parties and things like that. He also had another trick up his sleeve which was that he had been involved with Americans in various clandestine operations in the Second World War. He knew the double agent Tricycle, I heard. He got on very well with Senators and members of the House of Representatives of a certain vintage. They really liked him. The key people at the Washington Post liked him, the owner Katherine Graham, the editor Ben Bradley. He was a people person. Whereas Lord Cromer was not. Cromer for example did not attend the weekly meetings of senior staff in the Embassy. It was always taken by the Minister, Richard Sykes at the beginning, who tragically was murdered by the IRA later.

I didn't meet Lord Cromer often, only about three times, I suppose, during the time he was Ambassador. I met him usually just bringing somebody in to see him, say, a journalist, introducing him and then leaving the room. Whereas Peter Ramsbotham was much more personal. He knew people, he got around, and he invited relatively junior people to his dinners. Lord Cromer wouldn't have thought of inviting me to a dinner. A couple of years later or so there was an IMF meeting in Washington, Lord Cromer by this time had gone back to business and private life. He came into the ballroom, I can see him now, at the Residence in Washington. There was a reception going on and he clearly didn't know many people and I went up to him and re-introduced myself and he remembered me and was very pleasant. I felt he was slightly lonely. So he was my second ambassador, but I ended up by working for five British Ambassadors in Washington.

MG: So you had two on this tour.

MB-B; Two on this tour, yes. Peter Ramsbotham's wife, Frances, was very nice too. He had a daughter who I think had been a musician. Sadly, she had had a car accident and was paraplegic. And one of the things I felt myself that was totally unjust was the way that Peter Ramsbotham was pushed out by Jim Callaghan who wanted Peter Jay to be the Ambassador, but that was after my time.

MG: You have got Harold Wilson down again, WGMS, what's that?

MB-B: Oh yes, that was an episode towards the end of my time. As First Secretary (Information) it was my job among other things to take senior visitors to interviews and arrange meetings with the press. By this time Wilson was the Chairman, I don't recall what the formal title was, of the D'Oyly Carte Opera. He had retired from being Prime Minister and he came out to Washington to raise the profile of D'Oyly Carte because I think their monopoly on productions of the Gilbert & Sullivan operas was at an end. For many years they were the only company allowed to perform.

Wilson's job was to raise their profile. He came out and I took him to WGMS, the Washington Good Music Station as it was called. To make sure that we got the right publicity I asked a reporter, Joy Billington from the Washington Star, to come with us. She is a British born woman who still lives in Washington. Her husband was a clergyman who by pure chance turned up later in my life, as the American vicar of the next village, which has Lord Spencer as the Patron of the Living. Be that as it may. She was in the car. Off we go to WGMS in the suburbs of Washington and on the way it's my job obviously to make a bit

of conversation with the visitor to put them at ease. So I started off by saying that I supposed Wilson had been to Washington many times before. In fact, I think he said it was his 26th visit in one capacity or another. After that it was like putting a record on. He just could not stop. He told me he was the youngest Cabinet Minister since Pitt. He told me he had answered many thousands of Parliamentary questions. All I had to do was nod. Meanwhile the reporter Joy Billington in the front seat was getting a bit bored with all this. She had her notebook there in case we wanted to say anything to her, but I thought we would talk to her in detail when we actually got to WGMS and she would hear the broadcast.

Suddenly Harold Wilson said that he was going to Windsor in the next week or so to get installed as a Knight of the Garter, and his banner was going to be hung in St. George's Chapel. So I said something suitable I suppose like 'a great honour, Sir Harold.' He agreed, but then said that the trouble with St George's Chapel (so this must have been autumn maybe even early winter) was that the heating had broken down and although they were trying to mend it, would not be working by the time of his installation. He then mentioned that he had asked Mary, his wife, to go out and buy him a pair of flesh-coloured tights from Marks & Spencer to wear under his Garter robes. Whereupon of course Joy Billington in the front seat, the reporter from the Star newspaper, started scribbling 'No! You mustn't print that!', I can hear Wilson saying, I can't imitate his accent. 'You mustn't print that!' So we then had this tremendous argument between Wilson and the reporter about Wilson not being recorded as being in flesh-coloured tights under his Garter Robes. We got to WGMS, the programme went well and on the way back there was another exchange about this. I was trying to pour oil on troubled waters and in the end we agreed that the story could be printed in the Washington Star but only after the Garter Ceremony was over. So that's what happened. I haven't got that cutting in my scrap book I must admit, but that farcical episode is indelibly burnt on my mind.

And something that did also impress me about Harold Wilson was how pleasant he was to me. I was just a junior official, I was a nobody really, but he asked where was I born and where did I go to school etc. I was born in a suburb of Liverpool near his constituency. He didn't know my father was a doctor there but he was interested. Whereas certain other people, not excluding Ted Heath, never said anything at all. Ted Heath sat next to my wife at a dinner once, this is another part of the story, and he hardly said two words to her the whole evening. He wasn't interested in women. I felt sad about it. But I got a good impression of Harold Wilson.

MG: He was meant to be a very clever man and he probably was. He got a bad press really, in the press, which made him out to be deceitful and sly but probably he was just a good political operator.

MB-B: Personally I thought he was one of our more successful Prime Ministers in one important way: he kept us out of the Vietnam War without wrecking our relationship with the United States. Unlike certain Prime Ministers of more recent vintage he didn't get himself into a war abroad. He managed to keep the Vietnam War at arm's length and I think that's a great credit to him.

MG: Tell me about where you and Chrystal were living throughout this time: you haven't told me about your domestic arrangements in Washington.

MB-B: We started off in a hotel where we had to stay while we were looking for a house. This was called the Alban Towers. It was a large, dull, oppressive, airless building known to everybody in the Embassy, because everybody at the Embassy had to start off there, as the 'Awful Towers' and we then looked for a house to rent. It took us quite a while to find a house within our rent allowance that was going to be within reasonable striking distance of the office. But eventually we found one, a modern house with central air conditioning and heating, a bit of a basement and a nice garden in Macomb Street: the area was called Wesley Heights, near the American University. I suggested to the office that the Embassy should buy it. I did this because the landlord who was called Joe Keller asked me when I moved in did I think the Embassy would like to buy this house? And I knew that the Embassy needed to buy some houses because renting was expensive. Whether the Government had the budget for that or not I wasn't sure, but we asked about it. We didn't get any reply. Then it was on the markets for $85,000. I suggested I could I buy it using a bank loan, paying the bank loan off with my rent allowance. At the end of my tour the Embassy could take over the house or we could sell it. The response was on the lines of 'Oh no, that's not allowed; that's filthy commerce. You can't do that.' This wasn't allowed at all under Treasury Rules or other reasons why the slightly entrepreneurial approach to these things couldn't happen. What happened eventually after our time was that the Embassy bought three houses, mine and the two next door, roughly the same size and vintage. Very good houses: but the Embassy paid $125,000 for each house.

So we lived in this convenient location. Harriet went to the local school, the Horace Mann School, down the road. She could go to school with her mum every day and walk there. My

son didn't go there. He needed to go somewhere else because he was nine. And so he went across the River to the Potomac School. Chrystal took him every day in our large shooting brake which we had bought, second hand, from a member of the Embassy who was going back home.

Our domestic arrangements, then, were very pleasant. We had to have some help in the house, however, because I was entertaining and meeting journalists a fair amount. Also official visitors quite often held meetings in the house. So we needed extra help. Before we left London I must have had an introduction from probably somebody in the Japan Society who told me that they knew a girl who was looking for a job. She could act as a babysitter cum au pair in the house. Well, that was a mistake! We engaged this young Japanese girl and her fare was paid by the taxpayer. She was with us for about nine months but she didn't really know anybody, she wasn't making any friends and then she fell into the hands of the Unification Church, aka the Moonies, and she wanted to leave us. Well, by this time we were unhappy with her anyway because she wasn't paying much attention to the children or helping them: so we agreed to part. Thereafter we had a number of other part-time helpers in the house, none of them lived in after that. One was a lady from Jamaica, another one was the Air Attaché's daughter who was looking for a sort of babysitter-cum-au pair type of job. That's how we ran our domestic arrangements.

We were entertaining quite a lot and I can remember trying to be too adventurous and ordering oysters for some supper we were having and then having to open the blooming oysters myself and cutting my hands to ribbons which was very stupid. But you learn things as you go along. It seemed like a good idea I suppose at the time. So our domestic arrangements on the whole were fine in Washington, but I found the job very demanding and at times quite stressful. This was because if you were a First Secretary in the Chancery, let us say, (and there were many excellent people in the Chancery who were obviously going to fly high in the Diplomatic Service) they didn't really have to talk to the demanding press and didn't get exposed to the public as I did every day. As a Chancery First Secretary you could talk to the press, nobody minded that. But you could be selective. Whereas with us we were exposed to everybody and anybody who claimed to know Lord Cromer or be a friend of Peter Ramsbotham or whomever. There were two ladies downstairs who stuffed envelopes with material about Britain and who answered routine questions about the Queen or whatever. But anything a bit more serious came to me. We took an immense number of phone calls. I

mean about every few minutes during the day I suppose. This was quite stressful and in the end, it undermined my health to some extent. I got a bad back and stomach issues.

MG: Is that how you came to move to Japan, because you went from Washington back to Japan in 1976? Did you ask to go, did you say that you wanted to go back to London and back or what?

MB-B: Well I had treatment for my bad back

MG: I remember you had had a bad back earlier when you had fallen over going in to the Bank.

MB-B: Yes that's right: the same thing had happened and I had a bad back. I was in hospital in Washington on traction and then I had a stomach ulcer, probably as a result of some stress, I should think, because the pressure was really remorseless: the pace of things you were expected to do. All the time you were on public display. And of course you were on a knife edge too because if you made a mistake and said something you shouldn't have said, it could be all over the papers the next day. However, I liked the job. It was certainly not dull. I greatly enjoyed it. It suited my personality in a way I suppose, but it did take its toll. Should we go to Japan now?

1st Secretary (Commercial), Tokyo, 1976–79

MG: Well I think that is where you go, I mean did you go straight without passing Go in London?

MB-B: Yes I went to, no I didn't go straight, I left Washington in August and had a bit of leave. So I recovered from the day-to-day rush of Washington and went out to Japan in October 1976.

MG: Can I just ask how you kept your Japanese up meanwhile? Had you been able to do anything of that kind?

MB-B: Not really, but I had been using it a bit. We had had Japanese students who had come to 'home stay' with us at our house in London. We got on to an agency I think that specialised in introducing young Japanese to British families so that we could look after them. The trouble with that was that they wanted to speak English, which didn't help our Japanese. Reiko, the girl in the sailor suit whom we had met on the road in Ibaraki Prefecture when the car went into the ditch or the drain, she had stayed with us at our home in Japan for

some time and had helped us there. One day after we had been back in the UK for a few months, she sent a telegram announcing she was coming to London and she stayed with us. So we kept up Japanese anyway one way or another. Not every day but we already had had five years living there so it sticks in your mind .It's a question really of polishing the language when you come back. And that's what I did.

MG: First Secretary it says, then Commercial Counsellor. What does that mean, it sounds very brainy and impressive.

MB-B: Well in the Embassy's Commercial Department in those days the man who ran it was the Counsellor Commercial. Underneath him were two First Secretaries who were the sort of stokers in the engine room, who did quite a lot of the work. And then the local staff worked for us basically. So there were two First Secretaries, one who dealt with consumer goods and one who dealt with capital goods. I was the one dealing with capital goods. The Counsellor was Ben Thorne who was from the Department of Trade and Industry. Our job was to promote Anglo-Japanese trade, that is British exports to Japan.

Before I started doing that, however, I was told that I would be required to accompany a delegation from UK aircraft industry, senior members of the Society of British Aerospace Manufacturers (SBAC). The idea was that they would go around looking for possible collaboration with Japanese companies on aircraft parts and indeed aircraft development. And they included some pretty heavyweight industrialists. I had just arrived in Tokyo and I had to go into my predecessor's house. I arrived at this house and I found it had furniture but nothing else in it. I didn't even have any blankets on the bed at first. The delegation from Britain led by Sir Robert Hunt from Dowty Engineering, was coming out within a matter of days. Well, the Embassy either didn't seem to want to pay too much attention to my comfort, or they didn't have any blankets or whatever the reason was. I was cold at night. I found one blanket in this house, and then had to sleep under newspapers to keep warm.

Well they arrived and there was besides Bob Hunt of Dowty, Roy Sisson the Chairman of Smiths Industries, Ralph Robins, who became the Chairman of Rolls Royce later on, and various other bigwigs from Britain looking for Anglo-Japanese industrial cooperation. The overall message that we were trying to get across to the Japanese at that time was that the Anglo-Japanese trade imbalance was too big and needed to be reduced. They were selling us far more things than we were selling them, and we needed to redress that balance. So most of

my time both as First Secretary and later as Counsellor was to do with trying to reduce this imbalance, and persuade the Japanese to dismantle trade barriers.

So I joined this SBAC group. We had this splendid bus, I had never seen one like it where instead of having, as you normally do, people seated sitting in pairs on this bus, each person had one rotating arm chair on either side and there was a little conference area in the back. We travelled around and we saw all sorts of factories and I got to know these industrialists really quite well. It was extremely tiring because I was doing quite a lot of interpretation and coming back to Japan after that absence of nearly seven years, it was, despite having practised a little bit, quite stressful to pick it up again and suddenly get back into the right frame of mind to do it. So that was my baptism of fire dealing with these people, who were fortunately a very pleasant, amusing group.

Then I started in the Embassy's Commercial Department proper, promoting British products to the Japanese. We supported British companies at exhibitions and looked for agents for them; we met incoming trade delegations from Chambers of Commerce et cetera.

Then I was told to join another delegation, this time taking Japanese car manufacturers to visit Britain, I think something that probably was the most far reaching of all my efforts to promote Britain abroad. What happened was that, again in the context of this Anglo-Japanese trade imbalance, we decided, the British Government did, that we must as a priority get the Japanese to buy more from us in the motor industry. So the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMM&T), invited their Japanese opposite numbers, the Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association, to send a delegation to investigate the possibility of buying car parts from the UK. Yours truly was assigned to accompany them. So I went off to Britain with the Japanese delegation and we took these motor manufacturers around, I can't remember how many now, but nine or ten factories in two weeks. I was absolutely pooped by the end of that! We went to every company of note. Dunlop, Lucas, Automotive Products, Ferodo, you name it, we were there, in their factory.

The delegation was led by Mr Nemoto. He was a senior director of Toyota Motors. Only one member of his delegation spoke English. But we had a professional interpreter and I was number 2 liaison officer and unofficial interpreter and that in itself was quite demanding. We had a well-run programme. I remember the first night we spent in the New Forest at the Chewton Glen Hotel which is very smart. We started off with a 5-star hotel and we seemed to go through 5-stars for most of the remaining days of the two week programme. One of my

jobs was to send word ahead to our hosts that the Japanese did not drink alcohol in the middle of the day so please would they a) cut out the alcohol and b) cut down the volume of food. When we got to these factories after Mr Nemoto was greeted by the senior management he always said that he would like to meet the Works Convener as he wanted to find out what the attitude of the Unions would be to dealing with Japanese. ... So our first meeting was almost always relating to Union matters. The Japanese had got it into their heads that Britain wasn't working, that the trade unions were over-powerful and that our productivity and general competence in trade was being undermined by poor industrial relations. We are talking now about 1977. So we had to try to get over that preconception.

We had some fun experiences. We went to a Motor Show I remember at the Birmingham Exhibition Centre and stayed in a hotel near there. Somebody over-ran their bath and caused a flood. There were things like that happening quite regularly. I was sorting out snafus of one kind or another, interpreting and generally trying to be helpful. We all got on like a house on fire. And the idea was that at the end of the tour we came to the conclusion that it would be helpful if the Japanese could start their new relationships with the British motor industry by buying car parts from us and putting our parts in their cars. Which is what they did. There was then a collaboration between British Leyland and Honda and I think that Honda car designs were used in the British cars or the other way around. But there was a general closing of relationships in the motor industry. And then later on that led to asking Nissan to open a factory, which they did in Sunderland. So I have always felt that I was 'in at the creation', as it were, of Anglo-Japanese collaboration in the motor industry which was quite stimulating at the time.

But there was a lot of opposition to it. Some people in the motor industry thought, at Leyland and so on, that all we would only act as metal-beaters for the Japanese and they wouldn't give us any high technology; that we wouldn't be involved in anything serious when it came to making the engines and so on. But actually it hasn't worked out like that at all. It has become a really good relationship. Certainly now with the Brexit problems some clouds have appeared. But, generally speaking, we have had a very successful time in the recent years with the Japanese motor industry and its investment in Britain.

MG: I should have asked who your Ambassador was when you went out there in October 76 and whether he was a Japanese speaker because in your earlier experience, one of them was and one of them wasn't.

MB-B: That's right, yes. Well, when I first went there the Ambassador was Michael Wilford. He was not a Japanese speaker. He was a very good golfer, which went down well with the Japanese business leaders and he spent quite a lot of time playing golf. If you can't speak Japanese you might as well play golf with them, so he made a lot of friends through his golf, because the Japanese are fanatical about the game. But not being a Japanese speaker, he wasn't well informed really about Japanese culture and things like that. Following him was Hugh Cortazzi who had been the Deputy Under-Secretary, the senior official at the Foreign Office dealing with the Far East and Japan. I worked for Hugh, and with Hugh, first as Ambassador and then afterwards when I went to the trading company, I was in touch with him quite regularly. Those two were very good Ambassadors, both of them in their very different ways.

Hugh Cortazzi was amazingly energetic. He was doing two things involving me: aiming to sell British products, helping to push British products; and at the same time attract Japanese investment into Britain. I used to go with him on various calls. Once, we called on the chairman of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries I remember and we were talking to them about some kind of investment in the UK. When Hugh Cortazzi and I got up to leave we stood and made our bows. Then as the Chairman bowed to us his trousers dropped down to his ankles. He seamlessly pulled his pants up. As we left to get in the car, Hugh said 'Did you see what I saw?' 'Yes.' And we were screaming with laughter in the car on the way back. I never dared tell anybody in Japan that this is what had happened with the boss of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. We went to quite a lot of these meetings with the industrialists and others whom we were trying to attract.

Have we got Margaret Thatcher's visit in here?

MG: No you have got Charles and Diana's wedding. Did Mrs Thatcher come out?

MB-B: Yes she came out in '79 quite soon after she became Prime Minister. And brought Sir Geoffrey Howe out with her. That went down very well. Of course there was a lot of interest in her. I got egg on my face because, usual thing, Merrick had to accompany the Chancellor of the Exchequer who would like to do a bit of shopping. We went to Mitsukoshi, the leading department store in Tokyo. So I'm there to interpret generally, ease the passage etc.

MG: Was it in the G7 times?

MB-B; G7 yes. So off we went to the Mitsukoshi Department Store where the all-powerful Mr Okada was the Chairman. Now Mr Okada had a huge ego. He used to publish books about his travels around the world and what a wonderful person he was. Well, being a diplomat, I, of course, was keen to make sure that Mr Okada was happy on all occasions since the more he bought from Britain the better both countries got to know each other. I can remember going to Okada's office with Geoffrey Howe and there was a print of the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1770-something on the wall. And there was a Gainsborough that was highlighted.in the print. But the actual, full sized, Gainsborough was also in the office. Mitsukoshi must have bought it for millions.

Pleasant chat with the usual refreshments. We had musk melon which was wildly expensive in Japan, grown by an Englishman first, as it happened, in the 19th century. A musk melon and weak tea. During the course of conversation Mr Okada produces a box and says something like 'I have got a souvenir for you Sir Geoffrey' and Geoffrey Howe said something to me. I didn't really hear what he was saying as I had dropped my napkin on the floor, so I bent down to pick it up and said 'mmm' which G. Howe took to be an indication of approval. He opened the box and said something like 'Oh Mr Okada what a lovely watch: thank you so much.' Visit ends. Everybody is happy. Incidentally we hadn't really intended to see Okada at all, there was supposed to be no call on the Chairman, it was just supposed to be buying souvenirs. But of course the word got out and the next thing was that Okada invited us to his office and so on.

We got back to the Embassy and met Michael Wilford. Geoffrey Howe says 'Okada gave me this, it's a very nice watch.'

'He gave you what?!' said Wilford. He gave me a thunderous look. 'Merrick, how did you allow the Chancellor to accept a watch from Mr Okada. You know that no presents are allowed.' Or words to that effect. Mrs Thatcher herself had turned down several kimonos apparently, and had said that her delegation could not accept presents. So I was in the doghouse and felt very embarrassed, partly because I hadn't been focussed at the time. I should have told Geoffrey Howe to accept the present but not to open it. You don't open presents in front of Japanese because if you don't like it, there might be some embarrassment. What he should have done was to thank him for the present and make no further comment. Then, when he got back to the Embassy and opened the box and found it was an expensive watch which you aren't allowed to accept, you could send a note of thanks explaining that

there are various Government rules which meant it had to be returned. But that didn't happen, he had already sold the pass by saying 'Oh Mr Okada what a lovely watch'.

Anyway, Geoffrey Howe bought me a tie with piranhas on it. He was Tie Man of the Year, apparently. I bought him one: his had white piranhas on blue background and mine had blue piranhas on a white background. After I got this rocket from Michael Wilford, we managed to save face by finding a photograph of Geoffrey Howe which he had signed. He must have had it with him and maybe he deprived somebody else of it. We put it in a silver frame and I took it down and handed it in to Mitsukoshi with a graceful note from him. So it was all right and face saved.

MG: We have British Export Marketing Centre. And the wedding, and then resignation which I am most intrigued by. So which comes first, the British Export Marketing Centre?

MB-B. I'll talk about the British Export Marketing Centre, yes. When Ted Heath was Prime Minister he had been to Japan and he wanted to make a big push to help redress this Anglo-Japanese trade imbalance that I have been talking about earlier.

MG: Can I just interrupt, is this a little bit like Trump and China?

MB-B: Yes, it's a bit like that in that sense. But not aggressive.   We weren't as bombastic, it seems, in our method of dealing with it. We hinted that things would get really difficult unless something was done. The Japanese were protecting their own market and not letting, for example, whisky in, at least not in the sort of quantities that we wanted: the Japanese liked whisky but always tried to protect their own producers, Suntory and people like that. And then their cars, they had all sorts of anti-pollution equipment on the cars which our cars didn't have and that was regarded by us as a non-tariff barrier. There were many regulations which made it difficult, not just for us but any foreigners, to sell things in Japan. So we had to do our best to break down those barriers and the way we chose to try to do it first was through collaboration, joint ventures and hence the aerospace mission and the motor car mission and so on.

The British Export Marketing Centre was started, as I was saying, by Ted Heath following his visit in September 1972. It was a building in Tokyo where we exclusively had exhibitions of British products. Something like six or seven a year, whether they were consumer goods, car parts, clothing, furniture, Ercol came I remember and exhibited their furniture and so on.

And this in itself was a pretty good way of getting into the Japanese market. It was very expensive because rents in Tokyo were extremely high.

We used to have a big reception at the beginning of each exhibition. Potential agents would be invited, potential purchasers of one kind or another. The opening reception had to have interpretation. The Japanese interpreter was called Mr Hanabusa and then quite often I did the Japanese into English interpretation, or one of my colleagues did it. So it was all done in two languages. Generally speaking it was very successful. The BEMC was managed by Alex Macmillan who came from the Department of Trade and Industry. He was very competent and very experienced in trade exhibitions of one kind or another. So he ran the British Export Marketing Centre day to day. My boss was Ben Thorne, also from the Department of Trade and Industry so the pair of them had that trade strong promotion background.

Counsellor (Commercial), Tokyo, 1979–82

Then Ben Thorne retired and I became the Commercial Counsellor in charge of the Commercial Department for the remainder of my time in Tokyo. That was from roughly speaking 1980 to 1982: I was Commercial Counsellor. The Marketing Centre was, I think, a pretty successful and imaginative venture. British business enjoyed going there, the Japanese liked to come, it was centrally placed in Tokyo. But then it moved to another part of the city a bit further away. Gradually the need for the BEMC disappeared as our products became better known in the market and more people got agents and found out more about operating in the Japanese market. But in its time I think it did a very good job.

The next thing that I remember vividly about my second posting in Japan was the extraordinary episode of the Prince of Wales' marriage in 1981. When we knew it was going to happen the Embassy planned a street party. The Embassy itself was on something like eight acres of land in the middle of Tokyo, I think it was once regarded as the most expensive area of regularly inhabited real estate on earth, I mean it was a terribly valuable piece of land for which we were paying a pittance in rent. We got the lease at the time of the Emperor Meiji in the 19th century. We backed him against the Tokugawa family who were the Shoguns at that time, the principal political clan in Japan. We had leased the compound, as it was called. And the street party was principally for Embassy staff and the British community, although the wedding itself was getting a great deal of publicity in Japan.

I was in my office one day when somebody said that NHK (the Japanese equivalent of the BBC), would like a British couple to talk about the Royal Wedding on television. Chrystal and I were the choice because we were the only couple in the Embassy at that time, I think, who had the experience to do that. So I got permission from the Ambassador and we left the street party in a car sent by NHK. When we got there, I recognised the newsreader who was called Obama, (curiously the same name as the US President and spelled the same). He read the news, the Huw Edwards of NHK. Mr Obama told us that they were having an extended news broadcast, dealing with the domestic political items and news from around the world in the first ten minutes, and the next 50 minutes would be about the Royal Wedding. Because of the time difference, NHK could show it live as an evening broadcast and they wanted Chrystal and I to talk about it. I suddenly realised that we were there not for five minutes but we were going to be there for half an hour, 40 minutes maybe, effectively commentating on the Royal Wedding. So I asked before we began, what sort of questions could we expect. Obama-san replied something like 'Oh well, for example, why is Lord Spencer wearing a grey morning coat?' Invariably, morning coats in Japan are dark coloured. I said 'Quite frankly I don't know, so don't ask me that question please!'

We had to work out the ground rules before we started because the idea was to show the Royal carriage going by and then Chrystal or I would make some comment about an aspect of the Royal Family's life. So we talked on those lines and it seemed to go quite successfully. But I was glad when it was over. One of the questions I remember we discussed was why was it that the Royal Family allowed some very senior members to fly aircraft and do things which were comparatively dangerous? Prince William of Gloucester, who had been posted to Japan as a diplomat, had been killed in an aircraft crash. Why had Prince William been allowed to fly an aircraft when it was obviously dangerous? This sort of thing. So we just said it was part of our Royal Family's tradition and people expected them to do things in the armed forces and so on. We didn't think any more about the interview and, went back to the street party. 'How did it go?' I was asked 'Oh it was all right,' I replied, hoping it was! Nobody had seen the television broadcast, nobody at all, they were all busy tanking back their gin and tonic and glasses of wine.

Next day, however, I was standing by a bus stop when a stranger said 'I saw you on television last night'. Then later on, I went to a party at the Okura Hotel to meet the new Chairman of some big company – it may have been Nissan or one of the car companies – and there was a receiving line. Everybody, it seemed, had seen Chrystal and me on the television.

We were suddenly a tremendously well-known couple. It was very unusual for two foreigners to speak Japanese and to do what we had done. I think I am right in saying that the television audience for that programme was something like 60 million people. The population of Japan was 127 million at the time or thereabouts. So we were briefly 'famous'. We couldn't go anywhere – on the bus, in the train, on the road, people were continually asking 'Weren't you on the television? I saw you on the television, oh we did enjoy the wedding.'– and all that kind of thing.

I had had experience earlier of the power of the media, because the BBC had come to me and asked if they could use me as a recipient of a telephone call from Heathrow, where payphones allowing calls abroad had just been installed. 'We thought we'd ring the furthest place we could think of which is you in Tokyo, Merrick, and just show how much talk you could get in for 50p.' So the person concerned was filmed ringing me at Heathrow. He dialled Tokyo and I picked up the phone: We had a chat lasting approximately 20 seconds before the money ran out. That worked out ok. It had all been set up, incidentally, by the Post Office in advance to make sure it didn't go wrong: but it worked. Within the next 12 hours I think we must have had 8 or 10 phone calls from Britain where people had noticed the numbers that the guy was dialling on the phone at Heathrow and then they rang us in Japan. I can remember one person rang - it was about 3 o'clock in the morning and said 'Hello is that China? Well, tell them it's raining in Britain.'

So we were involved in that type of public relations stuff. . I did a programme about Japan, a series about Japan for a programme called Pebble Mill at One, with a guy called Donny McCleod who was the presenter. We went round with him in Japan and I was talking to him about Japanese baths, Mount Fuji, food, weddings all sorts of experiences. So I was partly the Commercial Counsellor, partly the person who was called upon to do PR things like Prince Charles' wedding and Pebble Mill at One and things like that. It was slightly like a hangover from the Washington posting, doing the information side as well. Although there were younger people in the Embassy who were very good at Japanese and could do this just as well as me, I turned out to be the senior person to act as Embassy front man.

<u>Director, Cornes & Co., Tokyo, 1982–85</u>

MG: So how did you come to resign? I know you teetered on the brink of it earlier, you mentioned that.

MB-B: Well I had enjoyed Japan very much. I wasn't really sure where my career was going. I felt that I was a bit of a sort of, what do you call it? a one-trick pony or something. I mean Japan had been so much part of my life. I had been in America of course, as well, but nowhere else. Peter Hewett was the Chairman of a local trading company, Cornes & Company. This was part of a big group in Hong Kong called the Wheelock Marden Group run by John Marden. Peter asked me if would I like to join him and he hinted, well he more or less said it in terms, that when he retired I would take over as Chairman of the trading company. By that time Chrystal and I were extremely well dug into Japan. We had many friends in all walks of life. I hope it doesn't sound too sentimental to say I was in love with Japan. I said to Chrystal that if I never went back to Britain again it wouldn't bother me too much.

MG: Well you had been extremely torn when you were sent back before, you had really embedded yourself in Japan from the start.

MB-B: Yes we got in deep. We were really deeply embedded there. So, of course, Peter Hewett's proposition was extremely attractive and it was well paid because I was appointed a director of this trading company and had a contract with a percentage of the profits. I made more money in 4½ years with Cornes & Company than I had done the previous 20 with the Foreign Office. You were in a different ball game. Cornes were the agents for Rolls Royce motor cars. When I started with the company I didn't have a car, I had sold the car that I had used when I was at the Embassy. I asked Peter Hewett if I could I temporarily use a company car. He agreed. Then I got word the company's Honda Accord, was not available for me, because the car salesmen were using it to go to a golf tournament. But they would get another car for me from the garage in Yokohama. So I waited outside the back door of the building for this car to appear. It was a long-wheelbase Rolls Royce, an enormous vehicle with for some reason a steering wheel on the wrong side for Japan because the Japanese drive on the same side of the road as us. So I had to steer this blooming thing through the streets of Tokyo. That was quite a test of my driving skills.

MG: You have come full circle with your father!

MB-B: That's right, full circle! So later I had my own Roller anyway. Peter let me use a Rolls Royce and I had a driver who came sometimes: when Peter wasn't there I used his driver. Otherwise I drove myself. Working with Peter Hewett was one of the more unusual experiences I had. He had been in Japan since shortly after the Second World War with the

Occupation Forces and stayed after being demobbed. He had taken over the management of what was then a pretty derelict trading company, started in the 1860s by Frederick Cornes who brought in silk from Japan to Britain and sold them various other things. Of course like everything else in the Second World War the company went to pieces in 1945. He revived it.

Peter was a chain smoker, absolutely never stopped smoking. He had a small cylinder on his desk which was full of water. And he would be smoking and you would hear (phisszz) and into the cylinder goes one cigarette and out comes another. Hewett was a man of fixed views, usually rather right-wing. He had an office routine which was very clear. When we first started I stayed with him in his house in one of the suburbs of Tokyo while we were looking for somewhere to live; in fact, I lived next door to him in the end. He had a butler called Kosegawa-san and Hideko-san, a cook./housekeeper In the morning Peter would appear in the Cornes office in the centre of Tokyo at about 10 to half past. I found out this was because he was worried about being spied on by the tax man because he had told the authorities he was only part-time. At lunchtime, he had a sandwich. This was a small white sandwich with processed cheese inside it, cut in to four small squares and followed by a couple of dry martinis when he wasn't going out to a club for a bit of lunch with somebody. In the evening a lady in a kimono appeared, Mrs Kaga the widow of a former Embassy driver. She had some duties around the office at Cornes. But she would bring a tray in with a bottle of John Begg whisky, which Cornes promoted. Peter would pour a stiff one for himself and a stiff one for me. And by then, all he had had to eat usually were the tiny sandwiches, smoking the whole time. So after a while he had another Scotch and then he had another one. I decided that two was sufficient for me because they were pretty generous. And then at about 7 o'clock, he would ring down for the car and the driver, Mr Matsunaga, would bring up the Rolls.. Still smoking, Peter would get in the car and be driven to his house in the suburbs where I was staying with him. On arrival, and waiting at the entrance was Kosegawa-san the butler in some kind of uniform, carrying a tray with whisky and glasses.

Peter drank the most amazing quantity of whisky, yet I never saw him drunk. I couldn't do it, I couldn't do it at all really – not in that quantity. So dinner came and was usually cold meat, a tiny bit of bread, maybe a bit of fruit, and that was it. After dinner in comes Kosegawa-san, John Begg again, he put it down with the soda and I swear that Peter must have had seven or eight strong whiskies that evening before it was time to go to bed. He would reminisce about things, always smoking the whole time. He was quite a character in his way, and had

made a lot of money. Three weeks after I started he went back to London where he had a house in Edwardes Square. We got the news one day that he had suddenly collapsed and he died soon afterwards.

MG: I was going to ask you: did he live long because it doesn't sound a very healthy lifestyle?

MB-B: No it was a very unhealthy lifestyle. He died at the age of 62, leaving me as the putative future chairman of this company whose business was divided between trading and the insurance side. The leader of the insurance business was a Japanese called Takahara. Mr Takahara ran that with an iron hand. So, fortunately for me, the parent company agreed that he should take over. We had a wonderful funeral for Peter. He was cremated and his ashes were buried on the island of Hokkaido in the north where he had some friends. But I remember Takahara saying that this funeral was extremely expensive to arrange. It must have cost £20,000 if it cost a penny. And Takahara said 'Oh well we have to. You know, the customers are watching, the Bankers are looking, we have to put on a good show.'

Takahara was a most extraordinary character too. He had worked for Peter for 20 years, maybe more. He claimed to have been a purser on a Japanese aircraft carrier, and his unusual hobby was reading hands and telling fortunes. He told me that he had read the palms of kamikaze pilots and he claimed that some people extended their lifeline with a knife so they didn't have to go on the aircraft as they hadn't got a short lifeline. Whether this is true or not I have no idea, but that's what he said.

He was extremely susceptible to flattery. I can remember telling him that I'd been to the garage in Yokohama and had seen a car that would suit him very well. I said to TT – he was Tatsuo Takahara so we all called him TT – 'It's a Rolls Royce Phantom, lovely car, it is a little bit dated but I think it would suit you, as Chairman.' He spent, I calculated, the equivalent of £21,000 (in 1982) on that car, putting in a cocktail cabinet, new lambskin rugs and doing I don't know what else. He didn't really drink himself, but it was all to do with show and showing off the amount of money he'd made. The lavish spending at Cornes was quite the norm because they were making serious profits. These were the days of Japanese high prosperity, mind you, things don't happen like that nowadays I believe.

MG: What I think I need to get you to tell me is how your resignation was accepted, I mean was there concern in any way, did they ask you to see a psychiatrist or anything like that, and

how you got back because, you know, this is the first time I have ever come across anyone who has had a break in the middle.

MB-B: Yes. Well what happened there was that I decided that after my commercial experience in Japan, as a Counsellor and First Secretary at the Embassy, I'd like to continue doing something of that kind and build on it. The second thing was that I was very well dug into Japan as I have mentioned, but I wanted to know more about the Japanese character and their thinking processes and just get to know them even better. I had lots of friends. I had never worked with the Japanese except as a boss in the commercial side of the British Embassy. The expatriate staff were the bosses. The Japanese were the gofers, you know, doing the donkey work. I had never worked with the Japanese on equal terms so I went to John Whitehead who was the Embassy's Minister, number 2, and talked to him about all this. We agreed that I could go away for a few years and get the experience that I wanted provided it wasn't too long. There was never any fixed term put on it and no letter was every written saying that I could come back. It was just a verbal agreement between John Whitehead whom I knew, who was after his time as Minister in Tokyo, in charge of the administration of the Foreign Office. We had a lunch at a London Club and talked about it. I don't think up till then that many people, almost nobody, had actually resigned from the Diplomatic Service, as I did, and then came back again. It was unusual.

MG: So he treated it like a sabbatical period.

MB-B: Yes: in effect he treated it like a sabbatical. And it was up to me to make up my mind whether I wanted to come back or not some years. .

MG: So how did you make the decision that you did?

MB-B: Well I had this what I thought was a pretty good career in Cornes over four years, started another company called Infrared Engineering Japan , and various other things I had done which I enjoyed very much. I had been well paid. But about the third year I was there, the group in Hong Kong called Wheelock Marden who owned Cornes was taken over by a Hong Kong entrepreneur called Sir Y.K. Pao. He was at that time; I think I am right in saying, the world's largest private shipowner. His company, the Kowloon Wharf and Godown Company owned the tram in Hong Kong, the Kowloon Ferry and many buildings. YK, as he was known, had huge interests in Hong Kong. He was a director of the Standard Chartered Bank, and I think had helped to rescue it from some troubles in the past. He bought out John Marden.

So I was working for Y.K. Pao. What I didn't know at the time was that he had a Japanese son-in-law who was married to his daughter. I think he had given his daughter the controlling interest in Cornes and it became clear to me that so long as YK was the chairman of the Company I was not going to be the boss of Cornes. It was going to be Mr Watari (who is still the Chairman of Cornes to this day). I didn't resent that, it was just a fact of life. My relationship with YK was always good. He gave me an engraved silver salver when I left, at a lovely dinner in Hong Kong and thanked me very much and all that sort of thing. Before this happened I wrote to John Whitehead and asked if I could take advantage of our oral agreement that I come back provided it is 'not too long'. He wrote back saying: in essence 'Yes, we will have to go through various procedures of course, security and things like that, and the unions have got to be told. But if you want, if that's what you would like to do, then do it.' So I applied for reinstatement. I gave YK my notice and he installed his son in law as the Chairman of Cornes which has gone from strength to strength since then.

I have kept in touch with quite a lot of the employees there, most retired now. So it was all pretty good natured. I liked YK. He's dead now, but I respected him not only because he was one of the world's wealthiest men but because he listened. He had a son-in-law, another son-in-law, Mr. Chang, whom he appointed director of Cornes without consulting me or, more importantly, the Japanese chairman Takahara. Takahara came to me and made it clear that he did not like the idea of Mr Chang being Director. He lived in Hong Kong, he did not speak Japanese, he had very little interest or influence in Japan. I was asked to tell YK that and it would be in his interests for Mr Chang not to play too big a part in the affairs of Cornes & Co.

So I made an appointment to see YK. He used to come to Tokyo and borrow a flat owned by the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank. I went to see him in this flat and I put it to him in a way that I felt was best, which was to say that, as YK knew, foreigners were in a difficult position in Japan quite often. I was a foreigner, he was a foreigner. We were always regarded with a certain amount of suspicion by the Japanese, especially in business, leaving aside my friendships with people. I had to say that Mr Chang was not making the right impression on Japanese colleagues or the board of Cornes because they felt we could not have a proper meeting of directors without interpreters. They felt that because they didn't speak Chinese. Moreover, they didn't want a Chinese / Japanese interpreter at board meetings which took place in Japanese or English. Mr Chang's English wasn't great. YK listened to this, nodded and I thanked him for his time and cup of tea and I then went to see Sydney Giffard, who by

that time was the Ambassador in Tokyo. He succeeded Hugh Cortazzi, and I told him that if he heard that I had suddenly disappeared in a puff of smoke he would know that something had gone wrong between YK and me. I hoped it would not, but watch this space, or words to that effect. We never saw Mr Chang again in Japan. So that worked out quite well.

When I joined the company we had a party on the first day, in 1982 it would have been. And at the end of it, after everybody had had a few drinks, somebody said to me, ‘Baker-Bates-san, why have you left the esteemed bureaucracy to join this second-class trading company?’ We were second-class, but we were the top of the second division. We weren’t a Mitsubishi or Marubeni of Japan, we were second rung. But still it was a company with quite a lot of weight. I replied that I wanted to find out more about Japan. I wanted to build on the knowledge that I had. And life is about doing things, new adventures, doing things in new ways, new challenges. ‘So that’s why I have come to join you.’ And that went down ok. We had, I think anyway, a very successful time with Cornes. Everybody was very kind to me not least because Takahara-san and I used to decide people’s bonuses! I introduced people to their wives; I mean working in a relatively small Japanese company of that kind was quite an experience, which most foreigners don’t have. You marry them, and you bury them. One of our directors died and we all had to hammer a nail in his coffin. All sorts of extraordinary experiences.

Dep. High Commissioner and Counsellor (Commercial/Econ), Kuala Lumpur, 1986–89

MG: So how did you bring about the return? Did you go back to London?

MB-B: I went back to London, I asked John Whitehead if I could do that, and it was agreed. I got a letter back saying exceptionally you can come back. And you are to go to Kuala Lumpur to be the Deputy High Commissioner.

MG: What did you think of that?

MB-B: Well I thought that was rather exciting, it was something completely new. I didn’t know anything about Malaysia. So I was looking forward to that. I never went back to work in Japan in any capacity, and I was slightly sad about that. No, I had finished there, and that was the end of it.

MG: What, in any capacity, you didn’t go back as a visitor?

MB-B: Oh I have been back since, yes as a visitor, but not in any official capacity. It was made clear to me when I got to the Office that I wasn't going to be Ambassador in Japan.

MG: Because you had this sort of business experience it had sullied your purity?

MB-B: Yes, I think you have probably guessed right. I think maybe others would dispute this if it becomes public knowledge, but I was regarded as a bit of an eccentric, maybe even a lightweight because I was doing things that people didn't normally do, and moving from thing to thing. But nobody ever told me that however. The Foreign Office did not do that.

MG: It's not likely though because they made rather an exception for you, so they must have valued you, so I doubt that they thought you were a lightweight.

MB-B: But what happened was of course that I lost five years of seniority. But I was prepared to do that. Chrystal had decided anyway that our parents were getting old and she wanted to come home. We had never been in England while our children were at school so we wanted to go back, she wanted to go back. But, as I said earlier I kept saying to her, it wouldn't bother me if I never went back to Britain to live. I had been there, done that: I knew about it.

MG: So was Chrystal in England when you were doing this business or was she still with you in Japan?

MB-B: She was with us in Japan, very much so. She went to Kuala Lumpur with me as well.

MG: So you had just a year, no you didn't even have a year did you between coming back, being reinstated in December '85 and you went in January?

MB-B: I went to KL in February 1986.

MG: So she had just come back to touch base.

MB-B: To touch base, yes, yes. We had to do things all over again, we had to have security vetting all that sort of stuff.

MG: Well I think we had better leave it there and then that's a good place for us to start and the next time we should be able to start off with Kuala Lumpur because I imagine that Los Angeles is going to be quite interesting!

It is 29 May 2019 and Merrick Baker-Bates is recording the final instalment of his recollections of his life in the Diplomatic Service.

MG: We are in in early 1986 and you have arrived in Kuala Lumpur (KL) as Deputy High Commissioner: what was it like?

MB-B: Well I was recovering from a hernia operation. It was actually the third such operation I had had. When we got there we found that we had been allocated a large and rather beautiful house that belonged to the Government which had been refurbished in my honour, as it were, with a wall put around it and various things done inside the house. But it had no air conditioning except in the bedroom so it took us several weeks to get used to the climate which was hot and sticky with rain falling heavily most afternoons. At one point when I first arrived, I wondered whether actually I was going to be able to stick it because it was at times unpleasant in this house. The trouble with the air conditioning was that it made a tremendous noise at night so you had to get used to that as well. One way and another the first few weeks in KL were not much fun, not least because my father died as well and I had to go back home for his funeral after having been in KL only for a few weeks. Chrystal stayed behind. So getting used to it was quite difficult. Another factor was that my predecessor's staff, insofar as one could call them staff, it sounds a rather grand word for two Chinese ladies of uncertain age, were difficult. And I didn't realise until later that they were light-fingered. Things started disappearing; cufflinks given me by my grandmother on my wedding and things like that vanished. So we weren't in the best of moods for some of the time there.

After a few weeks, the High Commissioner, David Gilmour and his wife Lucille, a quite delightful couple (he went on to be the Permanent Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office and very sadly he died young soon after he retired), had one major task to perform before leave. This was to close the High Commissioner's Residence, a house called Carcosa which had been given us by the Malaysians on Independence. It had been built by Frank Swettenham, a colonial administrator at the end of the 19th century (after whom Port Swettenham was named, now known as Port Klang). The house was huge and as part of the general deterioration in our relationship with the Malaysians, which I will explain a bit more about, the Malaysians demanded the house back again. So we had no alternative but to agree to that. But we struck a bargain with them: they gave us some land in another part of the town and we built another High Commissioner's residence, not far away. And the land in the town

was for the office. So relations with Malaysia were still quite delicate. David Gilmour went on leave, leaving me as his Chargé d'Affaires. I had been there about three weeks.

Besides getting to know the senior Malaysians and such persons as I was new to the whole place, the major issue on my plate was to conclude a rural water project in which the British Government was about to invest some £60million of aid. It was run essentially by a company called Biwater and it was one of the biggest aid projects that we had, certainly in Malaysia. What I had to do was to take documents to the Malaysians, which effectively said we will give you the £60 million in aid and sign on the dotted line here and this is how we are trying to help you as it were. The crucial telegram confirming the £60 million came on a Friday afternoon and I was asked to get in touch with the Malaysians as soon as possible to tell them that we were agreeing to hand over the money and the project would then go ahead as planned. It had been in the pipeline for ages.

So on a Saturday morning when I had been there three weeks or so I needed to act. David Gilmour had by this time gone home for his bit of leave, and I had no car. So I thought I would get the office car. Well, the office car didn't exist because the driver, thinking the High Commissioner was not there had decided to take a holiday himself! I had no Malaysian driving licence at that time, so I was stuck and had to ring up one of the young First Secretaries in the Commercial Department and say to him could he very kindly help me with a bit of transport because I have to call on the Secretary General of the Treasury, that is to say the boss of the whole Malaysian Civil Service Treasury side, whose name was Tan Sri Thong (1930-2015). We found out where Tan Sri Thong lived and he wasn't all that far away, 10-15 minutes maybe from where I lived in KL so the pair of us got in Graham's car and off we went to see Tan Sri Thong, I with my briefcase with all the papers in asking him to sign stuff, and various legal things that he had to agree to. When we got to his house, we opened the gate and two enormous dogs appeared barking like mad, baring their teeth. W e retreated back behind the gate and closed it. And suddenly a window opened upstairs and a woman looked out. "Who are you?" "We're from the British High Commission" we shouted, and want to see Tan Sri Thong. We have got some papers for him. We made an appointment; would that be … is that alright? And she told us "He's on a sponsored run at the moment, I don't know when he'll be back. He didn't tell me you were coming". "Oh dear", I said, "Ok we'll come back later".

So with the dogs barking like mad we retreated back to Graham's car. I went back home, had my lunch, and then thought I had better get back to Tan Sri Thong's house again. Unfortunately I had no transport because Graham wanted to use his car for something else. I was vaguely aware of the route, but not wholly. So I thought what am I going to do? And the only thing I could think of at that time was to take my bicycle which had just arrived with my luggage, and go there on my bike. Putting the briefcase into a basket at the front, off I pedalled to Tan Sri Thong's house on my own.

All went well the second time. The dogs were under control and I sat in his living room and we talked about the project and the various things I was going to ask him to sign and so on. We concluded the deal there and then, £60 millions of taxpayers' money. And then as I got up to leave Thong said "I'll take you out to your car,. Where's your driver." And I said "I haven't actually got a driver Tan Sri Thong, I came on my bicycle". He didn't comment. He smiled and took me out to the bicycle and I pedalled home, just missing a violent rainstorm.

But it was clear that he was surprised to see the UK Deputy High Commissioner/ Chargé d'Affaires turn up at his house on a bicycle. This was, for me, a good move which I did not recognise at the time. What had happened was that they, the Malaysians, senior Malaysians, because of some difficulties which related to Buy British Last and I can talk a bit about that later, were extremely sensitive about what they considered a British neo-colonial attitudes lording it over the Malaysians, telling them what to do and generally being a bit superior in their attitude towards them. So the idea that the Deputy High Commissioner should ride a bicycle, when the only people who appeared to ride bicycles in Kuala Lumpur, though I did not know it at the time, were workers, pedlars, and people selling stuff from their bikes. But this story about me turning up on a bicycle soon got round Malaysian official circles even to the ears of Dr Mahathir. However, thereafter I had a special relationship with Tan Sri Thong, who always greeted me at parties, I could see him whenever I wanted, all that sort of thing. And I put it down to the fact that inadvertently I had somehow shown that I was just an ordinary person who wanted to do business with him in a perfectly equal way, and I wasn't a grand diplomat turning up in a car flying the Union Jack and all that sort of thing.

So that helped me personally quite a lot. The rural water project was a plus for us. Gradually we began to get on better terms with the Malaysians. Dr Mahathir was always difficult. The problem with Buy British Last was, the history books will tell you all about it, that there was still a rather neo-colonial relationship between Britain and Malaysia. The Tunku, Tunku

Abdul Rahman, and his successor Tun Razak, had a close relationship with Britain but Dr Mahathir was a different person altogether. He was not one of the aristocrats of Malaysia and he was, in effect, rather anti-British in many ways. He felt that we had taken Malaysia for granted and one of the difficulties had been that when his predecessor, I think it was his predecessor, Tun Razak, had a heart attack,: he went to London for treatment and died there. The hospital apparently made the Malaysians take his body out of the back door. They wouldn't allow them to collect it from the front of the hospital, where they had sent an ambulance. This rankled very much. Then there was a High Commissioner, Bill Bentley, whom I didn't know myself, but who, for some reason did not hit it off with Dr Mahathir. Bill Bentley sadly died in a boating accident some years later. He was later Ambassador to Norway. Bill apparently somehow got the wrong side of Dr Mahathir, over-emphasising the British contribution to Malaysia in the colonial era. And in the Emergency. One reason, also I heard, that he was shooting monkeys in the grounds of the High Commissioner's residence which apparently didn't go down well with the Malaysians.

The Malaysians wanted more flights to London for their national airline, MAS, and we didn't, British Airways didn't want that and we refused to do it. So there was a row about that. And generally speaking, there were a whole lot of things that came to a head and suddenly Dr Mahathir said I am fed up with the British, or words to this effect, and as far as I am concerned I am not giving them any more contracts, so it is Buy British Last. That was how it all started. By the time I got there, thanks to David Gilmour's patient diplomacy and one thing and another, things were much, much better and as a sign of that was we got the rural water project, which Dr Mahathir approved.

MG: In this rural water project, was it going to have British construction workers or was it going to be the native construction?

MB-B: It would be native construction I think, we were just putting in the money. We were putting in the money and the expertise, but maybe we provided engineers and that kind of thing. So that all went pretty well. But one always had to be very, very careful about how you behaved in public and making sure that nobody could take offence at anything you might possibly say: all that sort of thing.

In order to restore the relationship somewhat, a body called the British Malaysia Society had been started and a Malaysian British Society. The British Malaysia Society was headed by Lord Richardson who was a former Governor of the Bank of England and he had got a few

similar people together such as Peter Cazalet Deputy Chairman of BP who was one of various captains of British industry. They used to meet their Malaysian counterparts and the whole thing was designed to try and defuse any problems that might arise. If the Malaysians felt we were being arrogant or whatever, if there were difficulties, we would have a forum where these things could be talked through. For their side, the Malaysians had a series of pretty high-powered people as well and there was a chap ...

MG: It's not the chap that then they tried to frame.

MB-B: No that was Anwar. It will come to me in a moment, but the equivalent of Lord Richardson. - Tun Ismail Ali., former Governor of the Bank Negara. He and Lord Richardson got on very well. And fortunately for me I got on very well with him, because he was one of the people who heard about me on the bicycle. And he had a sort of joke about it – Did you come here on your bicycle Mr Baker-Bates? No, no I didn't. In fact I never rode my bicycle again after that incident because when it got round the British community some of them were quite snooty about it. They thought this was … British High Commissioner riding a bike, Good Lord! Actually, I had come from Japan where it was quite common for me to go, for us to go to the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo by bicycle because the traffic was so awful. Anyway, be that as it may.

So, the name of the game was to get, obviously, as much business as we could from the Malaysians. I had better just talk a bit about "Carcosa". We gave it back to the Malaysians, this remarkable house, and one of the reasons why they asked for it back was because, not only were we in bad odour with them for various other incidents but they didn't like the fact that the house looked down from the top of a hill, on the Malaysian Parliament, They thought this symbolically showed the British lording it over the Malaysia. David Gilmour and I closed the house up and it was fascinating checking the inventory. I personally didn't do it, one of the staff did that. It turned out, I heard, that there were nine silver tea services in the house. And what had happened was, apparently, that each High Commissioner would come and his wife would say we haven't got a silver tea service, we need a silver tea service. So they would send a silver tea service from London because nobody could find the previous one, locked away in some cupboard. So that by the time we came to clear the house and take the furniture out and all that, we found this collection of silver tea services which were sent back to London anyway because the era of the silver tea service had more or less passed. The last thing I did was I got a screwdriver and I removed the door knocker with David's

agreement, and we put it on the door of the new High Commissioner's Residence. It was a lion's head with a tongue that you banged. So that was that.

The rest of my time there I found very fascinating, because this was in a way rather old fashioned diplomacy. So much depended on personalities. You had to get on with people to get things done, well, you would have thought that was a statement of the obvious but unfortunately, in the past we had given the impression that we just expected the Malaysians to do what we said or acquiesce with what we said and in the end of course they rejected that. I joined the Golf Club, Dr Mahathir didn't play golf but it didn't matter, his deputy did and various other people and I used to play golf quite regularly with ministers.

MG: Had you played golf in Japan, because it is very important there?

MB-B: It is very important there but it was too expensive, so I am afraid I didn't. But I learnt to play in Malaysia on purpose because that was where you met everybody, at the Golf Club I had a test, you had to have a golf test to play at the Royal Selangor Golf Club. My sponsor was Francis Yeoh whose company was into all sorts of aspects of Malaysian business, in construction and house building. They had been particularly involved with building the new High Commissioner's residence. Francis Yeoh has risen in the hierarchy and is now a Tan Sri himself. He is also the Chairman of Wessex Water. They bought Wessex Water here, so recent pronouncements about nationalising this and that from the opposition have obviously caused fluttering in the dovecotes around there.

One day he rang me and said 'Right Merrick, it's time to have your golf test, I have got a member of the committee so turn up at 4 o'clock will you, and we'll play nine holes'. And the object of this was to see whether or not: a) I could hit the ball vaguely straight and: b) if I knew about golf etiquette and stuff. So I turned up, parked the car, somewhat nervously, and was introduced to the member of the Committee. I teed off, first drive, a frightful slice, slight pause 'Bong' the ball lands on the top of a car in the car park. So Francis Yeoh looked slightly grim and says, "now concentrate, Merrick, head down and just play through". Mercifully for me, the next shot went straight and I managed to get round four or five holes before again, mercifully, the heavens opened in a tremendous thunderstorm and the member of the committee said "That's all right, you've passed." I went back to have a couple of beers to calm my nerves.

The Golf Club was where the politics went on, a lot of it anyway. And the King was a former Sultan of Selangor, no, sorry, the Sultan of Jahore. The King was an avid golfer. I heard

from someone who knew him well that on average he played 26 holes a day. Whether that's the case I don't know. He was temperamental in the extreme. One day, for example, I had turned up at the Golf Club and stopped the car by the main entrance and was just taking my bag out before I droving into the car park and the Manager came rushing out and said 'Can you move please, can you move straight away'. I said 'Yes sure, but what's wrong?' 'You are in the King's line of sight and he doesn't like it.' Because the King was inside the Golf Club, he had looked out through the entrance door, realised he couldn't see the green with the flag fluttering and asked "who is that man with that car – get him out of the way!" So I had to move. Another time I was in a tournament with the King - anyone would think I was good at golf but I wasn't - I am a pretty poor player. But anyway, I was about, they call them flights, I was about flight 12. The King was playing with the Canadian High Commissioner. . Off we went and as we walked up to tee off, we noticed people coming back towards us. So we went to meet them and asked is there a problem? They said yes, the King has got into a bunker on the fifth hole. He took five shots to get out of it and said: This is no good; we'll all start again. So he had sent everybody back to the beginning.

He was always a very good host during our golfing trips to Jahore but I remember on one occasion, talking to a friend, and I asked "does anybody know where the loo is here?" And all of a sudden I heard the King's voice saying to one of the staff – "Show that man the gentleman's toilet" So I thought oh my God the walls here have ears, I have got to be careful. You had to be quite careful also how you behaved on the course itself. Even to the extent where I knew two expatriate ladies who asked if they could play through when some people, a foursome, were playing slowly in front of them. This was agreed, but the next thing we heard was that the two expatriate ladies were in danger of being kicked out of the Club because they had asked to play through a royal group, with the King's sister and her friends. So you never knew how far you were from a problem. It was a bit like Alice in Wonderland with some of the things that were going on there. I remember on one occasion, I don't know whether I am supposed to tell you the … but anyway we'll see. On another occasion the King, we heard, was playing with the Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry and he said I've got this awful sinus pain, I need some Sinutab, which was a pill you took in those days. Will you please tell the pilot of the MAS plane that is arriving this evening to bring some Sinutab with him. They didn't have it in Malaysia. So he flew it in from London but that meant the Secretary General had to stop playing golf and go and arrange all this, just walk off the golf course and do it all. It was very strange.

MG: So it was old fashioned in a lot of ways because he sounds like an absolute monarch which we haven't seen the like of here for a long time a bit like Henry VIII coming back.

MB-B: Yes. But fortunately we arranged it so that the kings in Malaysia only have terms of five years and they rotate, the kings rotate among the sultans. So the Sultan of Jahore was only going to be the King for five years.

The other thing you had to watch out for was the way you were dressed. When we went to present credentials, among the people who went in before us to get a medal from the King, was a senior policewoman. Apparently the King had taken exception to the angle at which her beret was presented.. He had taken her hat off and put it on again,. When it was my turn I had a morning coat which was far too tight for me, The High Commissioner was wearing morning dress as well. When we both went in for the ceremony I had to hold my breath and take my stomach in because I was determined to button up the morning coat. If I had opened it the King would surely have noticed straight away and reprimanded me.

MG: He might have tried to do it up for you!

MB-B: And then I would have had to let him!

MG: What else is there to talk about? Barlow and Chambers, you have got to tell me about Barlow and Chambers please.

MB-B: Again this happened when David Gilmour was away. . I was the Chargé d'Affaires for about six weeks when we had the Barlow and Chambers problem. They were two people who had been arrested for drug smuggling on arrival at Kuala Lumpur airport and subsequently been sentenced to death under Malaysian legislation. The object of our diplomacy was to try to get this sentence commuted to a term of imprisonment. It was really very difficult. The Consul bore the main brunt of this. He went to see them but I had to make representations to the relevant authorities in the Malaysian Government asking for clemency. Actually, I think they were living in Australia, but they were born in Britain and they still had British passports. So that was quite a saga and it was taken up by the British press because they were condemned to death and hanging was going to happen. People came out from the UK: Members of the House of Lords who were abolitionists, I am trying to remember the name of Lord whoever it was - Lord Avebury I think - he came out. I had to receive them all and explain what we were doing because obviously we weren't wanting to

show that we were pulling out every single stop we could to make sure this death sentence was not carried out. But unfortunately it was.

MG: So they were killed, they were executed?

MB-B: Yes and one of the most horrible things I ever saw in my life was their bodies coming out of the prison covered in a tarpaulin. I wasn't in the prison when the sentence was carried out. I don't know quite what happened after that, I can't remember now, but it was a very unpleasant … and David Gilmour was very cut up about it because he had made a tremendous effort, The execution actually took place after he got back to Kuala Lumpur. I was only partially involved with it. Someone subsequently wrote a play about them, I think and it's one of the reasons why if you go to Malaysia, what used to happen certainly, when you land at KL airport, the pilot says while you're all thinking about removing your seatbelts and getting your luggage, "Welcome to Kuala Lumpur, the penalty for smuggling drugs is death." And that was all he said, and so immediately after that people leave the plane and I suppose they leave all their drugs behind on the plane. But it was pretty grim one way and another.

MG: Who did succeed David Gilmour?

MB-B: Nick Spreckley was his name. Nick Spreckley whom I knew quite well because he was a Japanese language student before me and had been Ambassador to the Republic of Korea.

MG: And when would he have come out do you think, because you were there from 86 to 89?

MB-B: Yes. Well he came out I suppose about September 1986, something like that, he had all sorts of difficulties at the end, poor man.

MG: So tell me about your dealings with Dr Mahathir because he is, has been and continues to be a force of nature, getting his own way in lots of strange areas, including against Abdul Ibrahim who is now the Prime Minister and he is the President or vice versa and they are going to swap,

MB-B: Anwar, Anwar Ibrahim. Yes that's another very strange thing, the way all this happened you know. One day the guy's accused of sodomy and the next thing he's Deputy, He was Deputy Prime Minister when I arrived in '86, generally considered to be the person

who was going to succeed Dr Mahathir when he retired. But then he fell foul of Mahathir for whatever reason and it was all very difficult. Two spells of imprisonment followed but now he has been released.

MG: I think so, it's a bit like Putin and Medvedev they are going to swap over at some stage but they seem to be firm friends again which is quite surprising. But going back to then, how was the good Doctor?

MB-B: Nothing could happen of any substance without his approval. And this was particularly the case with commercial contracts. So you had to keep on the right side of Dr Mahathir otherwise it didn't happen. It didn't matter who else you went to see, he had the final word. And there were people who were, as it were, intermediaries between you and Dr Mahathir of whom, for us, the most helpful was a guy called Arumugam, known to everybody as Aru. He seemed to have the ear of Dr Mahathir and was very helpful. I think he is still quite a power in the land in Malaysia, but I haven't asked recently. . And there were various others who were helpful because you had to do things through these intermediaries all the time to get things going.

MG: Did you get to see him very much?

MB-B: I didn't see him very often but I had to go and see him on a few occasions. On one occasion, this was very typical, we were working towards a big defence contract with the Malaysians and unfortunately there was a programme on the television here, I think it was a BBC programme, about Malaysia which portrayed Dr Mahathir as a dictator and said several very uncomplimentary things about him. This programme was, I learnt through Arumugam, discussed at the Cabinet in Kuala Lumpur and there were calls for another Buy British Last. They thought it was another example of British arrogance towards Malaysia. After discussion with London, I went to see him, really to explain that the Government had no control over what the BBC broadcast, no editorial control of any kind over the BBC, even though of course the BBC's licence to broadcast and all that had to be approved by the Government and the amount of the licence fee.. So I called on him. I worked out how I was going to play it and I said to him first that I was very sorry this programme occurred. I could see it was extremely annoying for you and your colleagues to have these sorts of programmes coming on the BBC. But the best way to deal with it seems to me is to get another programme made which will show the world that actually Malaysia is in many ways more democratic than Britain. And what I meant by that was that it wasn't long since the gates had

gone up outside Downing Street, and people were being kept away – you couldn't walk up Downing Street and have your picture taken in front of the No. 10 door. But in Malaysia, at the right time of year, at the end of the fasting month, Ministers hold open house, there is no security whatsoever, you turn up, they give you refreshments – and this is not just High Commissioners and senior figures like that. This is the general public who will turn up at Ministers' houses and will be given hospitality. Dr Mahathir was just wandering around shaking people's hands, talking to them and, literally hundreds of people turn up at his house. I said if that isn't democracy in action, I don't know what is. We couldn't possibly do that in the UK, the police wouldn't let people do that in No. 10 and meet Mrs Thatcher. . So I think one ought to emphasise much more, I said to him, that open aspect of Malaysian society. And he nodded and took account of it all and it turned out later I heard from Arumugam that he was pleased with that conversation.

We didn't have a second Buy British Last. However, I don't think a film was ever made of the type that I had advocated but I felt there was a serious misunderstanding in London about how these things were viewed in Malaysia. It was too far away. Of course by that time I think Anwar Ibrahim was out of favour, I don't think he was actually in prison but it's a rather strange mixture of extreme openness and at the same time the use of quite oppressive legislation to deal with one's political opponents, which is still I think a feature of Malaysian life. And I found it very fascinating to watch this in action. You would see something in the paper and you would wonder what it meant. There were lots of things going on and you had to read between the lines and weigh up what does all this mean. . But the main object of our diplomacy there was to keep the Malaysians onside when it came to these contracts obviously. And Margaret Thatcher was very good at that. She got on well with Dr Mahathir.

MG: Did she come out to visit when you were there? How did that go?

MB-B: She came out once when I was Deputy… that went well. He liked her and he went back to Britain and had dinner with her at No. 10. He liked her because he respected people who were forceful and outspoken and she had not been associated with any 'colonial' ideas. If I wrote him a letter, Dr Mahathir, inviting him to dinner in Downing Street and … how did I phrase it … I phrased it in some way Dear Prime Minister, I have been asked to let you know that the Prime Minister would be delighted if you could lunch with her or something. And he didn't like the phraseology. He didn't like the idea 'to let him know' or something. There was wording in my letter which he didn't like. I heard about this from Arumugam. I

said I am terribly sorry but that is just a phrase we sometimes use in letters and has no hidden meaning. I am not ordering the Prime Minister about or anything like that, you know, Mrs Thatcher would be delighted if he could come, whichever way you want to put it. You had to be terribly careful even down to how you wrote such routine letters; you had to be careful to get the nuances right.

It helped me, too, that I had relatives who were classed as native Malays. Bumiputra they are called. What happened was a relative of my grandfather was recruited by the last Rajah of Sarawak, Vyner Brooke, (1874-1963), to be his Director of Commodities. He went out to Malaya and then to Sarawak in about 1912 and he lived there from 1912 to 1962. He died in Malaysia. During the war he was detained by the Japanese in a prison camp in Japan. His family and his descendants still live in Sarawak. Some of them are called Bates, some of them aren't. But it helped me in dealing with the Malaysians for me to be able to tell them that I had relatives who were Bumiputra Malaysians and I felt an affinity towards them and so on. I went to Sarawak several times, always in search of those big projects – building dams, building roads, airports, things like that. So Taylor Woodrow, Wimpey and those big companies, were always keen to get us to help them win contracts.

MG: So how did that all come to an end? Had you got to the stage when you could say what you wanted to do because at some stage the FCO stopped telling people where to go and gave them alternatives, or asked them what they would like to do. I don't know yet whether that occurred in your case?

MB-B: I was in a slightly strange position because, as you know, I had resigned from the Service and gone to work for Cornes & Company in Japan. Then I had said I would like to come back and the FCO had agreed. So I didn't really feel that I could, as it were, ask to go somewhere in particular because I had by my own way in the past, leaving, coming back again and so on. So I didn't ask for a particular posting. What I wanted to do was to be the Head of a Department in London because you could not get into senior grades in the Diplomatic Service without having been the Head of a Department in London and most of my career had been spent abroad. I had been in the UN Department in the late sixties and early seventies but since then I had only been serving abroad, I had been in Japan and in Malaysia. So when they rang me and asked if I would like to be Head of West Africa Department, I happy. So I packed up in Malaysia, went back to London and phoned the Office. I asked when I was to start in West Africa Department and they said 'Oh things have

changed a bit, old boy, don't call us, we'll call you. But that posting is off'. So I did nothing for three months, I was on gardening leave and wondering what on earth all this was about. I went to London to ask the people in the Personnel Department what had happened about the West Africa Department posting. And they said 'Oh the Minister didn't think you would be good with Africans'. So I said 'How does the Minister know that?' I had seen this Minister once .when she came out to Kuala Lumpur with some Parliamentary delegation and I briefed her about Malaysia.

MG: Would this have been Lynda Chalker?

MB-B: Yes. I said 'I don't want anybody to get the impression, or it to go on my record for some reason, that I don't like black people or that I am racialist (*sic*) or something of that kind because there's absolutely no, not even a scintilla of truth in that'. They said no, it was all right, on that score and that I should wait, something would turn up. So then having mooched around at home, feeling not very happy really, about all this, I became Head of the South America Department and told to see Robin Fern who was the Under-Secretary dealing with South America, later Ambassador in Spain. He was just about to move and go to Spain I think. And he said well you need to learn Spanish. So I said Ok, that's fine, I can do that. .

MG: I was going to say how is your Spanish?

MB-B: Well my Spanish was then non-existent. My Japanese was good, my French was all right, but my Spanish was not. They said that's ok you can go to Cuernavaca in Mexico and stay with a Mexican family and go to language school. . So I had some lessons first in London and then I went to Cuernavaca to the language school for a month. I can't say I really enjoyed it because to learn a language you have got to be living properly in the country, in my opinion - y experience anyway. And I knew that I could do languages, it was just a question of organizing it the right way.

I came back to London, Head of the South America Department, got myself stuck in there, got to know the Ambassadors, very nice people. All the Ambassadors and their staff, needless to say spoke perfect English, so my Spanish wasn't really necessary and wouldn't have been necessary until I was posted to a South American country when I would have redoubled my efforts. And after doing that for a year, and having got my feet under the table, one day David Gilmour, who was by this time the Permanent Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office, came into my office and sat down on the sofa for a chat about old times, in Kuala Lumpur and how was his wife and all that sort of thing. And then I asked him did he know

what was all that about me and the West Africa Department? ‘Oh no, there is nothing ad hominem’, I can remember him using the Latin phrase, there was nothing ad hominem about it. It was just that the Minister wanted to be able to say “I want a woman to do this job” but she couldn’t in case you sued her. That had happened earlier on with another case, the other way round, where there was a very able woman. She had been appointed to a job in Africa and the High Commissioner had said “Oh we can’t have that, a woman is no good for this job” She had sued the Office for discrimination. My discomfort in it was all tied up with this sort of thing.

Anyway it worked out ok. I was there as Head of the South America Department. My boss, the new Under-Secretary was Adrian Beamish, whom I knew well. Adrian had been Ambassador in Peru. He was my age. He had also been the Head of the Falkland Islands Department just after the conflict I think. Having been the Head of the South America Department for a year, I suddenly was told one day oh we are having a change and we are making a new Department, it’s going to be called the South Atlantic and Antarctic Department and you will be the Head of that, so forget about South America. So I had to say goodbye to all the Ambassadors I had been working with, and their staff members and they were a bit baffled I think by all this. Anyway Baker-Bates disappears and re-emerges on a different stage which was connected with Antarctica and with the Falkland Islands and was, in effect, the main vehicle for negotiating with the Argentines about the Falkland Islands and particularly the problems of fish and oil around the Islands s. That’s how that happened. So you always have to be prepared!

Head of South Atlantic and Antarctic Dept, FCO, and Commissioner, British Antarctic Territory, 1989–92

MG: Did you go there?

MB-B: I went there yes, I went there. Once but not to Antarctica. , I haven’t been to the Hebrides, but I am told the Falklands are rather like the Hebrides. Very few trees, lot of wind. I went with Tristan Garel-Jones who was the Minister of State dealing with that part of the world who told me, that he regarded the countryside as “somewhere to wipe my feet when I get out of my BMW”. But that’s the way he used to talk, he just liked to shock a little. Wonderful Spanish speaker, I mean bilingual, tremendous asset to the Office. So I started on that whole new ballgame and one day, this is how the Foreign Office works, I had been there about six weeks or so , and somebody said to me “ Are you ready to be sworn in?”

I said 'For what?' And they said 'Well you're the Commissioner for the British Antarctic Territory and you will therefore be governing Antarctica from London'. So a High Court Justice I think called Sir Renne Davis came, I think he had been, maybe he was a Colonial Judge, but anyway, he came to the FCO and swore me in. I swore two oaths to be loyal to Her Majesty and then to interpret the laws of the Falkland Islands and Antarctica according to blah blah blah. And that was that. And as with all these things, nobody ever really told me before I took the oaths what it was all about – what I was supposed to be doing.

I was however greatly helped by the fact that there was the Polar Regions Section inside this new Department. So we had the South Atlantic and Antarctic Department with the Polar Regions Section in it and then the Department itself dealt with the Falkland Islands, Ascension, Tristan da Cunha and St Helena. That was my little empire. So having been sworn in I then went to talk to the Head of the Polar Regions Section, John Heap – The Dr. Heap was a tremendous expert on Antarctica. In fact at that time, I think I am right in saying there had only been since the early 1940s, four Heads of the Polar Regions Section. All serious experts. He was the fourth. It was essentially a Home Civil Service job dealing with Antarctica and John was the dominant figure. He was a very nice guy, sadly no longer with us. We got on well and he was very helpful. He spent most of his times, as far as I could see, travelling around international conferences discussing Polar affairs. I mean he had a travel allowance in those days of £60,000 a year for him and his colleagues. He was really travelling around, it was just amazing. That budget was a lot of money for those days.

The nub of the whole thing was the Antarctic Treaty of 1959 and whether or not it should be revised, or at least a protocol attached to it, to deal with the issue of mineral exploitation in Antarctica. The Foreign Office's position was that we needed rules governing minerals exploitation, should that ever have to happen, and it wouldn't have to happen hopefully so long as we could dig coal and whatever minerals we had to exploit\t from other places. But if we were desperate and civilization depended on it, as it were, then we would have to go to Antarctica and start mining. And to do that we needed rules. This was twisted by various interested parties, not least non-governmental organisations, into "the Foreign Office wants to dig up Antarctica," as do the Department of the Environment, and that Secretary of State Michael Heseltine was quite keen on it and comments like that.

So there was a row about that. John Heap was much involved in it. Eventually, to cut a long story short, a Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty was agreed, John Heap played quite a part in

that going to innumerable meetings usually in far flung parts and staying six weeks even eight weeks. What the Protocol (1991) did was guarantee that there would be no commercial minerals exploitation in Antarctica without the agreement of all the States Parties to the Antarctic Treaty and since that wasn't going to happen because the Australians and the New Zealanders were dead against it particularly, effectively it meant that there would be no digging for coal, as it were, in Antarctica. John spent a lot of time, I think he was in Buenos Aires at a conference which finalized this, sent me enormous communications, pages and pages of stuff about who said what and this that and the other. I was trying to digest this stuff at long range and I went round to see Tristan Garel-Jones and told him we had finally got agreement to this Protocol so this is at least a plus for us, that's for sure. It wasn't what we wanted in the first place but we have changed, we've adapted and this is the compromise. And he said something to the effect "well don't give me the detail," I can hear him now saying; "Don't give me the detail, Merrick, I have got to go down to the House and tell them this was a triumph for British diplomacy". Well, it was a triumph for British diplomacy but we were just one major player along with all the other people, the Australians, the New Zealanders, the Americans, even the Argentines were all interested and it is not just a British thing. But this is how I projected it. Great triumph for British diplomacy and Dr Heap in particular. So that was fun. We got that Protocol out of the way. During the course of doing that we had been subjected to an absolutely relentless campaign of lobbying by Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, and even the Women's Institute who all got the idea that the Foreign Office's policy was to mine in Antarctica. It got to such an extent I was at home and I opened the Sunday newspaper and at the bottom of the front page, I think it may have been the Sunday Times, was an advertisement for Friends of the Earth saying more or less "Don't dig up Antarctica. The Foreign Office wants to dig up Antarctica. If you oppose this ring this number." And I looked – it was the phone number of my office.

I went down to London on a Sunday evening and took the phone off the hook because I thought Monday morning is going to be busy! We got hundreds of letters, also, just from ordinary people. I went to Adrian Beamish and said look I think we ought to deal with this in some way. Why don't we just have our own postcard printed saying something like "Thank you very much for your communication about Antarctica, I am afraid it was one of those that we were unable to give a substantive response to" – something like that. Anyway that lobbying campaign came to an end because we had the Treaty, the Protocol. John Heap had

played a very good part in that. But it wasn't a triumph for British diplomacy, it was a triumph for everybody concerned, to be quite honest.

The other aspect of the Department was dealing with St Helena, Tristan da Cunha and Ascension, each of which had separate problems. On Ascension we had an Administrator called John Beale who was, putting it mildly, difficult to handle. The trouble with being the Administrator of Ascension from our point of view, was that you do have, or did in those days, all sorts of special powers that you could use in your Bailiwick. One day a lady who was in the hospital sadly died in childbirth and the rumour went round that the anaesthetist at the hospital had made a mistake and was the worse for wear because of drink. He had been at dinner with the Administrator, had left the dinner to go to the hospital, that's as I heard it, and the lady died. So we got a message to this effect and then we said there had to be an inquest presumably. I rang up John Beale. And he said "Yes, I'll take the inquest, I have those powers", which he did as Administrator. Well there was an inquest that lasted less than three hours, and its verdict was death by misadventure - end of story.

Unfortunately for me, in one sense, but perhaps fortunately in another, my sister in law, Myrtle Ashmole and her husband Philip Ashmole, were regular visitors to Ascension (They are two experts on the flora and fauna of the South Atlantic islands.) So Philip and Myrtle told me that people on the island were unhappy at the way this inquest had been conducted and something had to be done about it. So we went back and forward on this and in the end Ministers agreed that there would a second inquest and who better to take it than Sir Monty Levine, the London Coroner who had done the inquest on the Marchioness/Bowbelle disaster on the Thames in 1989 So £20,000 later he goes out there, he holds another inquest. I don't know for how long he was there, but he was there for quite some time. He went into the incident in great detail and he concluded that: a) the anaesthetist was not drunk; and b) but he had made mistakes and it was a medical errors that had occurred. There was nothing tremendously untoward, it was just a sad accident. I don't know what happened after that, I would have to look it up. But I was not further involved.

There was a regular flight from Brize Norton to Stanley in the Falklands that used to stop at Ascension. It took about I think eight or nine hours to get to Ascension and then another eight hours or so to get to the Falklands. People were sometimes stuck on Ascension for more than 24 hours, and this happened quite regularly because the plane broke down and other delays occurred . John Beale decreed that such passengers, would be entitled to use the

so-called Exiles Club, which was an expatriate club, (well there weren't any natives on Ascension, only Americans and South Africans and Brits there). He had apparently put up an ordinance to that effect on some notice board. Well this again annoyed everybody because the regular members of the Club felt he had just over-ridden them completely and any Tom, Dick or Harry could join this Club if they were marooned on Ascension for a couple of days. So there was a great row about that. The BBC in particular objected and they got on to the Office, via News Department and the Head of that Department rang me and said the BBC are up in arms. This Administrator is throwing his weight around. So I rang up John Beale and said "John, there is a bit of a problem here" and explained to him that there were complaints at the London end People were clearly unhappy about this ordinance but I understood from what they told me, that there was quite a lot of opposition on Ascension. John replied to the effect that John Major had declared a classless society in Britain and he, Beale, was declaring a classless society in Ascension and why was I beefing about it? So, there was no winning.

So then, fortunately for me, John Beale's tenure was coming to an end and we were preparing for him to welcome his successor, Brian Connolly who is, I am glad to say, a great friend of mine and lives near here and I see him pretty regularly. I briefed Brian before he went. Brian was well aware of the difficulties with John Beale, and off he went to Ascension. It was only later that I found out what happened. I had been to Ascension myself by the way, on the way to the Falklands so I had got a feel for the place. When Connolly got there he was met by John Beale at the airport and Beale took him to a guest house where he said, he was going to spend the night. He expected Beale to be around in the morning to brief him on what was happening on Ascension and meet people. So Beale says good night, the Connollys go to bed, then in the morning they looked out of the window and they couldn't see very much around. Ascension is effectively a volcano, with a lot of sort of ash around the place, and not very much to see. So Brian then decided he had better get hold of somebody. He found a telephone in this guest house with a list of addressees in it, and one of them was that of he Harbour Master. So he picked up the phone and dialed the relevant number and spoke to the Harbourmaster, and explained who he was. 'Where is John Beale' asked Brian Connolly? And the answer to that was that Mr. Beale was at sea. If he looked out of the window, he would see Mr Beale, by which he meant that he was onboard the SS St Helena steaming away from the island on his way home. He had just left without a word to Brian who could see the ship out of the window. So Brian was on his own, no briefing of any kind.

MG: Which of these islands is the one where they have recently built a landing strip or an airport and we got it wrong and they can't use it because of the winds?

MB-B: That's St Helena.

MG: You weren't involved in that, were you? Because they built the runway the wrong way or something.

MB-B: No, no, no! I don't know whether they can use bits of it now, I am not really au fait with that. But in my day the Ministry of Overseas Development or whatever they were called resolutely refused to pay for an airport on St Helena. They said, there just would not be a demand for it, the population of St Helena is only about 5,000 I think. And it's not a place where many tourists are going to come. You have got Napoleon's house and Jacob's Ladder which I am told is the longest staircase in the world. But really it is not a place where people visit. The other problem was that there were no marketable fish to exploit around St Helena, no viable fishery either. So the idea of having an airfield was continuously turned down by the ODA. At some point in the last ten years somebody must have decided that an airport would be a good idea so they changed their mind. When I was involved in 1990, they launched the RMS St Helena. So they had the ship, but the ship was coming to an end of its life after 20 years I suppose. Hence the idea of an airfield.

MG: Yes the prevailing wind, the planes couldn't land or take off, one or the other, it is too dangerous.

MB-B: But there is a limited service I am told now because one of my friends round here, David Smallman, is a former Governor of St Helena and he's au fait with all that.

MG: Tristan da Cunha, what happened there, why was that in the headlines?

MB-B: Tristan da Cunha is a volcano and it had erupted in the recent past and all the inhabitants had to be removed, mostly to the UK. Most returned to Tristan eventually. The alcoholic consumption per head in Tristan I one of s the highest in the world, or was: a tremendous amount of drinking was going on, unfortunately. Tristan's economy was in the grip of a company called the South Atlantic Islands Development Corporation which was based in South Africa. The SAIDC had been given a lease of so many years to exploit crayfish around Tristan and that crayfish licence which was extremely lucrative. I think the island has benefited a bit from that. But it was quite clear to us that the South Atlantic Islands Development Corporation could see that their lease was coming to an end and they

therefore getting as many crayfish as they possibly could out of it. We were worried that they were going to fish it out. I don't think they have in the end but there was a lot of angst and trouble about that, and various personalities involved, including a former Administrator of Tristan, now deceased, who turned out to be a major shareholder in the South Atlantic Islands Development Corporation. It was really rather extraordinary. The best story about Tristan, which did not happen in my time and whether or not its apocryphal I don't know and perhaps we had better not include this but I tell you for fun. The story is that you could only communicate, and in my day it was the same, by a rather bad radio telephone with Tristan, or almost all communications came via Morse code to Cape Town, who relayed it to somewhere in London and then that was turned in to plain words and circulated round Whitehall as a telegram. So this telegram comes in having been sent by Morse code, which says that a group of " Armenian terrorists" had landed on Tristan and were demanding repairs to their yachts and, they had come on two yachts apparently, and they needed food Actually there wasn't all that much food in Tristan because there were about 350 inhabitants and they relied on ships coming about every two months or so with supplies. So what were they to do about it? And at the London end, people have always been concerned that criminal groups would somehow establish themselves on these outlying islands, particularly drug smugglers. So a panic button was pressed and somebody agreed, that the so-called West Indies Guard Ship, WIGS it's known as, should be sent down from the Caribbean with marines on board to go to Tristan, it was I think a four or five days sailing, to get there to investigate what was happening. And the relevant Head of the Department of those days was told to get hold of the Administrator on the radio telephone and see if he could get some sense out of him, but the reception was always very poor. So he rang the Administrator from London and asked him are you alone, was everything all right, that sort of thing. And the Administrator said Yes, everything is ok here. "Well", said the man at the London end, "I am sorry about these visitors you've had" but he was talking rather cagily. "Yes it is a bit of a nuisance" came the reply. They had a conversation anyway. And then after they had put the phone down the Administrator went back and looked at his communications and he sent back another telegram which said something like "My immediately preceding telegram for Armenian terrorists read American tourists." And all this so called emergency at the London end had been built up in a most dramatic way. But that didn't happen in my time and whether it is apocryphal or not I just don't know.

So there was always something with those islands. For example, I was at home one weekend when I got a phone call from the Governor of St Helena, to say that there was a suspicious looking ship lurking outside. They wondered if it ought to be investigated and would I contact Customs and Excise here to see whether they knew anything about the ship. And they did indeed. They had been watching carefully it apparently. And the people from Customs & Excise here rang me and asked me instruct the Governor to seize the ship and search it. So how the Governor did it I am not quite sure, I don't think he even had a policeman. Anyway we sent a fax from here saying please investigate said ship and he came back the next day saying this was "the biggest thing to hit St Helena since Napoleon." They had found that the was loaded up with drugs. And we were of course delighted about that and Customs & Excise were very happy and so on. This was at Christmas.

After Christmas there was a meeting in London that I went to where everybody was congratulating everybody else on finding these drugs. Then somebody realized that they were going to have to send lawyers and interpreters out. The crew were under arrest and lawyers were going have to get to St Helena and the cost of that would be high. Then they would have to send what they called 'Rummagers' expert people who are going to tear this ship apart to see if there were more drugs inside the hull etc. . So the Rummagers have to go out there. And the whole thing was costing a fortune. I went to the Minister, Tristan Garel-Jones, and said this affair is going to be £60,000 or something like that. . We hadn't got any budget for it. Moreover, it was going to take weeks for them to get out to St. Helena. We were going to have to ask for money from the Treasury's Contingency Reserve.

So the crew were in custody but in the end they brought them all back here as it was cheaper to hold the court case in this country than it was to send all those people out – the Judge and interpreters etc, to St Helena.

Consul-General, Los Angeles, 1992–97

MG: You think they're out of the way but clearly they're not. Your final posting, you have said 1992, June to 1997, December – Los Angeles, but you haven't said what your role was. You told me how in Geneva there were two Ambassadors or something, so why does Los Angeles have its own set up?

MB-B: The United States, and other the major countries where there were important British interests, needed "mini Ambassadors" because of the size of the country. The Ambassador in Washington was essentially concerned with the Administration, with what went on in the

Congress, on the Hill as they call it, and receiving visitors of one kind or another, particularly Ministers coming out who had special talks with their opposite numbers in Washington or possibly in New York. The Ambassador couldn't get out to major cities outside very often so they had to appoint local Heads of Mission, styled Consuls-General, who were in effect mini-ambassadors of lower rank but still of Senior Grade rank, in several major cities. Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago and New York of course. So in Los Angeles, we had a consular area covering southern California and neighbouring states, which was effectively Los Angeles, Utah, Clark County in Nevada which meant Las Vegas, plus Arizona, Hawaii, Guam and the Marshall Islands, which I never went to as they were half way across the Pacific. So I dealt with that area. In 1992 California had an economy bigger than China. It won't be now but it will still be very, very large. In my area Hollywood was a major factor. McDonnell-Douglas still made aircraft in the Long Beach area and there was major industrial and scientific research going on. There was San Diego, a major biotechnology centre, where all sorts of stuff going was going on The job was to first of all, help the promotion of British exports to California, then to look at getting Californian companies to set up in the UK, the attraction of inward investment to this country. Then it was getting the studios to make films here. The first one I was involved in with was called Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. And that made something like $30million for Britain. We have got some very good technicians, sound mixers, photographers, film makers, these sort of people. And of course the English language. So that was really what the job was about. Also, California is a place where there is an awful lot of wealthy people and Los Angeles has plenty And British charities, not least Oxford and Cambridge colleges and people like that want to see if they can get some of the action.

So the Consul-General's job was to try to cover that huge area. You see I had in my parish, I think I had the second, largest city in the United States, the third, no the fourth largest city was Phoenix Arizona and San Diego was huge too. So when it came to creating a league table of posts which were important to the UK, of course the principal one in those days was Washington, then Moscow, Paris, Bonn as it was in those days. Los Angeles came 23rd, which wasn't bad and the reason why it wasn't higher on the list was that Los Angeles had no vote at the United Nations. So it was quite an important place for British interests and there was a constant stream of visitors.

MG: So, for example?

MB-B: Well, we had visits from every member of the Royal family except the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester as I recall. Prince Michael of Kent was regular, the Prince of Wales came. We had the UK-LA Festival, and the Prince of Wales came to open that. The Duke of York came regularly. He was involved in raising money for the Duxford Air Museum and to do that he wanted to harness various film stars who had served in the Second World War. Charlton Heston among them, and we helped him do that. I remember going to a lunch in Orange County once which was part of this fund-raising for the Duxford Air Museum. Charlton Heston was there and Jimmy Stewart, remember him from the 1950s?

MG: Had he flown out of Duxford because he was in the USAF, he did fly didn't he?

MB-B: He did fly, I think he might have done. He was a Squadron Leader I think. Chrystal had travelled down to Orange County by car. I flew down in a helicopter with one engine and the Duke of York flew in one with two engines – the way these things work is wonderful – and afterwards somebody said "How are you getting back"? And I said I think I'm probably going in the Office car because I don't think the helicopter is available. It turned out, however, that I could get the helicopter back. So I clambered into this helicopter and saw that it was being flown by, I am bad at names at the moment, the guy, the astronaut, an astronaut who had been on the Moon … Buzz Aldrin that's the guy. He was around LA quite a bit.

MG: So you felt in safe hands!

MB-B: Yes in safe hands and as I was sitting there putting on the headphones, the door slides back and in jumps Charlton Heston, because we used to see him quite a bit too. So he jumped in and off we went. We are going to Santa Monica, Ok, said Aldrin. Yes right, I replied. As we flew away, it's not very far, it's only about 60 miles or something, we're approaching Los Angeles Airport, known as LAX and a voice comes out over the radio saying Have you got permission to cross this Airfield?

Well yes, yes said Aldrin.

Well I don't think you have said the voice on the radio and just taking off below you is a 747 so watch out, it's got quite a slipstream"!

Charlton Heston says well, with an astronaut flying and Moses in the back we've got to be alright. So we got to Santa Monica Airport and he dropped us off there. And then I took Charlton Heston home in my car because I had got the Office car to meet me at Santa Monica

Airport. And he told me some wonderful stories, one about Marion Davis, who was the mistress of Randolph Hearst, the millionaire newspaper proprietor and how when he first arrived in Hollywood in the late 1940s or early 50s, he met her. He went to see her at her house and was very impressed that she had an Egyptian sarcophagus outside her front door which was kept perpetually full of bottles of champagne and ice. So she enjoyed herself. And then he told me a wonderful story about how Marion Davis got earache and summoned the doctor, some young doctor who happened to be Charlton Heston's doctor as well. The doctor said to him how he was summoned by Miss Davis and when I got to the house, he said, I was shown up to her bedroom. There she was lying in the middle of this huge bed and she says to me "I can't get up, my ear is terrible, come across the bed."   So he had to clamber across the bed to look in her ear. Whereupon suddenly the door is flung open and William Randolph Hearst shouts "what the hell are you doing on my wife's bed!" So there was a row about that. He was full of stories of this kind going on.

So those encounters with interesting personalities made Los Angeles, for me, a fascinating post. You got so many visitors. In our last six weeks, I was talking to Chrystal about that not long ago, we had the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, that's Chris Smith, Princess Anne was in Phoenix; Princess Alexandra came to Orange County; the Lord Mayor of London came as well; the Duke of Edinburgh came twice. Anyway we had these VIP visitors in the last eight weeks and some of them stayed in hotels, the Duke of Edinburgh stayed in the Residence with us. So you were sort part hotelier, part movie pundit trying to get the studios to make these films in the UK. Then there were these factories you were wanting to get the Americans to build in the UK and so on. You go to Phoenix, I mean that's a huge place, home to all kinds of high technology. Motorola, the headquarters of Motorola, who were at that time the biggest investor in Scotland, were in Phoenix. So it was a job of infinite variety. I went to Hawaii several times, which is a five hour flight from Los Angeles in the middle of the Pacific. But the main reason for going was because, at that time the University of Hawaii were pioneers in battery technology and we were very interested to see whether we could come to some arrangement with them, or people at home were, about licensing some of their technology.

MG: Did the Queen come?

MB-B: Yes, the Queen came. She was going to New Zealand. And she spent a couple of hours in Los Angeles airport. So the New Zealand Consul-General and the Canadian and I

were invited to meet the Queen and we went to the VIP room where she was and we had an hour with her, just chatting. It was the day of the Quebec Referendum, and she was very interested in the results of that. We had a very easy conversation. There were a couple of members of her staff present, but they just sat in another part of the room and just let us have a conversation.

MG: Was Chrystal there?

MB-B: Yes.

MG: I wondered whether she was in the Royal Yacht Britannia at all, because she used to use that sometimes.

MB-B: She came, yes she came for the Olympics but I wasn't there at that time, 1984 Olympics and she took the Royal Yacht to America in 1976, she did that too. We were there and we went on the Yacht for a party

MG: Who was your favourite film star?

MB-B: Liza Minnelli. She was high on drugs when I sat next to her.

MG: Oh dear!

MB-B: My favourite film star, well Charlton Heston is very nice, and I have got lots of memories of that time with some of them, I can't talk about particularly because the personalities involved are still alive.

MG: Did they still have the cricket team, because you know C. Aubrey Smith used to be the head of the cricket team, they had a British cricket team at one stage.

MB-B: Yes that's right. The Hollywood … yes they had that very much so. You see the British film industry was alive and well but most of them lived in Los Angeles and you had people like Tom Jones and Elton John, they were coming and going all the time. Pierce Brosnan, Patrick Stewart were also around, members of British Academy of Film and Television Arts, which was in a fairly embryonic stage when I was there, but which is now going very well and has all sorts of senior Americans involved with it.

It was a wonderful posting because of this variety, and then we had the inner city issues which we were becoming increasingly interested in because what the Government was trying to do among other things with the Americans, was get alongside them on some of these social

issues which were beginning here in this country to loom rather large and LA, of course, had all sorts of problems, murder and mayhem, child exploitation and one thing and another. So I was involved with all of that in a big way. Spent a lot of time on inner city issues.

MG: Where were you and Chrystal living in this residence? What was that like?

MB-B: The residence was lovely. It was a house built about 1925 by a well-known architect of the time, Wallace Neff. It was designed in California Spanish style. It wasn't huge but it was very pretty and it had a big circular hall downstairs with a large chandelier, the hall flanked by a curved stone staircase so that you could look down on the guests below. We had a big earthquake while we were there. People kept ringing from the Foreign Office – it's wonderful the way the Brits carry on – they rang me at 4 o'clock in the morning. We had just had this big jolt, several big jolts and they say are any British people hurt or killed? I explained the city is 450 square miles. What am I supposed to do? Get on my bicycle? The roads are in chaos, nobody's moving, the telephone system is down. And all they were interested in, was were any British people hurt, because of course their phones were going and they wanted answers they could give out.

Margaret Thatcher used to come quite regularly. I went with her to Utah. She had retired, she had set up her Foundation and she was much in demand as a speaker, especially after she wrote her memoirs. She was there to promote the memoirs and sign them. I went to several dinners with her. I used to travel in the car with her quite a bit, meet her at the Airport. She sometimes flew out, on one occasion particularly, to San Diego where she had been invited by an American Admiral to have lunch on a battleship. I met her when she flew up to Los Angeles. My job was to bring her any very recent news off the Reuters tapes in case there was something that had happened which she needed to think about or might be asked about when she was making her speech. So we got in the office car, I would have these Reuters papers with me. Something has been happening in Bosnia or whatever it was. And suddenly I noticed she had gone to sleep, and I thought to myself well, there are not many members of the Diplomatic Service who can really say that the Prime Minister of Great Britain fell asleep on their shoulder, which she did. And then the driver put the brakes on, she woke up with a jerk. "As I was saying to Helmut Schmidt…", she would as it were hit the ground running. So she was quite a regular visitor. I got her to go to Utah.

When I first arrived in Los Angeles it turned out that not many of my predecessors spent much time in Utah but I, when I went there for the first time, realized that this was a state

where a very large percentage of the population had British ancestry, and it also had a serious and very well developed high tech industry, particularly in electronics, in the area between Salt Lake City and Provo in the middle of the state. So I thought we needed to pay more attention to Utah, and use our special connection, because when you go to Salt Lake City to see whether any of your ancestors are in the large genealogy centre there, they have got a room for the United States, a room for Britain and a room the rest of the world.

So we managed to get Margaret Thatcher to agree to come out to Utah to give a speech and to spend a few days. I think that the people of the State Government of Utah and particularly the Church of the Latter Day Saints, whom it was my business to get to know, probably didn't really believe that Mrs T would come out to Utah. I found the Mormons very interesting people, very well educated, tremendously well-read and I was fascinated by the whole set up there, I must say. So I got to know a former editor of one of the newspapers there called The Deseret News, Deseret I think is an old word for Utah. And to cut a long story short we got Margaret Thatcher to come. They offered her an honorarium of $150,000 to come and speak, which was for her Foundation. And to prepare for it they set up a committee, headed by John Huntsman Jnr. who was a prominent politician and had been a former American Ambassador to Singapore, whose father, John Huntsman Snr. had major investments in this country. He has a factory in Skelmersdale and various other places where they make polystyrene boxes for hamburgers and various other things - a major investment in this country. John Huntsman Jnr presided over this committee and because his father was a billionaire and everybody knew him, he could more or less get the attention of anybody he felt like in the state of Utah, including Senator Bennett who was one of the two senators there, always Republicans, rarely Democrats in Utah. So I went to this meeting presided over by John Huntsman and they were discussing who was going to sponsor tables at the dinner. The tables were $9,500 each for a table of eight, I think it was eight, or ten. And John Huntsman said to Senator Bennett who was there, "Bill I have been counting on you for three tables, is that all right?" So Bill Bennett said Yes. I calculated that that was $30,000.

MG: A lot of money.

MB-B: Very nice! Then the door suddenly opens and in comes Wendell Ashton, this former editor of the Deseret News wearing a slightly scruffy raincoat and carrying a yellow legal pad He said "sorry I am late, John" and sits down. We were talking for a bit and he suddenly said, addressing Senator Bennett, Bill, I have got you on my list here for ten tables, is that OK

– and the bloke bought ten!   They had all been at school with one another, or members of their families. They had these tremendous close personal relationships and it was really fascinating to see how it all worked. Anyway the whole Thatcher visit was a raging success. John Huntsman Snr had suggested that Lady Thatcher and Sir Dennis should stay in his house in Park City – it's where they did the Winter Olympics a few years ago. Off they go. I was with them in the car and on the way I said "perhaps you had better bear in mind, Lady Thatcher, that there won't be any alcohol in the house and there may not even be tea and coffee . I think they probably will make that concession".   And after about three days Dennis Thatcher said I think my doctors aren't going to like it, it's too high up here, I think I had better come down in to the city and we put them in the Little America Hotel where they could have a drink.

She spoke to what she told me later was possibly the largest live audience of her life, which was 23,000 people in the Basketball Court of Brigham Young University. And they just thought she was fantastic. She was very, very good with them. Always, I was tremendously impressed with her interest in - a very arrogant way of putting it, - interest in little people, people who were not particularly important. She would ask, for example, to have a word with the chef who had prepared the dinner and would – and sometimes she even got her handbag out and wrote down recipes. She made herself available to everybody. Admittedly she wasn't Prime Minister at the time, but they really were impressed with her and she certainly rose to the occasion and gave an excellent speech.   I suppose it was a speech she had given many times before. You know the end of the Evil Empire, Ron and I, all that sort of stuff. But it went down very well there.

That was one of the highlights of the posting as Consul General. The whole Utah experience. .And then I met Arthur Gilbert. He had, I was told, the second largest collection of silver in the world after the Hermitage Museum. He made a fortune in Hollywood on real estate and when we met him, Chrystal and I were invited first to dinner.   The idea was ..., no, I'll go back a bit. He had lent large parts of his collection of silver, objects which included silver gates from a monastery in Kiev, a sledge made of silver that had been given to Catherine the Great and that sort of stuff. He had lent those items to a museum in Los Angeles. A story appeared in the newspapers that Mr Gilbert was not satisfied with the way in which his artefacts, were being displayed and he was thinking of removing them and putting them in another museum that would appreciate them better. So this aroused interest among museums. Then another story appeared in the Los Angeles Times saying this is incorrect, Mr Gilbert is

happy with what's been happening, and everything is ok. The next thing we knew was a full page advertisement from Arthur Gilbert in the Los Angeles Times saying something like "I am dissatisfied and I am removing my collections from the County Museum of Art."

So then various museums scrambled to get hold of the collections. We had a secret weapon a) Arthur Gilbert had been born in Britain but b) he was very friendly with Lord Rothschild, he also knew Michael Heseltine well, and various other people prominent in the UK. It was arranged that the collections would be displayed at Somerset House. My job was to keep Arthur Gilbert happy and ensure he did not change his mind. And to do that, I used to visit him at his home which was absolutely incredible. It's a big house in the Hollywood Hills, but inside it's like an Aladdin's Cave. He had silver everywhere. We had dinner with him and his wife and in all ten people were seated there. There was Arthur and his wife Heather, Chrystal and me and some other people I can't remember now. But you couldn't really see the people opposite you because they had decorated the table with silverware. I said "Arthur this is the most amazing thing – what is this silver piece?" It seemed about three feet high. He said "Oh it's the christening cup of the Empress Maria Theresa."

MM: Is that right?

MB-B: Yes, yes, it was wonderful and the place was unbelievable. He had a collection of micro-mosaics as well. I didn't know anything about micro-mosaics. This is apparently a technique developed in Italy in the 19th century to make pictures out of tiny mosaics – tigers and birds and things like that, which is an art form in its own right. I took the Secretary of State for National Heritage, Virginia Bottomley, to see him and we all had lunch together. We were obviously making sure that if there were any problems, I was to be the first person to pick up the phone to and blow up. If I couldn't cope with it I would then get hold of whoever it was in London

Anyway he brought this immense collection to Britain and he put it in Somerset House, but it isn't there now, it's in the V & A. It is just incredible if you look at it now, well worth going to see

So Arthur Gilbert was another memorable personality. The fascination of the job in LA was meeting these larger-than-life characters who were around. There's no other job in the Diplomatic Service I imagine where you get that sort of variety I was the fly on the wall as it were, or rather just a bit player involved with all of this infinite variety.

MG: And that was your last posting. Because I now have to spring on you the question of your consideration of the life of a diplomat and whether you think things have improved or whether they were better when you were doing it, and what are your thoughts about the Foreign Office now? And I know that you have done something in between that is not forming part of this, so you have got a bit more of an understanding of how things are going than other people, when asked this question. So what's your view?

MB-B: Gosh, need to think a bit about that!

MG: Well you could always I suppose add it in, if you want to think about it more.

MB-B: Yes I think I would like to do that really. It is of course a very different organization from the one I joined, there's no doubt about that. I have got a feel for it because having worked at Hanslope Park and having had access to official communications through my computer there, until two years ago, I have got an idea …

What drew me to diplomacy and what I found, and it may have come out in our talks, always were the personalities. I loved the people, I loved the idea of the Queen coming out to Washington and then the things that happened there and arranging all that, and I loved the idea of being in Los Angeles, which as fun and fulfilling and suited me perfectly,. I liked those sort of opportunities. I wasn't really a policy wonk, although I did it when it came to South Atlantic and Antarctic Department when we were negotiating with the Argentines about fisheries and things like that. But for me it was always the personalities that were a big attraction in the job, whether they were British personalities or. Meeting Dr Mahathir, that sort of thing. And there was a huge change from when I started to when I retired. The major change was, I think, that the people whom I met when I first started in 1963, many of them had fought in the Second World War, quite a lot of them had MC or DSOs, you know, serious military medals of one kind or another. Whereas nowadays virtually nobody in the Service has that experience really. And then, we were also I think, quite dominated at one point, certainly for the first ten years, maybe longer, of my service, by the Burgess and Maclean affairs, by the Cold War, by the fear of betrayal of one kind or another, The Office was quite, I won't say paranoid, it's an over-used word, but people were very conscious of the security that had to be observed.

So that was certainly a strong theme throughout the first half of my career. I remember going on a course which was essentially for Heads of Chancery. I suppose about half way through when we were told that we had to look out and keep an eye open for anybody who might be a

homosexual and might be compromised as a result of that. And I remember saying, we were having a discussion about it, well, why don't we just do what I remember hearing what a Japanese diplomat did when the Russians said to him we have got compromising photographs of you in bed with a woman 'Well, ok, publish them, my friends will be proud of me'. And I said, if we didn't make such a thing about sexuality, we would be better off. And the Office lost some good people because of that. I personally knew one of them quite well. I didn't realize, to use the jargon these days, he was gay. And he was more or less pressured to leave. I think that was very sad really.

So I started in this climate of Cold War with a lot of the people senior to me having been in the Second World War. The Office was essentially an organization in its upper levels dominated by private education and Oxbridge and old school tie and so on. And I, having been at a public school myself, and at Oxford, I didn't find that a very difficult atmosphere to deal with. So we moved from the sort of "open fires" generation that I started with to the email generation that I finished with, and that itself was an enormous cultural change. When I started, a great attribute for everybody to try to attain was the ability to draft, to write beautiful English, to put arguments succinctly and a lot of the stuff that was written was of that type. The FCO was a Rolls Royce machine in that sense. The diplomatic estate was much bigger, it was grander in many places than it is today. Britain has shrunk and that is, inevitably a source of regret for me.

Another theme that I didn't like about the Office was that if something went wrong or they thought something had gone wrong in your post – and I was in several posts where things did go a bit wrong – London tended to assume that it was the post that was at fault. Did I tell you about how I was called off the stage in Utah? I went to make a speech in Salt Lake City and I was talking about investment and Britain as a trading partner and I was going to do this to an audience of business people about 100 strong at a Rotary lunch. Somebody said to me there's a phone call from London, they need to speak to you straightaway. I thought goodness me what's this about? And it turned out that they were fussed because somebody on the Lord Mayor of Manchester's visit (Manchester were bidding for the Olympics; the Lord Mayor came out with a delegation; they were hoping to get the Americans to vote): somebody in that group had complained that I had entertained senior Americans, who were involved with the Olympic movement – and there were quite a lot of them that came to the house – and made them eat off paper plates and drink out of plastic cups. They were proposing to raise this in Parliament saying that I had undermined Manchester's bid for the

Olympic Games by my “cheapskate” attitude. London panicked and rang me and said Is this true? As if I had done something terribly wrong. I replied Yes it was true because in Los Angeles at least you were not allowed to have glass outside for functions near a swimming pool There were local by-laws about it It was too often assumed in London that you were in the wrong And they wanted to protect their backsides from ignorant Members of Parliament who were going to be asking questions.

When I was in Japan someone raised a question in Parliament asking why the Commercial Counsellor was driving a Honda motorcar. And the Secretary of State had to answer that question. We got a telegram coming in, Michael Welford got the telegram, called me in and asked how are we going to answer this? And I need to say it was that most British cars were not suited to Japanese regulations, anti-pollution regulations. The only ones that were, were Rolls Royce, Jaguar and Lagonda. First Secretaries couldn’t drive those motor cars so get stuffed was the way I wanted to reply! London always assumed that there was somebody who had done something wrong and I really objected to that. I thought it was very wet: they should have stood up for us a bit more. But I wouldn’t say it was a very serious matter, just an irritant..

The other thing that strikes me is that I never worked with anybody whose personality I couldn’t cope with. Most people (there were some exceptions) were pleasant, often very amusing, witty, laidback but at the same time shrewd and competent. I liked that atmosphere very much. It was a bit clubby, old school tie-ish, but it worked. We gave away an empire without too much violence and trouble and I think the FCO I worked for had a lot of achievements really.

Now, when I was at Hanslope Park after retirement, it was ok, but it lacked, I felt, that sense of fun and humour. May be that is just my personality: I like to enjoy my work. And keep up standards. Certainly the whole drafting thing in the age of the email has gone out of the window. People don’t write beautiful English any more. But it was a job that I wouldn’t have exchanged for any other. I think it was, for me anyway, a wonderful experience. I was never going to be the Permanent Under-Secretary, I didn’t actually want to be the Permanent Under-Secretary. I might have been an Ambassador somewhere if I hadn’t left the Service for some years, but I did and I suppose that counted against me. I rarely knew what other people thought of my efforts. For the first five years that I worked in the Foreign Office I never had a review of any kind. Nobody said much to me about my work, it was just this is

how you do it, get on with it. And if it didn’t go right you got told, sometimes forcibly. Whereas now it is all about regular review and appraisal.

I don’t know whether it’s as attractive a profession as it was. The people who join it now don’t know what it was like 50 years ago and they may think “Oh I wouldn’t like to have been around in the FCO of those days”. For me it has always been the people and friends I made and so on. There were drawbacks. I was never posted at home when my children were at school so there were certain sacrifices in our family life that my wife and I had to make. I don’t regret for a moment that I took four years off diplomacy to work with the Japanese Trading Company. But I can elaborate about my conclusions if you like, in a more sensible way. Sorry, this is all a bit random.

MG: Well it isn’t, but I will stop recording, I think. It has been very interesting and thank you very much.