

## **BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index**

**BEAMISH, Sir Adrian John (born 21 January 1939)**

**KCMG 1999 (CMG 1988)**

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## **BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME**

### **RECOLLECTIONS OF SIR ADRIAN BEAMISH KCMG, RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY SUZANNE RICKETTS**

SR: This is Suzanne Ricketts recording Adrian Beamish on 5 February 2019. Adrian, tell me why did you join the Foreign Office?

AB: It's a question I've asked myself several times! I think I'd start by going back to 50s London, over which lay the shadow of the Cold War. We lived not far from the junction of Cromwell Road with Gloucester Road. The buses, big and red, went to Shepherd's Bush, Victoria, Baker Street, Clapham Junction. But there were other buses, low, grey single-deckers with a section at the back above the luggage hold. Bearing the livery of British European Airways (BEA), they were bound for the airport - the front indicator panels marked variously for Cologne, Berlin, Vienna, Warsaw, Budapest, Moscow names suggestive of rubble, ruin and defeat but intriguing nonetheless. Some evenings, my brother and I would surf the radio waves and listen, uncomprehending, to all sorts of voices fluent and full of energy, angry, soothing, confident, reasonable coming from the zone; a confusing picture. On the one hand, Radio Moscow in English, on the other Radio Free Europe in Russian but what were they really saying? The Voice of America was a great comfort. On both sides there was fear and anxiety. It was an anxious time, made all the more so by episodes of high drama, most notably the Berlin Airlift, immense relief when it was over. Other alarms, stories of treachery and deceit made a big impact -the Burgess and Maclean affair - wall-to-wall coverage for days, possibly weeks; - Nunn-May, Pontecorvo, Kroeger were the names of other traitors and spies and there was the Budapest uprising in 1956.

The BBC had a programme to teach Russian. My brother and I wrote off and got the book published in Moscow by the Foreign Languages Publishing House, which was, as we subsequently learnt, a huge enterprise with worldwide reach. We stumbled about, listening to the programme and trying to pronounce the Russian words, to conjugate the verbs and so on. We didn't get very far and all that slipped into the background. I was only a teenager and not thinking about anything very much. It was only later, when the question of what I was going to do after getting my degree arose that I began to focus. Because I was studying English, I was aware that a lot of our great, and not so great, poets had been, not in the Diplomatic

Service, but had gone abroad on missions of one sort or another. That seemed to me an interesting thing to do: it was the lure of the exotic, I suppose. So, I felt I wanted something that was a good job and that involved being abroad. Then, one day, one of my friends with whom I'd been discussing what to do said, "If you get into the Foreign Office, I'll buy you a meal at the "White Tower" at that time a top London restaurant, way beyond my, and as it turned out, his means. So, with that spur ... that's how I joined!

### **Persian language training, then British Embassy, Tehran, 1962–66**

While I was learning Persian, I went to see Lawrence of Arabia. An electric moment was when a road sign appeared with some Arabic on top and below '*Damas*', on which my eye automatically focussed, but not understanding, switched to the Arabic which I saw at once meant Damascus. That was encouraging. The Arabic script had taught me the French word for Damascus. This was real not just a course text book.

SR: So how were you selected to do Persian language training? Did they give you an aptitude test?

AB: No, they didn't do that. But you were invited to offer a language. I didn't really have any languages. I had O-level French, but it was really low level French. Our English master at school made us read a bit of Dante. It sounded very melodious. I began to study it in my own time. So, at the Civil Service competition, I offered Italian. They gave me a test and must have concluded that I was enthusiastic.

SR: You went to SOAS. What was that like?

AB: It was quite an unglamorous place, in the lee of Senate House. A very utilitarian building, I think from the 1930s. It may even have had steel window frames, very characteristic of that period. Our teacher was the redoubtable Professor Lambton. She was a remarkable woman. She must have been in her 50s and looked a bit like Katharine Hepburn: fine bones, erect carriage. A very handsome woman. My memory of her is in a dark tweed suit, a skirt and jacket and I think they're called Lisle stockings and sensible shoes. I cannot picture her in anything else. She was a ferocious squash player and taught Persian as though it were Latin, which wasn't very efficient actually. Persian is a living language.

There was a programme every year to which the Foreign Office sent one or two people. Alternately they would go on either to Tehran or to Kabul. In that way, the Office wanted to

build up a cadre of Persian-speaking officers because one of the conditions when relations were reopened in 1953, after the Mossadeq affair, was that no one who had served in Iran before could come back. The Iranians were so suspicious of us because we had played such a heavy role in their history. They didn't want any 'experts' who'd be nosing around in the bazaars and finding out what was going on. We had to build up our expertise from scratch.

SR: Did you get up to a very proficient level after a year? Was it very intense?

AB: What happened was that we had an introductory course to the Service and then, to my disappointment, instead of getting a job, they told me that I wouldn't be needed until October before going to SOAS for a full academic year, which only took us to intermediate standard. We were aiming at advanced standard. When I got to Tehran the following August, the programme was to spend half my time in Chancery, shadowing my predecessor and to do some more language training, including immersion. The exams were the following spring and took us to advanced standard.

SR: What was Tehran like for your first job? It must have been quite exciting.

AB: Well, it was. When I arrived in August 1963 there was a curfew. Only a week or two before, the Ayatollah Khomeini had led some riots, protests about the Shah's so-called White Revolution which had been launched in March, I think. Among other things, the programme included votes for women and agricultural land reform. That united the clerics who were against votes for women and the huge landowners. Some of the estates were colossal in terms of acreage. Some of it was desert, of course, but there was immense wealth in very few hands. So there was an unholy alliance between the landowners and the clerics and this resulted in considerable violence. In the holy city of Qom, which is where Khomeini had his presence, a lot of the clerical students who'd been the most eager supporters of this uprising were just liquidated, really, by the Shah's police, army. Khomeini himself was exiled to Baghdad, well to Karbala actually, where he spent the next fifteen years or so, inveighing against the Shah. Every Friday he would preach in the mosque in Karbala and that would then filter into Iran in audio cassettes. In that way people learnt of all the insults that were heaped on the Shah, all the accusations of despotism and corruption and lack of freedom etc.

For us, our business was to keep the Shah on the throne and part of the method for doing that was the CENTO alliance (a mutual defence pact, cf. NATO) which had been constructed some years earlier to embrace Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan and the UK. However, there'd

been a revolution in Iraq so they'd come out, but CENTO still existed and that was linking with NATO and then with SEATO in South East Asia to restrain Soviet Communist expansionism. In return for that political support via CENTO, one of the things the Shah gave us was the CENTO route to the Far East. At the time we had, as you know, troops in Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Brunei. And we had our position in the Persian Gulf. One of my duties was to manage the military overflight régime - we had about 800 a year, I think. Each one had to be cleared diplomatically. Occasionally, the Iranians would make a difficulty, just to show that they could. The route was crucial because the planes then didn't have the range they have today. We had another base in Libya and we had Akrotiri in Cyprus. We could stage in Turkey. We could stage in Iran. We could stage in Pakistan. But not in non-aligned India. It was an important asset that we had and we had to keep the Shah on the throne: that was the business of the day. And then of course there was the oil, BP, nationalised in 1951 came back in 1953 as part of the consortium with the Americans.

But I should speak a little bit about Denis Wright, the Ambassador, who was an exceptional man. He'd joined the Consular Service just before the Second World War and had been based during the war variously in Turkey, Romania and Yugoslavia and had really had quite an adventurous time. To begin with, he was just a volunteer, I think. The war was breaking out and he turned up at some Consulate and asked if he could help. They said yes. I don't know how much he got paid, but not a lot. It took the war for him to become a properly established civil servant. He was married to a charming lady, Iona. They had met at Oxford. She was a 'leftie'... well perhaps that's too strong a term, but she certainly had a very open mind, as did he. They made a very strong couple, absolutely devoted to one another. They had no children, but a couple of dogs. They loved horses. That served him very well in Iran because Iranians, like the Arabians, are really keen on horses. There's a long tradition. I think the Iranians invented polo.

The confiscation of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (BP) in 1951, masterminded by the Prime Minister, Mossadeq, was greeted with immense jubilation in Iran. At last, they were getting rid of the British, the oil company (aka. BP) at any rate, and British interference had been such an irritant for so long. The chagrin in London was great and diplomatic relations were broken off. In 1953, when agreement had been reached to resume relations Denis Wright, a forty two year old First Secretary, with a string of obscure commercial and consular postings behind him, was sent out as Chargé to reopen the Embassy. He obviously did a first-class job. Ten years later, he returned as Ambassador. By the time I got there he had

established himself very firmly. In particular, he had become very friendly with the Minister of Court, Asadollah Alam. Minister of Court sounds like the Head of Protocol but in fact, after the Shah, he was the most powerful person. He was the Shah's confidant, gatekeeper and mouthpiece. He was a keen horseman and had huge estates in eastern Iran on the Afghan border. Every Friday morning, which is Sunday morning in Islamic countries, he would invite Denis Wright to ride. Sometimes he would invite Iona, because she too rode well: Denis had been Ambassador in Ethiopia where they'd done a lot of riding. Every Friday he would go and get a full briefing from the Minister of Court about what the Shah was thinking. A valuable connection, you might say.

SR: As Third, later Second, Secretary did you have an opportunity to travel?

AB: Yes, I did quite a bit. I went North, South, East and West. My immersion language training was in Mashhad, in north eastern Iran, and from Mashhad, about 50 or 60 miles, you got to the then Soviet border with Kazakhstan. I went up to the border. There was a big fence with towers and so on. Later, I went there later with a colleague: we looked through the same fence sensing Central Asia's vast inaccessible expanse stretching ... without limit. We thought we would never see it. Paul was a brilliant linguist. Later, after he'd retired, when Tony Blair's government was searching desperately for expertise on Central Asia, they identified Paul Bergne and turned him into an Ambassador. He opened our Embassies in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan: the languages there, similar to Persian, he learnt in no time. (He'd also served in Cairo, so his Arabic was extremely good.) He was an excellent choice.

In Tehran, we felt the Cold War. Our Embassy, in the centre of Tehran, was on Stalin Avenue, on the other side of which rose the wall of the Soviet compound. A similar configuration obtained around the corner on Churchill Avenue where the Soviets found themselves across the road glaring at our compound wall. These designations commemorated the Tehran Conference in 1943 when the big three, Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill, met as allies. I recently heard that Churchill Avenue has long since been renamed Bobby Sands Avenue. History is never still. In my time, the Soviets eager to unseat the Shah, were busy supporting the Tudeh (pronounced *tooday*), the Iranian Communist Party, driven underground years earlier.

One day, when I was in Mashhad doing my immersion - very daringly, I thought, -I succeeded in visiting the tomb of the 10<sup>th</sup> Imam. In Shia Islam, the 10<sup>th</sup> Imam is the so-called Hidden Imam, Imam Reza, and he will come back at some point. His tomb in the Shrine in

Mashhad, is surrounded by a great silver cage around which the pilgrims circulate. You're not allowed in if you're not a believer. So, I had to disguise myself as a local which meant a shabby Western suit and shoes with heels trodden down. These I borrowed from one of the waiters in the hotel and, to complete the disguise didn't shave for a few days. I shuffled anxiously around with all the others, feeling that I was treading in the steps of Lawrence of Arabia and liable to be found out at any moment.

Then, on another occasion, I managed to persuade my Ambassador that I should investigate the rumours that Nasser, the dictator of Egypt who was then causing a lot of trouble in the Middle East, was shipping guns across the Persian Gulf into Baluchistan in south-east Iran. I think the Ambassador thought this showed a bit of initiative, so he agreed that I could go for two weeks, provided one was taken as leave. That was typical of him: he would give but would also have regard to the rules. One week's jolly might be at the taxpayers' account, but not two!

It so happened that Professor Lambton, the Professor of Persian, was in town, she used to come out every year, and hearing of my plan said she would come with me. I couldn't say no. In fact, I was delighted to have such a knowledgeable companion. We set off in an aeroplane and flew to Zahedan in south-east Iran, near the Pakistan border. Then we got a jeep and drove 100 miles south down a dried river bed to Iranshahr; a very rocky ride.

The rumours were that the guns were for the Baluch, a tribal people who could be troublesome. In Iranshar, we linked up with the people who were hiring camels. Our objective was to get to Chahbahar, on the Gulf coast, about a week's ride. To do that, we had to cross a mountainous sandy desert, overnighing in oases. We hired our camels and off we went. We had a fairly uncomfortable (average noonday temperature 40 + degrees Centigrade) but interesting time. We rested the camels at midday, resting ourselves in the shade of their humps. On one occasion, one of our guides using his camel as stalking horse got near enough to a wild gazelle to bring it down with one shot. He and his colleague later cooked and kebabbed it for our meals. We didn't discover any arms. Hardly surprising, because the Iranians insisted that our lives were in danger from ferocious tribesmen, so we had to be accompanied by two gendarmes. Our every moment was observed.

There wasn't much in the way of political work for me in the Chancery. Mostly what I seemed to be doing was tailing the Ambassador and any time there was an empty seat at the dinner table, I occupied it.

SR: Did you do any interpreting and translating?

AB: Yes. Most of the upper crust could speak English quite well. But there were some who couldn't. Denis took the view that it was good for the Embassy's reputation for some of these upper crust people to see that there were people in the Embassy who could talk to them in Persian. I being so low and they being so high, the conversations wouldn't last for very long. But it was a signal.

The situation was very tense politically. On one occasion, one of my Iranian friends rang up to tell me that the Prime Minister, Hassan Ali Mansour, had been shot. He was still alive lying in the street under my friend's office window but could not be saved notwithstanding the attentions of some top medics flown in from France and, I think, the US. The following year, the Shah was attacked by one of his bodyguards who just turned his gun on him. I think he took a slight flesh wound, but there was a terrific crackdown after that. The Communist Party, quite numerous and active underground, was persecuted and people we knew were taken in to the dreaded Evin prison and came out shadows of their former selves. Quite soon after some applied for visas at the Consulate. An American colleague told me that they had had quite a flood asking for visas. So, it was pretty unpleasant, really.

SR: Were there any signs of anti-British sentiment?

AB: Not really. There was the occasional demonstration outside the Embassy. When you were talking to Iranians, some would make pointed remarks about British interference in the past and how we had stunted their political evolution, notwithstanding the fact that the British government had promoted the movement for a constitution, before the First World War. The Embassy had indeed sheltered 4,000 or more merchants from the bazaar with their families from the then Shah's wrath at their opposition to his disregard of the recently agreed constitution. In my time, the dashing young President Kennedy, having faced down Khrushchev in the Cuban missile crisis, was their hero. The Americans were the role models of the day; we were on their team, but second fiddle. Among the young, a significant percentage were pro – Western.

I knew the Prime Minister's Private Secretary quite well. He had been to Cambridge. One day not long before I left, he asked me if I would like to have a valedictory audience with the Prime Minister. It did not take me long to say yes. The Prime Minister wasn't a Muslim but a Baha'i, a very small sect which had grown up in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and had suffered much



persecution. He was very gracious. I had shaken his hand several times before in the Ambassador's house and elsewhere, but we'd never really had any conversation. After courtesies, he said, "There's one message I'd like to give you. 25 years ago, your job in the Embassy was to draw up a list of people who were to be elected to the Majlis (Parliament)." I knew that he was telling the truth. He continued, "Today, you are having a farewell call on the Prime Minister. In 25 years' time your Ambassador will be lucky to see the Foreign Minister once a year." Well, it didn't take that long!

Anyway, when I went back to the Embassy, all eager, I dictated a minute recording this conversation. The Ambassador, who didn't stand on ceremony, came pounding down the corridor and said, "Did Hoveyda say all this?" I replied that he had. "Cheeky so and so!" he replied.

SR: Was it a small Embassy? How many people were there?

AB: We had an Ambassador, two Counsellors, one Commercial, one Political, and a Head of Chancery who was another Counsellor. There were quite a few First Secretaries and then some Second Secretaries like me. We also had a Military Attaché and an Air Attaché (who shared an aeroplane with his counterparts in Ankara and Islamabad) and a Naval Attaché who visited from Ankara. With all the support staff, it was quite a big family.

### **Eastern Department, Foreign Office, 1966–69**

SR: So you had three years in Tehran and then they moved you back to Eastern Department in the Foreign Office, where you had your first experience of that wonderful building in King Charles Street. What was it like?

AB: Yes. There's a tower in that building which overlooks the park. I was up in the tower on the Jordan desk. When it was cold, the floor to ceiling windows let in a lot of air. There was no central heating. The messengers came and laid the fire and when we came in, we lit it: it took time to get going. Some of the time we sat in our overcoats. The people who really felt the cold were our clients because they were mostly from the Middle East. They would come in their overcoats too and keep them on.

In those days there was a bit of technology for the transmission of paper. You could still see them when I was a child in certain shops.

SR: You mean those pneumatic tube things?

AB: Yes, these tubes would fly around overhead. Were they called Lamson Paragon tubes? That's what we had in the Foreign Office. These cylinders would arrive at strategic points on each landing. The messengers would bring them to us: there was a place for a label. We had a key, but they didn't have a key. So, in that way, the confidential telegrams were brought to us. All that is now gone. Other things that disappeared were wooden desks, a lot of wooden desks, and brass table lamps with green glass shades. I'll never forget my horror when I came in to my office one day and they were doing some renovation. My desk had been moved to the wall, my desk lamp was on the floor the shade broken. My colleague's desk lamp met the same fate. When we asked what was going on, they said they were putting in new lighting. Neon strips were then fitted. That kind of impulse strengthened the notion that the Foreign Office would be knocked down and rebuilt in a modern style. We owe it to Geoffrey Howe that that plan was thwarted. It was a long time in the cooking, I think, and he became Secretary of State in time to stop it. So, we've still got Gilbert Scott's palace.

I'd spent an academic year at SOAS but I'd never been into the Office. I had no idea of the layout, of who sat where nor much idea of the protocol or of what I would be doing. In my early weeks I had to call one day on a very august figure - Viscount Hood: he was what would now be called the Political Director. He lived in one of those offices with an oak door which 12 or 14 feet high. Amazing doors: you opened them and the silent hinges still worked perfectly! What I had to do with him was to confirm that I had brought our contingency plan for the evacuation of the Jordanian royal family up to date. So, I came down from my tower and found my way to his distant corridor. Awed, I knocked on the imposing door. The plan had a nickname or codename. He was supposed to know what it was. So, I said, "I have come to discuss Blue Thread." He looked blank for a moment and then said "I thought it was Pink". There was a distinct pause. Such a mis-match could clearly have security implications. And who was right? I can't remember which of us was right. But it was a moment full of wonderful possibilities.

So, there we were in this strange building with lofty ceilings, freezing to death. One issue gave me a little trouble. One of the Secretaries in the Jordanian Embassy came to see me one day to say they had been talking in the Embassy about the Sykes-Picot agreement and he had been instructed to ask if he could see the original text and, in particular, the maps prepared for it. In my innocence, I agreed and sent a message to the Library to ask if I could have it. A day or two later, there came back a few papers, typed papers, with a map from a school atlas. There were these red and blue marks designating which territory was British and which

French. The bold blue and red crayon boundaries were perhaps 2 or 3 millimetres on the map. God knows how far they measured on the ground. I thought to myself that we couldn't just hand this over. I honestly don't know how the story ended, but I referred it to higher up the chain. It was a moment of embarrassment! But it didn't trouble our relations with the Embassy.

But then came the Six-Day War. I shared an office with another colleague who was on the Israeli desk: beforehand, as the tension mounted, the Israelis were in to see us several times a week. The Israeli Ambassador - a man called Remez – also called frequently on the Secretary of State, George Brown. On one occasion, I was summoned to the Private Office to take the note. The Israeli Ambassador had been an RAF pilot during the war. I think he was demobilised as Wing Commander. He knew England well. It was 11 o'clock in the morning. George Brown asked me to fetch the sherry and glasses from the cupboard. I was surprised to see that the glasses were large goblets. The S.o.S poured two bumpers and the two men got down to business. I started taking notes. It was not long before I heard the S.o.S. say "Won't you have another?" The ambassador declined but the S.o.S beckoned me over for a top up himself. The conversation ran its course. The ambassador took his leave. As I returned to the Department, I noted that it was not yet midday. "Two large bumpers and lunch to come", I thought. Things didn't get better.

The Six-Day War hit us in Eastern Department from the organisational point of view. The Office just wasn't really equipped for the surge in activity. I mentioned earlier the distribution of telegrams. An extra distribution was organised, once the war was in train. But it was very hierarchical. And photo copiers had yet to be invented. This often meant that we, the operative Department, only got one copy, or sometimes not even that. The telegrams came in a flood, obviously, from Washington, from UKMis. (New York), from the Middle East capitals, those that hadn't closed, and from pretty well all over the world. We spent quite a lot of time chasing around the Office looking for where the latest news was and for telegrams that had not reached us but were referred to in telegrams that had. Mostly, what we needed was found in the Private Office, of course. We worked very long hours and the Head of Department, Willie Morris, a legendary figure among Middle East experts, highly regarded by everybody and a very good boss, had to sleep on more than one occasion on a couch in the corridor. It was at the end of the sixth day that I met the Assistant Head of Defence Department. He said, "We have something called the War Book. I wonder if we should open it?" This was a set of procedures, designed for war. But, obviously, we were not at war.

From a logistical and organisational point of view, there would have been helpful things that might have been done. It hadn't occurred to us. So that was the sort of level that we were at: just desk officers, chasing around and trying to make sure that papers got to the right place and that we were able to produce drafts in time for the senior officers and Ministers - constantly at meetings and difficult to get hold of. Lots of foreign representatives who wanted briefing from Ministers, which had to be recorded and circulated in the Office, Whitehall and to posts overseas. And then we had to bunch up, as it were, to accommodate officers evacuated from Damascus, Baghdad, Amman and Cairo where the British communities were evacuated and the Embassies closed. There wasn't really much room for them: we had to get extra chairs as we were all sitting three or four around a table. So it was all very ad hoc. But as quickly as it started, it was over, although, in a way, it's been going on ever since.

We took some pride - and I think it was largely due to Willie Morris's deft drafting - in the famous Resolution. Was it 142? It got through the Security Council and insists on the pre-conflict borders being respected. That is more or less a dead letter now, but it is quoted constantly. It was our drafting which was accepted by the Secretary of State and, I suppose, Number 10 and went on to be accepted by the Security Council. That was a feather in our collective caps. In the midst of all the hectic activity, I had the pleasure of sending a telegram to my former Ambassador in Tehran who was still there, instructing him to be prepared to receive a twenty-seven -vehicle convoy from the Embassy in Baghdad carrying the Embassy staff and members of the British community! It gave me some satisfaction. It was a good bit of staff work. We got all the material we needed from Baghdad and we turned it into a telegram of instructions: he had about six hours to prepare. My former boss, as I tried to explain earlier, was quite a firm officer: it was good to be giving him directions!

Before we go on, let me just add something from the chaos of the Six-Day War. On one occasion, I was sitting in my room which was filled with other people camping, and a lady came in. She looked at me and asked, "Is Adrian Beamish here?" I put up my hand. She had been evacuated from Jordan on the advice of the Embassy. There were standard terms: anyone whose presence was not necessary should get out. She'd had to give up her job and had had to pay the fare back. She was aggrieved and asked me what I was going to do about it. I hadn't a clue what to do about it. But I mention this, because she managed to get into the Foreign Office. Nowadays, it's very different. But in those days, things were much

easier ... I won't say laxer, necessarily, but you could talk to people in a way that you can't today.

SR: But how had she got your name?

AB: Maybe she had said she wanted to see somebody to do with Jordan and some helpful receptionist had given her my name?

Anyway, that was just an aside.

### **Treasury Centre for Administrative Studies, 1969**

SR: So, then you were sent to the Treasury Centre for Administrative Studies. Tell me about your time there.

AB: Yes. I think it later became the Civil Service Staff College. It was in some rented premises in Regent's Park, near Cambridge Gate. We were divided into three syndicates of maybe a dozen each. People at Assistant, or possibly Principal, level. Each group was in the charge of a senior officer, one of whom was Mark Marshall from the Foreign Office who was an Arabist and also the son of the great Professor Marshall, the Cambridge economist. So, he knew all about supply and demand curves and things like that. The other one that I remember was Peter Middleton, who was very brisk and slightly fussy, from the Treasury, later Sir Peter and PUS there.

It was a crash course, designed to remedy the defects of our education as far as economic and social policy was concerned. I don't think there were many people who were economists, or much less sociologists. We badly needed what was on offer and we were drawn from the FCO, DTI, MoD, the Ministry of Labour and more.

SR: Did you find it hard?

AB: It wasn't that hard in the sense of too much work but, in the sociology, for example, there was anecdotal discussion that did not seem to me very rigorous. In the economics, we had to follow over several weeks a course on macro-economics, based on a number of equations for equilibrium. I found that a bit impenetrable, I must say.

SR: There's a lot of maths, isn't there?

AB: Yes, but we learnt some useful mathematical and statistical concepts. It would have been much clearer had we had more focus on actual fiscal and monetary management. It seems to me, from my subsequent experience, that those are the things you really need to get your head round. Perhaps it was a little too theoretical. There was an American academic called Samuelson who had written a primer on macro-economics and I think that was taught in British and American universities. But I didn't find it very enlightening.

SR: Did you go there because you knew you were going to be posted to the OECD?

AB: No, no. I was just sent there. Every year, when they weren't quite sure what to do with somebody, they asked how many places they could have on the Treasury course. I didn't know I was going to the OECD until some weeks after the course had ended. But I did have the interesting task of writing a paper on a single European currency. I enjoyed doing it, I must say, and found it subsequently useful to refer to. I did learn about economics, in terms that I was able to make sense of the financial pages. I think that's probably what it was designed to do. It was also interesting to meet colleagues from other Departments - the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Defence in particular. No Treasury officials, as far as I know: they were all getting it in-house.

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SR: Good morning. It's the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, the second recording session with Adrian Beamish.

### **UKDel OECD, Paris, 1970-73**

SR: Adrian, last time we finished with the Treasury Centre for Administrative Studies. You were then packed off to the OECD in Paris, so you just missed the student rioting there in 1968. What was Paris like then?

AB: When I was told I was going to OECD, I didn't really register. But I thought to myself, 'This is good fortune, to be paid to live in Paris.' Then I had to focus a bit on the OECD: it was a rather amorphous topic, as far as I could see. There weren't many books in the library. There were lots of OECD reports, but they really didn't give you the overall shape of the organisation or what it was doing.

There was a man in Trade Policy Department who was appointed to brief me. That didn't take very long. I don't think Trade Policy Department took a great deal of interest in the

OECD nor indeed did the FCO seem to register much interest in its activities either. As I was later to discover, the Treasury had more interest, but I wasn't invited to go there for any briefing. So we arrived in Paris, more or less innocent of the OECD and all its works.

We travelled to Paris in circumstances which I think, while not unique, were certainly to be seized at that moment in time. I'm not sure they endured for very long. We drove down to Lydd in Kent – or it may have been Lympne - and spent the night with a former colleague who lived nearby (actually, the man I succeeded in Tehran, Hugh Arbuthnott). The following morning, we drove to the airport and were told to park near a rather bulky aeroplane, from which a broad gangway had been lowered. At our turn, we drove up into the belly. It may have been, a Belfast Freighter. It took about half a dozen cars. It wasn't long before all were on board. We then went up a staircase into a cabin on an upper deck, perhaps a dozen of us altogether. This vehicle trundled along, finally becoming airborne. In no time, a matter of minutes, we had crossed the Channel. We felt very close to the wrinkling water, a thousand feet below. It didn't seem more; highly memorable. We landed at Le Touquet - Paris Plage, as we were going to Paris, an aptly named landfall.

SR: It's quite a long way from Paris, though!

AB: Well I know. But that's where we landed. Then there were the formalities at the Customs. So long dispensed with but now, alas, with us again, thanks to Brexit. We encountered a rather genial Customs officer who said, "Welcome to France!" He asked what we had to declare. We thought we had better be honest as we were part of official Britain, and didn't want to let the side down. "Cigars, silks, liqueurs, precious stones, gold, silver etc.?" he queried. We didn't have anything in those categories save for half a dozen place settings of silver which we had put together, expecting that we would be giving smart dinners in Paris. He took an interest. We had to show him what we had. He said, "*Ah, du massif* (solid silver)"! I felt chuffed that he had identified we had solid silver. He then learned that we were going to be diplomats in Paris. His smile became broader. I got back into the car, wound the window down and asked the way. He replied, "*Tournez à droite et voilà la N1. Paris, c'est tout droit*". As I turned onto the N1, I thought '*massif*' - 'Massive!' - what a wonderful welcome and felt completely at ease from that moment.

So, we got to Paris and moved straight into our predecessors' flat. He and his wife didn't have any children with them. We had two small ones, Kitty and Antonia. The flat was very close to the Delegation Office, in the 16<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* in Passy, and I could walk through

the Ranelagh Gardens to the office in 10 minutes but it was in a basement. That was a disappointment, very convenient but underground and that ruled out smart dinner parties. The Embassy admin section was very helpful and found us another flat on the Boulevard Saint Germain, not as convenient for the office but in a more interesting part of town. So we moved in after a month or so and enjoyed being on the fifth floor with a balcony over the Boulevard.

SR: Did you speak French already?

AB: No. I'd been trying to read books and so on but hadn't made much progress. Caroline, my wife, was a graduate in French so she was fully functioning pretty well immediately: I was trailing in her wake, but eager to advance. I thought the job would give me an opportunity to learn French and be at home in the French language. A good investment of time.

You asked about the 1968 riots. The University at Nanterre was still a pocket of discontent and there had been a few strikes but by and large things had calmed down. However, in August 1970, at our first "smart" dinner party on the fifth floor of this *immeuble* on the Boulevard Saint Germain, when we were just pouring the coffee, we heard a commotion from the street below. We went out onto the balcony and saw, eastwards towards the Odeon people streaming westwards. And there was a horrid smell. It was teargas, drifting up. There was a regular riot going on, at 10 o'clock at night. An attempt had been made, not very successfully, to block the Boulevard, and there were some cars mis-arranged in the middle of the street. In addition to the tear gas, there was also the smell of burning rubber. Some cars on the Boulevard had been set alight. Then, as it was all coming nearer and the crowd was being pushed back, people began to run for their lives with the forces of order in hot pursuit. Right under our window, we saw a young woman, flaxen hair streaming behind, dash down a side street. It was painful to watch the pursuing riot policeman gaining so rapidly. Within an instant or two he was close enough to grab her by the hair. The wig came away in his hand. By the time he, and we, had recovered from the surprise, his prey had vanished. What gave the evening a certain piquancy was that one of our guests was an official from the Quai d'Orsay who had been abroad during the 1968 rioting. For him, it must have been an embarrassing, not to say mortifying evening.

We didn't last very long in Boulevard Saint Germain. In fact, just before we were going on leave later that month, we were given a month's notice to quit by Mme. Liebeherr, the



landlady who lived underneath. Quite apart from anything else, she was no charmer. She accused the children of emptying their chamber pots onto her balcony! So, back from leave, we scrambled to find something and finally got a house with a garden on the other side of the Seine, across the Bois de Boulogne. It was much more suitable for the children than a fifth floor flat in Saint Germain and I could bicycle across the Bois to the Office.

Our first months were thus taken up with domestic matters and exploring the OECD which constitutes an eloquent part of European post-war history. Its origin lay in the rather ad hoc arrangements for administering Marshall Aid that became the OEEC (Organisation for European Economic Cooperation) which, ten years later(1960), basic European reconstruction done, transformed itself into the Organisation for European Cooperation and Development (OECD). In the course of the 10-year life of the OEEC, the GDP per capita of the OEEC countries had increased by something like 270%, which was colossal. In the 10 years to 1970, there had been another giant increase in GDP. That was very evident in France. Though we didn't know it at that point – 1970 - France was reaching the beginning of the end of that long trajectory called *les trente glorieuses années de croissance*. The comparison with London, especially with penny-pinching Whitehall, was dramatic. The headquarters of the OECD was in a bogus but well - appointed 19<sup>th</sup> century château called the Château de la Muette. Just down the street a spanking new building had been built to house the Secretariat and some Delegation offices, including ours. The needs of the Secretariat and of the Delegations, were well and conveniently catered for. I'd landed in a very comfortable place to work. The French, it seemed to me, were behaving with amazing confidence, ease and enjoyment of life - so far from where we in the UK were at that moment in time. In 1970, we, the UK that is, had entered a very difficult decade -the Seventies. In Paris, the evidence of opulence was unmistakable.

The organisation consisted of a Council of Ministers directing the work of a range of specialist Councils and Committees. The Executive Council where Heads of Delegation sat, met regularly. Weekly or monthly, I cannot remember. Subjects covered were economics, finance, agriculture, industry, trade, foreign aid and development, science, technology, each one of those Committees shadowed a corresponding Department in the Secretariat, under the overall control of the Secretary General. Our job was to service the Committees, in so far as they weren't serviced from London, and to lobby and report as the business needed.

SR: What was your particular role?

AB: I was told that this was a training assignment; a bit of a disincentive. I wasn't long out of university, had spent time learning Persian and had been on the Treasury course and now here was a bit more training. The first year, I was our man on the Budget Committee, the Development Committee and the Agriculture Committee. In the second year, I was relieved of the Budget Committee by the new arrival and then serviced the Economic Policy Committee and the Finance Committee. There was also an organisation called the European Monetary Agreement, of which I was the Alternate Governor for the United Kingdom. It sounds very lofty but I can tell you it wasn't! There were three First Secretaries: two from the Foreign Office and one from the Department of Trade. The Trade person did industry and trade and we did all the rest.

The most important committee as far as London was concerned - and London meant the Treasury - was the Economic Policy Committee. It had four Working Parties which focused on the four areas identified at Bretton Woods as key: growth, prices, employment and balance of payments. The Bretton Woods credo was to aim to keep these always in balance so that sustainable growth could be achieved. It is an almost impossible task to keep them in balance for any length of time, except for places like Switzerland. I didn't know that then.

For us, the most important forum was Working Party N0. 3, of the Economic Policy Committee, which at its frequent meetings attracted the Treasury knights and usually the Deputy Governor of the Bank of England. The UK was already well along a path which meant we had a more or less permanent balance of payments crisis. It was interesting watching these top men, how the personalities played and how, to a certain extent, the personalities were strengthened by the economic performance of their respective countries. For example, the Deputy Director of the Bundesbank, the redoubtable Otmar Emminger, was always full of geniality, generosity of spirit, smiles and bonhomie, because of course the German economy was powering along as usual, and no one else seemed to be able to figure out how or why it was so successful. We played in a lower key and could not always challenge criticisms of British policy offered by colleagues but had to take them on the chin. For us, our main speaker was Sir Douglas Allen, a very distinguished Permanent Secretary at the Treasury, later Lord Allen of Croham. That was all fascinating to watch, but rather laborious to write up because they wanted it in great detail.

What was noticeable about the work, which was fairly menial - record taking, passing on messages and that sort of thing, was the absence of any clear or immediate objectives, apart

from checking the growth of the budget; something of a will o' the wisp. OECD was, and as far as I know, largely remains essentially a consultative organisation. Its main value to all the members was the way it enabled them to pool data and methodologies and gradually develop models of best practise for national and sectoral policies designed broadly to advance the Bretton Woods ideals; a process that favoured coordination. The Statistics Department played a great pioneering role developing a framework into which the participating countries could slot their statistics on a more or less comparable basis. That statistical framework became ever more sophisticated enabling people to read their own and other people's economies much more accurately. The participating countries, in the privacy of these Committees, couldn't really expect to pull the wool over one another's eyes about what they were doing or what they were trying to conceal as far as the management of their economies was concerned; valuable transparency. Politics nearly always trumps economics in the real world but examples of best, or at least better, practice, did and do emerge. Education, of lively interest to voters, is a good example. This was useful and could be a helpful discipline on governments, in so far as it would enable domestic lobbies to point out that other OECD countries were doing better.

But, as far as Whitehall was concerned, there was no great impulse coming to us. There were close links between the academic world and the Secretariat: the Secretariat were in many cases either ex-officials or would -be officials or ex-academics or intending academics. There was a great deal of coming and going between the three. It was a high level community of bright well informed people. Visiting officials had to recognise that they were talking to people who often knew far more than they about their particular subjects.

It was and remains a valuable organisation. I must say I learned a good deal.

SR: You mentioned in your notes, Adrian, that there was a source of tension when the Treasury specified 'an unrealistic position for us to take up'. Can you expand on that a bit?

AB: This was particularly the case in the Budget Committee. For many members, especially the smaller countries, the Organisation was of immense value, because many of them were far further back in terms of economic and social development than we were. We had solved or were often well on the way to solving problems which, in many cases, they were encountering for the first time. Their political structures, at the beginning of the 1970s, were as chalk and cheese compared with our political and economic structures before the Second

World War. They weren't exactly starting from zero, but from quite a low base and encountering, in the process, a whole range of new political, economic and social problems. Membership of the OECD was of great importance and utility to them and naturally they were eager to see its capacities and its reach improved and enlarged. The US contribution was 20% of the budget. We had a contribution in proportion to our GDP which was quite large relative to a lot of the smaller and newer countries. All the other contributors paid according to the same scale. It was only the US who were on a scale apart. Whereas for e.g. the Germans, the French, the Japanese the annual subscription was not a problem for us it was, or we thought it was. So, our policy was in the familiar Treasury tradition collecting candle-ends; irritating everyone. Because of our concern about foreign exchange, we were under very tight instructions on the Budget Committee: we had to oppose practically all new ventures, even a new bicycle shed for locally engaged staff. For me, the culmination of this absurdity was that it was decided, at the ministerial level, that the question of an Environment Directorate or Department should be examined. Were it to be thought advisable, then the existing Science and Technology Department could form the nucleus of a new Department. Now, as you probably know, the Club of Rome reported in 1960, voicing concern about limits of growth and the impact of human activity on the planet. Gradually during the 60s that had gained momentum and it was becoming quite an issue internationally. The proposal came forward in the 1970 budget that we should have an Environment Committee in the OECD. My instructions were to say no, we didn't need a committee. I had to maintain this position over several sessions. Everyone got very irritated. They knew we would cave in and, in due course, we did. It's a style of negotiation we haven't abandoned!

So, there was tension on the Budget Committee but, in a sense, it was a very minor issue. I think that person who dealt with it in the Treasury was a Grade 9. If he didn't get 500,000 francs off the budget, his promotion might be delayed: there was no consequence beyond that.

The tension was political rather than economic. In addition to the Economic Policy Committee and its satellite working parties, there was another committee called the Economic Review and Development Committee (EDRC). Every year, the Secretariat submitted a draft report on each member country's economy to the Committee for publication. These meetings were usually characterised by a good deal of plain speaking. Pleas from e.g. Turkish delegates that the text on Turkey could cause the collapse of the

government or, more realistically perhaps, the jobs of its representatives in the EDRC, might move the chairman to sympathise with some of the adjustments and deletions proposed. The case of the UK was, however, different. The UK had not only given birth to John Maynard Keynes, who had played a key role at Bretton Woods, but HMG was regarded as having broad enough shoulders and being generally sufficiently grown-up to have a public debate on its economy on the basis of an impartial, expert economic analysis published by a highly regarded international organisation of which the UK was a founding member. Treasury officials found these discussions in pursuit of an acceptable text often quite awkward..

The seventies, was a poor one for the British economy characterised by slow growth, increasing inflation and industrial unrest e. g. ‘the three - day week’. Defending government policy in public was a challenge. I was on the edges of several rather tense discussions between Treasury officials and members of the Secretariat trying to agree draft conclusions. That tension, the presence of this corrective view in Paris at the OECD, was resented by Treasury officials at that level, middle level. It coloured their attitude towards the organisation quite a bit. Our cooperation was not wholehearted.

SR: And what about the personalities? Who was your Ambassador?

AB: To begin with, Sir John Chadwick was in charge. He had joined the public service as a Trade Commissioner which must have been before the Second World War and had spent time in the Trade Commissioner Service in places like India and other colonies. After the war, it was all brigaded together and he joined the Foreign Service. Before coming to the OECD, he’d been Ambassador in Romania. He sat in the Executive Committee and he was very active promoting the idea that there should be an agency under OECD auspices, perhaps part of the OECD organisation, charged with studying problems of the transfer of technology from developed industrial countries to developing countries. This was quite an interesting concept and a lot of academic economists and people in the Secretariat thought it was a good idea. But, of course, the Treasury were not very keen and they didn’t see why our man in Paris, was promoting something which was going to cost more money. Notwithstanding, he battled on. I think that the notion that this was a good idea was adopted and there may even have been an outline proposal for some sort of agency. But I’m not actually sure if it ever happened. He was well - liked and well-respected.

At the number 2 level, there were two Counsellors. A Foreign Office Counsellor and a Treasury Counsellor. The Treasury Counsellor, Owen Williams, had been there for years,

indeed saw out his career there. He was an agreeable and cultured man, who knew his stuff - Invisibles – backwards. Although he was a Treasury man, he didn't really take me under his wing. We got on very well, no problem. But in relation to the Economic Policy Committee, I had to do all the work! He was respected in the Treasury for his expertise. But he didn't see himself as someone who needed to take up the cudgels on the Treasury's behalf in the Budget Committee, for example. He was very keen on music and he and his German wife had met before the war but the war came between them. Years later, after the war, they managed to rediscover one another and got married. He was well regarded in the French Treasury and got on there especially with Jacques de Larosière. They often lunched together but I was never invited. De Larosière went on to become head of the IMF.

The Foreign Office Counsellor was John Roper. He had been parachuted into France in the Second World War and got up to all sorts of exciting things. He was no stranger to explosives, firearms and that kind of thing. Like Owen he was also quite a long stay officer in Paris. He had suffered quite a bit, health wise, from his time in the war. He later went on to become Ambassador in Luxembourg where he stayed until retirement.

Then there were three First Secretaries, an Archivist and, I think, two UK-based shorthand typists. We were all kept busy, but it wasn't a hectic place. I won't say it was stately, but we weren't overworked.

Before we move on, there is something I should mention about Paris. I said there was a fundamental incompatibility between the four goals of ideal economic policy. At that time, the US was getting further bogged down in Vietnam. The burden of the convertibility of the dollar was forcing US economic managers into choices they would rather not have had to make, distorting their economic policy. They were coming to the conclusion that the problems they were having with the dollar were not dissimilar to the problems we'd been suffering with the pound for so long. In other words, the limits of reach of a reserve currency based on gold. Indeed, in the following year, 1971, in August, during the holidays, Nixon surprised everyone by taking the dollar off the gold standard and bringing to an end the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates. The OECD got into crisis mode ... difficult to imagine. They had some meetings which, if I remember correctly, were presided over by the US Treasury Under Secretary, Paul Volcker. He was a very big, tall man, representing the biggest and strongest economy in the world and with commensurate competence and authority. One had the impression of a giant figure who was very cautious, not only about all

his movements in case he might knock over a precious vase, but also in what he said in case he upset the markets. He was a great expositor in committee: the sort of person people wanted always to agree with. A commanding presence.

I should also just mention one or two of the personalities in the Economic Department. It was led at that time by Christopher Dow, who'd been in the Treasury himself for many years. At some point, the job in Paris had come up and the Treasury had put him forward: that job had been regarded for some time as a British Treasury fief. The number 2 was also British. There were several other people at the upper echelons of the Secretariat in the Economic Department who were British academics or British Treasury officials, or had been. This meant that there was a very good osmotic relationship between the OECD Economic Policy Department and the Treasury. The OECD budget did not figure in those exchanges! Those of us who were outside that charmed circle were scurrying around dealing with the housekeeping, if you like.

In summary, I should say it was a valuable posting, not least for what I learnt about international economics. And I got my French to a reasonable standard. That had been one of my objectives. The other one was to learn my way around a French menu, but I never managed to do that.

SR: And to learn something about French wines, perhaps?

AB: Indeed. I mentioned earlier that the new Secretariat building was very well designed to support the sort of life we were leading. There was, for example, a little restaurant called *Le Snack* where you could have a snack, and there was *Le Restaurant des Délégués* where you could invite your important contacts for a proper French lunch. More important than any of those was a shop. The wine they had there ... nowadays they are way off the map expensive! But in those days, they were actually quite manageable.

SR: Happy days!

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### **British High Commission, New Delhi, 1973–76**

SR: Good morning. It's Tuesday, 19 February. I'm with Adrian Beamish for our third session.

Adrian, tell me how Delhi came about? Did you ask to go? Were you just summoned to Personnel and told that's where you would be going?

AB: I could speak a bit of Italian and every time the post preference form came round - an annual ritual - I would put down Rome. I thought I would put it down yet again. And when I was in London on leave, I went in to see the Department who said they had already got a few names down for Rome. Anyway, my Personnel desk officer at the time ... one of the names was his! So off he went. I didn't go to Rome, but went to India instead.

SR: Was this something you welcomed?

AB: No, not at all. I remember, I was fairly taken aback because, having joined the Foreign Office, it never occurred to me that I would be posted to the Commonwealth. Of course, when the two services were amalgamated, clearly the possibility arose. But I was frankly disappointed that it arose so soon! However, it's a question of doing what you're told largely and that's what we did.

I mentioned in relation to Paris that we took the approved route. Well, the approved route to India at that time was to travel by car to Venice, take ship from there for Bombay and then the train to New Delhi. You will recall that there was the Six-Day War in 1967: all sorts of shipping had been strafed and bombed by the air forces of the various combatant countries and the Suez Canal, littered with sunken shipping, remained impassable. Going via Bombay by boat therefore meant rounding the Cape of Good Hope. We motored to Venice and found our boat moored on the island of Giudecca. This was a convenient base for seeing something of Venice in the two days we had there. A good start. We sailed at sunset, memorable, and coasted down to Brindisi where I was disappointed to notice that Italians were now largely dressed like other Europeans, in jeans, and then out through the Pillars of Hercules and down the West coast of Africa, crossing the line on the way. No landfalls were scheduled but we made one stop, at Walvis Bay, where someone who had died a day or two earlier was disembarked.

On the boat there were several members of the Service also going to India, one to be the Deputy High Commissioner in Calcutta. He was voted as King Neptune and ducked us all into the pool in traditional fashion! We had fun. It was our first experience of a long journey by sea and we all thoroughly enjoyed it. It was an Italian boat. As I mentioned earlier, I was an enthusiastic student of Italy and Italian and Caroline's degree was in French and Italian.



So, we felt comfortable and, because we were able to talk to the crew, got a certain amount of special attention, particularly from the major domo who used to come to our cabin every evening to go through the menu with us to see what we would like.

Kitty had her seventh birthday on board and Antonia was two years younger. The crew made much of them. They quickly learnt the word *gelato*. I'm not sure we travelled POSH but it was a very gentle and agreeable way to travel to India. Our approved route was disapproved not long afterwards, as I suspected it might be.

During the voyage, there was the great emergency of the oil price rise: OPEC decided to jack up the price of oil four-fold, I think, in March 1973. As a result, the Captain of the ship - a Lloyd Triestino ship - received instructions from his base in Trieste to steam more slowly to conserve fuel. That added a week to the voyage, so it took us five weeks to get to Bombay. Giacomo, the major domo, was very mournful about the fact we were going more slowly, because he knew he was going to run out of pasta! No bulk supplies in Mombasa, our only port of call.

There couldn't have been a better way of going. But I must say, when we arrived in Bombay, my heart was in my boots. The heat was intense - I'd never experienced anything like that.

SR: This was in April?

AB: Yes. It was just beginning to hot up. Somebody from the Deputy High Commission had come down to meet us and help us off the boat, which was wonderful. One of the astonishing things was how our luggage was taken off the ship: half a dozen porters with nothing on but loin cloths came storming down the corridor and, within seconds, everything was gone. We had something like 24 boxes between us. Then we stood in the customs shed, looking out into the blinding sunshine to watch our motor car being hoisted and put down gently on to the quay.

We were then whisked away across the metropolis to take refuge in the Deputy High Commissioner's residence. He put a bedroom at our disposal to pass the heat of the day. I really felt some sympathy for him and his wife. They had grown up children and they were alone in this immense city. There was very little in the way of British community: I think they must have felt quite lonely. Anyway, we got the night mail train and arrived in Delhi the following morning.

SR: You put the car on the train?

AB: Yes. Well, it was magicked there by the Deputy High Commission. In Delhi, we were greeted at the railway station and taken to our lodging in the 26-acre High Commission compound. Twentfive years earlier, Nehru – at Independence - full of idealism throughout his life - had designated in New Delhi a diplomatic quarter called Chanakyapuri, named after the great Indian political philosopher from around the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. Opposite us was the Chinese Embassy, in an even bigger compound. Then there was the Russian Embassy, the American Embassy and the Pakistan Embassy and many others. The Pakistan Embassy was empty because there were no diplomatic relations at that time following the breakup of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh two years before. One didn't have to go far to meet diplomatic colleagues. Every compound had swimming pools, tennis courts and other amenities which are a great relief in that kind of climate - summer temperatures before the monsoon oscillating around 40C.

In our compound we had a large office block, about 4 or 5 storeys high, air-conditioned. There were four blocks of flats for staff, called Dorset, Radnor, Lanark and Antrim, also air-conditioned. Virtually all the staff were accommodated in these flats. Some of the senior staff had houses or flats outside. You were allotted your flat according to family circumstances and rank.

SR: You were a First Secretary at the time?

AB: Yes. In addition to the tennis courts and a swimming pool, we had a cottage hospital (with a First Secretary (Medical) who was a fully qualified doctor) and a sort of village hall building where we put on Christmas shows and that kind of thing. Then there was a bar run by an Indian, Lal Singh who was also in charge of keeping our Commissary stocked, which was quite a challenge at that time. In one corner of the compound there was custom built accommodation for 1,000 servants. We had four: a cook, an ayah for the girls, a sweeper and a kind of butler figure. The butler was in charge: Bachiram was his name, a tubby chap, quite bossy. One day, the sweeper, convalescing from TB was sent back to his village to recover fully. Of course, in his absence, there was no sweeper. And because Bachiram was a higher caste, he couldn't do the sweeping. The cook obviously wouldn't do sweeping, nor would the ayah. So who did the sweeping? The memsahib - Mrs Beamish! an insight into into Indian life.

I was the Head of what was called the British Information Services (All India) and I had around 80 people working for me: several had degrees and one a Ph.D. (Personnel Operations Department had explained that the posting would give me useful management experience). We had a printing press and issued press releases every day. We had a large library of documents and over 1,000 films about Britain, although the film collection had stopped receiving new acquisitions some years earlier. We also had a branch of Her Majesty's Stationary Office (HMSO) and a separately housed reference library and reading room.

My staff were drawn from all over India, many from the South where they speak Dravidian languages (e. g. Tamil and Malayalam) which are quite distinct from Hindi: another important aspect of the Indian reality. But in the Press and Information Department, we all spoke English.

My job was to cultivate editors and columnists in Delhi, the main press centre and also in the other principal centres: Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, or I should say Kolkata and Mumbai and Madras, now called Chennai. (When I was there, we never heard these alternative names.) I had to travel quite a bit. Not only to the three places where we had Deputy High Commissions, but also to other major centres like Bangalore, Hyderabad, the Indian Punjab, Kashmir and so on.

On one occasion, I decided to take the British gospel down the Ganges. The Head of Chancery agreed provided I took my own car. It was a six hundred mile round trip. But I was allowed a driver from the High Commission pool. Omo was his name. A Burmese, his English was poor and from what I could tell, so was his Hindi. I had two speeches in my pocket, one about Indo-British relations, the other about the changing international scene at a time of East-West détente. Our first halt down those rough country roads was Meerut where the Mutiny had started. Thereafter, our route led on to Allahabad, Lucknow, Kanpur and finally Benares. We stayed in three- star (Indian grading) hotels. In the early 70s, the Indian metric was some way off the international standard. It was an instructive excursion.

At that time, millions of Indians, possibly hundreds of millions, for whom English was the main language outside the home, might never have met nor could expect to meet a live, native speaker of the language. Accordingly, the appearance of such a person aroused great interest, curiosity and, in my own experience, easy fellowship. English culture forming such a significant part of their own, it was, if not a treat, then at least a novelty to come in contact with the real thing. This novelty factor no doubt explained why I had a full house wherever I

spoke. As I made my way down the Ganges Valley, there was no mistaking the enthusiasm warmth and friendliness with which I was received.

But familiar though we were through a common language and a shared history, not just cricket, there would nevertheless be gaps between us that could suddenly yawn disconcertingly wide; mismatches between our respective social conventions. The question, 'How much does your missus earn?' was frequently put to me. Less frequently, but often enough to put one on one's guard were questions relating to other aspects of family life.

In Meerut, my topic was 'Recent developments in Indo-British relations'. At the end, misled no doubt by my unaccountably grey beard, a man leapt to his feet demanding to know how the speaker, notwithstanding his great age, had managed to retain his youthful vigour. Before I could reply, and ignoring calls from the floor to shush and sit down, he made his second demand, namely how could he get an Entry Certificate to the UK for himself and his family. In that instant, the audience were all ears. Everyone wanted to know how to do that. As for developments and perspectives in Indo-British relations, they would have to wait for another day.

Immigration was a major part of the High Commission's work. We had ten, possibly more, Entry Certificate Officers (ECOs). Their work was stressful. The interface with their clients could be scratchy. We had our regulations and, for the clients, the issue was potentially life changing. There was a lot of disappointment and dissatisfaction. Part of the problem was that the Immigration Section was under-staffed. There was always a long queue. To join it you had to apply months beforehand and, for many, it entailed a long and expensive journey to Delhi. Alex King, a Minister of State at the Home Office, came out to see the situation at first hand. After Delhi, he went to Bombay, Calcutta and Madras and then on to Bangla Desh and Pakistan, where the situation was broadly similar. Like the rest of us, he discovered that the question of an Entry Certificate could crop up in any conversation with anyone, high or low. Among the top level Indians he met many had numerous second cousins.

SR: Did you have much to do with the High Commissioner?

AB: Not a great deal, actually. I'm not sure he knew what I did a lot of the time, because I travelled quite a bit. It's interesting, there were two High Commissioners. The first was Terence Garvey, an East European and East/West specialist, later Ambassador to Moscow. He was rather left wing and, like many people, he felt uneasy about British India and the

poverty. At the political level, we were inhibited because of this. We felt we should somehow compensate. One of the things we had to do was to be super-respectful so as not to offend the Muslims, the Hindus, the Jains, the Buddhists or the Sikhs ... all the different communities in India. And the tiny Christian community, of course, tended to look to us as a natural ally and felt we should be sympathetic towards them.

The Head of Chancery was a Commonwealth man who had served in pre-independence West Africa and had become very attached to the people there. He used to give us pep talks from time to time about what the correct behaviour was: it was always to be meek and to make every allowance for Indian demands and statements, however outrageous they might be; concentrated political correctness. That I found inhibiting, because when you're in a foreign country, a normal foreign country which is really foreign, you know where you are. Whereas with all this historical baggage, there were lots of traps you could fall into. Among the Indians, there were those who had been abroad, or otherwise exposed to foreigners ... senior civil servants, military men, business people, politicians and so on. Among them, you could often find a good deal of hostility because they knew their history better, they knew that India was trying to forge her way on the international scene, they knew that we didn't really approve of their non-aligned stance. Often, they had negative stories of their own which involved the British in the pre-Independence days, whereas the people who hadn't been outside India were much more natural and relaxed in their dealings with us. But, at the end of the day, there is no doubt that we were regarded with affection - I don't think that's too strong a word - by the vast majority of the people we met.

Terence Garvey's successor was Sir Michael Walker, who had grown up in the Commonwealth Relations Office and, I think, in the Colonial Office before that. He came from a military family and had served in India before.. He had a much more relaxed attitude to India: he was quite free of these inhibitions about the Raj. All his instincts were contrary to that: he enjoyed playing golf with Generals and going around the country as a sort of latter-day Viceroy. In a way, that was a healthier posture than the previous one. But we still didn't seem to have much policy and it was only later, under John Thomson and Robin Wade-Geary, that our policy began to make more sense. It may have been just the time we were there.

In Delhi itself, the High Commission had very good relations via the Defence Attachés with the Indian Armed Forces and, in particular, with the 61<sup>st</sup> Cavalry, an élite unit from which

was drawn the presidential guard. They were absolutely splendid looking chaps, like the Bengal Lancers. They generously put their polo ponies at the disposal of anyone in the High Commission who wanted to play, and several did.

My deputy was a retired Major from the Lancashire Fusiliers, a member of the MCC a good and enthusiastic cricketer. He got in touch with the main cricket club in Delhi, the Roshanara Club, and floated the idea of a match between them and the High Commission. This came to the ears of Bishan Bedi, later Captain of India and a very brilliant left arm spinner. So, thanks to the initiative of Ian Dowdall-Brown, we got a fixture with the Roshanara and some other clubs in and around Delhi. I might add that Ian D-B, with his MCC tie and Jaguar, recalled Osbert Lancaster's image of Major Thomson in the Daninos books. Concerned to improve the High Commission XI, he wrote a poem to Personnel Department, describing how we were getting on with the Indians on the cricket field and begging that the next person to be sent out should be good at cricket. The next person duly arrived, the new Head of the Immigration Section, and to every one's delight, played for one of the Minor Counties. Rather a coup!

We went on family holidays into the hills. Simla, obviously, but also some of the other hill stations which were not as grand. You could stay in what was called a *dak* bungalow. These were a network of bungalows, put up during the Raj. *Dak* means post or messenger. It was going back in time, all the servants seemed to be still in place. The service was a bit ramshackle but good-natured. They made you feel at home. I don't know whether it was a lost opportunity or if I was guided by my guardian angel ... we were staying in the *dak* bungalow in Ranikhet. I went into the library and it was full of books, English novels in particular, from the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to 1947. What really excited me were three or four Evelyn Waugh first editions – Black Mischief, Scoop ... some of the books he'd written in the 30s. They were all there and nobody was in the slightest bit interested, as far as I could see. I felt sorely tempted just to put them in my bag and walk off. In Bombay, on one of my visits, I'd gone to some old bookshops and found a first edition of one of his earliest books, for about 20 rupees. Mind you, it had been eaten by termites, authentic evidence of its time in the tropics.

Turning to political matters, Mrs Gandhi's Emergency happened while I was there. She was caught out in some electoral malpractice in her constituency. It went from court to court and finally the Supreme Court pronounced her guilty. This would debar her from office. A very

serious matter. It would have meant the unseating of the Nehru family from the position they had achieved at the head of the Congress Party pre-independence and, since independence, at the head of government. Nehru had ruled India from independence in 1947 to his death. Mrs Gandhi, his daughter, became Prime Minister in 1966. It was all very difficult for her. I heard about the Emergency from Mark Tully, the long-time BBC correspondent. He rang me about 5 o'clock in the morning, so we were slightly ahead of the curve.

The Emergency was declared under legislation which we had installed in India: the so-called Defence of India Rules (DIR). The Viceroy could invoke these Rules in cases of serious unrest. Mrs Gandhi invoked the DIR and approximately 10,000 people were arrested that night. There was chaos. Was Indian democracy going to survive this? Hundreds of foreign journalists appeared. One of the first acts of the Information Minister was to impose censorship on all media, which made even more journalists want to come in. My job suddenly acquired a new focus because though Indian journalists had all the news they could no longer print or broadcast it. The paper would come out, let's say The Indian Express or The Statesman (incidentally, the New Statesman is so called because the Calcutta Statesman came first) and the front page would have several black columns. I would go along to see all the editors I'd become friendly with. They would tell me what had happened - what they could not print. Then I would report back to the Chancery: their contacts were in difficulty because they were often in Ministries. So that gave my job a bit more point than it had had until then.

I don't know if it was touch and go. Some of us who were new to India, as most of us were, really thought that Indian democracy might not survive. But some of the wiser heads, the Deputy High Commissioner in Delhi - Oliver Forster who had served in Delhi before for the Commonwealth Relations Office - and later became High Commissioner in Pakistan, knew his sub-continent better and had more faith in it. He tended to tone down our reporting which was a little apocalyptic, I suppose, when first drafted.

One evening, I'd gathered some of the British correspondents: The Times, The Guardian, the BBC of course, The Telegraph and Reuters. Peter Hazelhurst turned up from Tokyo: he'd been a distinguished Times correspondent in India some years earlier. Before long, we had American correspondents, other British, German, French, even Japanese: there must have been about fifty people in this rather small flat. Hazelhurst from Tokyo was suddenly

prompted to make a very good and stirring speech about freedom of the press and Britain as champion of that freedom. In self-congratulatory mood we all drank gladly to that.

I want to say a word about our policy. It seemed to me we didn't really have any policy. We had this uneasy conscience about India, so India was our top aid recipient: I think the budget then was £100 million. We had an Aid Section in the High Commission which had very good relations with the Indian opposite numbers in various ministries. What was greatly welcome to the ODA was how good and well managed the Indian projects were. This, good in itself, also meant that the Indian recipient machinery for aid could easily absorb the £100 million programmed and more. Our trade with India was £100 million. A lot of people felt that it should be a bit more. But there wasn't really much emphasis placed on commercial work and Indian government policy was resolutely autarchic. The Indians, because of their non-aligned stance, at the official level - the Foreign Ministry in particular - kept us at a distance. They tended to be rather pernickety about the letter of the law or the letter of the agreement. The man in charge of the Department that dealt with Western Europe was very bright and used to write a column in the *New Statesman*. His and other columns there and elsewhere frequently gave him an edge over the Director of the British Head of Information Services in discussions about HMG's policies on a whole range of issues which the latter was trying to promote or defend!

In contrast, I had to brief the Indian Ministry of Finance from time to time about how the British economy was doing, or rather, how it wasn't doing. This was a difficult time (mid-seventies) for the British economy (cf. above for discussions at the OECD). The man I had to brief, the man who was gracious enough to receive me, was called Manmohan Singh. He later went on to serve as Prime Minister of India for 10 years. He was a brilliant economist who trained originally in Amritsar, I think, and then had gone to Cambridge and got a PhD. I was just repeating the Treasury line which came through - we got frequent bulletins. He would hear me very courteously and say, "I quite understand" or "Quite so, Adrian". One day I realised that he understood far more about the UK economy than I ever would. So after a time, I thought it was better to stop wasting his time and discontinued my visits.

There is another point worth mentioning. One day, I was surprised to hear someone shouting on the balcony above our flat. I went down into the garden and looked up. He was speaking in a foreign language, calling for the police and was on the balcony where our Administration Counsellor lived. But there was no sign of the Administration Counsellor. Then he jumped



but broke his fall, and his ankle I think, on the first - floor flat balcony. Other people came, including the Defence Attaché and a party of ex-Gurkhas (our security guards) with their rifles. Then this chap jumped again and landed on the grass. Two or three Gurkhas rushed forward to hold him and the doctor from the compound hospital, with his Gladstone bag, injected him with a sedative. I was a dumbstruck witness of this amazing scene. It turned out that he was a Russian who was transiting Delhi from Chittagong to Moscow and was making a break for freedom.

SR: But how had he got into the compound?

AB: I thought you'd ask that question! He'd come on the back seat either of an American Embassy or High Commission car under a pile of blankets. He'd first visited the Americans who thought that he might be of interest to us. Overlooking the High Commission compound on the other side of the road was the Ashoka Hotel, one of the biggest and best hotels in Delhi at that time. The Deputy High Commissioner was at a reception there and became aware of the commotion. Others at the Ashoka had seen it too.

On reflection, we concluded that this chap wasn't all that interesting. He was driving a crane in Chittagong harbour which was blocked with sunken vessels after the war with Pakistan. I think the Indians must have found out pretty quickly. Of course, this was something they were very hot on because, as you may remember, Svetlana Stalin did a bunk in Delhi and caused a great deal of trouble between the Russians and the Indians. This was something similar. We had to hand him over to be returned to Russia.

It blew over. It suited none of the governments to let the story drag on. But, at the time, what concentrated the drama in the whole issue was that the PUS was visiting. He, quite wisely (although it struck me as odd at the time), stood back and said it was something that the Office had to decide, in consultation with Ministers.

There's another incident I'd like to mention. At that time, in the mid-70s, Lord Mountbatten was Chief of the Defence Staff. His retirement came and he decided that he would retire from the world and embarked on a round the world trip to say goodbye to everyone! A valedictory documentary was being made of the trip for showing on the major networks. In India, where of course he had some form, much was made of him. The High Commissioner gave a party. One of the people I was talking to in the garden of the Residence was the head of the nascent Indian television service. We are talking about 1974, I suppose. Their

audience was very small: I think it was in the hundreds of thousands and limited to the Delhi area (population of India then approximately ca. 650m. The man who ran it, A N Kidwai, a very refined and cultivated individual I knew well, was not a pushy media type at all. He asked me if I could introduce him to Lord Mountbatten. Mountbatten was a big man, Kidwai rather slight: one looked up, the other down. After a few exchanges, Kidwai said, "I wonder if you would let us show your film?" Mountbatten might have said something positive, but his immediate reply was, "You've got no audience, too small." And that was the end of that. Imperious to the last.

I mentioned earlier the question of our policy. It wasn't clear to me. There was an economic disequilibrium and there was a kind of political disequilibrium, arising largely out of India's commitment to the non-aligned position and her determination not to tilt westwards.

Of course, the economic relationship they were grateful for. But I remember myself thinking and discussing with some colleagues in the High Commission that our £100 million (£1.5 billion in today's money) sounded a lot to us, but it was just a drop in the ocean when you put all the Indian metrics against it: they would themselves ultimately achieve self-sustaining growth. So, neither economically nor politically did we have much purchase. This wasn't reflected in our policy in any productive way, as far as I could see. The implication seemed to be that we would ride with the punches and try and stay within hailing distance, if you like, hoping for better times. Now maybe that was the right decision, but it was disappointing. The individual operations, getting out the word on Britain, handling the aid programme - all of those mechanical things worked well, that was good. At that level, they were satisfactory and kept one busy. But there was no overarching shape, as far as I could see. The Russians were gaining ground and others were gaining ground, e.g. the French with arms sales. When I was there, the Americans had two outstanding American personalities as Ambassadors: Kenneth Galbraith, the economist, and Senator Moynihan. They were like princes. They held court and everybody wanted a bit of them.

Our High Commissioners were outstanding members of our Service, but they were in a different league from the Americans. I mentioned Sir Terence Garvey, who came from a stable where the predominant sense seemed to be that we should accept that the Indians had plenty of reasons for resenting us, but make clear that ultimately, we were on their side.

But, against that background, when in 1974, far out in the Rajasthan desert in a place called Pokhran, the Indians let off their first atomic device, the shock and horror were considerable.

I don't think anyone said, "Why didn't they tell us beforehand?" But I think people felt that somehow we ought to have known. It was a complete thunderclap. At the time, one of my clients was the Guardian correspondent in Delhi, a very nice man called George Schwartz. That very morning he came to see me. He and his family were going on home leave that afternoon and I had agreed that we would look after his car on the compound while he was away. I asked him what he made of the news. He hadn't heard about the bomb. You could see his hair growing grey at this major story breaking, just as he was about to go on leave. So he didn't leave the car but beetled back to his place to file a story. I have no doubt that we condemned this thing in public, but there was nothing we could do about it. It was perhaps the final step in India's emancipation from the mantle of tutelage that we had cloaked her in so many generations before.

We had a language training programme. The First Secretary (Political) spent three or four months doing immersion training, usually in Benares, before coming to work in the Chancery. The standard reached in Hindi was never very high. But the notion that we should teach people Hindustani or Urdu was never suggested because it would have been somehow not accepting India's modern concept of herself i.e. not politically correct. Hindustani or Urdu would have been more useful and easier to learn. So that was part of the same mindset I have been trying to describe.

One further note on which to finish. When I got to India, 25 years after independence, I had a strange feeling that we, the British, had only just left. And, at the same time, that we'd never been there.

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### **Personnel Operations Department (POD), FCO, 1976–80**

SR: Good morning. It is the 8<sup>th</sup> of April and I'm back with Adrian Beamish. How did your posting to POD come about exactly?

AB: I was in India when the letter arrived and it shook me to the core. The last thing I had ever thought about was working in POD or in any kind of administrative function. In Delhi, the Christmas show was called 'Alice in Blunderland' and was based on a visit by the inspectors. One of the songs was sung to the tune of 'I'm getting married in the morning' (originally sung by Stanley Holloway in 'My Fair Lady' – the refrain went 'With a little bit, with a little bit of bloomin' luck'), but our refrain was 'There's an element, there's an

element ...' Anyone who has suffered an inspection will get the reference! And I'd written the script with the collaboration of Richard Thomas who was later Ambassador in Eastern Europe. We had a lot of fun. I needed to be restored after getting the letter from POD. The High Commissioner said, "You know, this is an invitation. It's not an order. You can't be forced into Personnel Department against your will. You are perfectly at liberty to say no and it won't be held against you. But my advice is that you should accept." So I accepted it.

I turned up in Curtis Green in the summer of 1976. I was welcomed by the Head of Department, Richard Parsons, who was leaving the following week. His job was taken over by Hooky Walker who then ran the Department for most of the time I was in it. The Deputy Head was Roger Carrick, later High Commissioner in Canberra. I met the Chief Clerk, Curtis Keeble, who later became our Ambassador to Moscow. The Deputy Chief Clerk was Oliver Forster who had been the Minister in Delhi during the early part of my time there, a familiar and welcome face.

I think I should give a detailed description about POD for purely historical reasons as it has been the subject of a great deal of readjustment. There were three personnel Departments: Personnel Policy Department (PPD) which considered high policy issues such as the shape, size and quality of the Service; Personnel Services Department (PSD) which dealt with financial matters, mostly allowances and pay, although pay was, strictly speaking the province of the home Civil Service; and Personnel Operations Department whose role was to man the establishment (i.e. postings and promotions). As Michael Alexander, who took over as Head of Department after Hooky Walker, said, "PPD look after the policy, which is the boring bit. PSD look after the money, which is the even more boring bit. We in POD look after the people, which is the important bit." At that time, the Department had about 100 people who dealt with all appointments in the Service, in all grades, for every kind of job.

In the Curtis Green building there were five floors: the inspectors were on the top floor and the lower floors were occupied by the three personnel departments.

The way the Department was structured was a function of the selection boards. The Number 1 Board dealt with appointments in what was later called the senior grade, DS 1, 2 and 3. The Number 2 Board dealt with DS4, Counsellor grade. The Number 3 Board dealt with Grade 5, First Secretary grade. Then there were the Number 4 and 5 Boards which dealt with lower grades. The Service at that time was divided into 10 grades, 1 at the top and 10 at the bottom. Vertically, the Service was divided into the Administrative and Executive branches.

Within the Department, there were four areas: the Home area; the European area; the Middle East and Africa area; and area 4 which dealt with the rest of the world. Each area was in the charge of a Grade 5, supported by a Grade 7 (usually from the Executive stream). The responsibility of these two was to draw up proposals for staffing every job within their area. I met regularly in a so-called 'grid'. I can't remember how frequently, probably, monthly, to prepare the monthly Boards.

My job was to be the chairman of the Grade 5 grid, covering both the Administrative and Executive streams. At the grid meetings, the area officers would all meet together with me. We would have a forecast of all the upcoming vacancies and there would be proposals to fill them. The more savvy area officers would do deals among themselves before getting to the grid. Frequently, this meant that I would be presented with a bit of resistance; two or more of them trying to present me with a *fait accompli*. These meetings were quite lengthy and sometimes difficult. Often, they didn't finish until people were wanting to catch their trains home. On the basis of those decisions, we would prepare the Board meeting. The Board had to have a piece of paper which proposed candidates for all the vacancies, supported by notes on each proposal. At the Board, which was chaired by the Head of the Department, and was attended by a selection of Heads of Department from the Office, more negotiation went on. But at that point, there was far less room for us to negotiate, given how interlinked so many of the proposals were. If one fell through, then there would be consequential knock-ons. The Board needed what you might call firm direction! Occasionally, the chain would be broken and then we'd have to go back and repair it. That was the basic discipline, for every gap we had to find a body within a given time frame. The very nature of this framework ensured posting and promotion proposals were closely scrutinised. I think it was a pretty fair system. First of all, it would be true to say, as a general remark, that those responsible for choosing people were guided by doing a good job, not simply by trying to ram pegs into holes, irrespective of the geometry. There was, in my experience, a real concern to try and make a good fit between the candidates and the slots. To the extent that that was true - and I think it was largely true - people worked with a clear conscience and tended to get satisfaction from the job, because they felt they were doing the right thing by their colleagues.

SR: How did it actually work, Adrian? This was in the days before computers. Did you have large wallcharts? Did you move things around? What was it like in practice?

AB: Upstairs, there was a room which housed thousands of punched cards, about A4 size. They had holes made with knitting needles, although I can't actually remember what any of the holes stood for. There were two or three very devoted officers in charge of that room.

SR: So, this was a way of coding?

AB: Yes, they were punched to indicate some kind of experience. Home, abroad, language ... it was a very crude system. We did rely on it, but it wasn't all that serviceable because, with the passage of time, the holes got larger and there was a good deal of Sellotape ... you couldn't quite see what the hole referred to! It was an asset, but quite difficult to manage and maintain. Apart from that, our basic tool was the individual file. This consisted of all the confidential reports on each officer plus related correspondence. And then, at the front of the file, there was a summary sheet with the officer's name, date of birth, promotion and so on. There was a space for any other remarks: some of these were quite random. I can remember one which laconically said 'Tallest man in the Service.' Another entry for an officer whose wife was German simply said, 'Wife is a sprinter.' Now I have heard 'Wife is a bolter', but I hadn't heard of sprinters before! Apart from that, there was no summarised information at all: you had to go through the file which made for an awful amount of reading. Because each file was individual, all the information it contained was random e.g. date of birth, name of spouse, quality of confidential reports. For me assigning sets of such random data was quite a challenge. I had a very good PA and I told her we needed to do something about this. So I designed a form to go at the front of the file which, with colour coding, tracked the officer's box markings. At a glance, you could see whether this was an average officer or above or below. It took us about six months. We would sit for half an hour each evening. She would have the sheet and I would go through the file pulling out the markings so that she could put them down.

When I'd completed this system, I offered it to everyone in the Department. We had put it in all the Grade 5 files. But no one was really interested: I think we were all very busy. But, for me, it was very helpful to get into my mind the progress of an officer.

There were also brown envelopes. In some files, you would find a sealed brown envelope, with an initial in the corner, usually the initial of some senior officer. Unless you knew that senior officer, or you were him or the same rank as him, the convention was that you didn't open these envelopes.

SR: And what was in said envelopes?

AB: They contained information about an officer of a particularly personal nature which it was thought appropriate to withhold from anyone casually flicking through the file. Probably the material would have been topic for gossip. As it was, we were licensed to talk about our colleagues all day long! At the beginning, a lot of the people you were dealing with you hadn't met. There was one officer called Harbottle-Reed. Everyone thought this was a very funny name. Not many people knew who he was. He'd been in Hungary a long time, I think. Every time his name came up, there'd be another feeble witticism and the tension in the grid would be released for a moment or two. There was another man who we called Master of the Foxhounds (MFH) So and So and I don't think any of us had ever met him. He was a Treasury officer who had been seconded to our UN Delegation in New York, in charge of input to the UN budget. He had been there maybe twenty years. Just lodged comfortably. He knew the situation from back to front and could be relied upon to say 'no'.

I should add that a good deal of our time was spent interviewing officers, at our initiative or theirs. We had an 'open door' policy.

SR: While we are talking about peculiarities of the system, Adrian, is there any truth whatsoever to the rumours that POD sometimes played games, sending Benson and Hedges or Dickins and Jones to the same post?

AB: No!

SR: All right. We'll put that one firmly to rest!

AB: Anyway, that was the rhythm and the basic structure. We did think we were doing the best for our colleagues. This positive attitude meant we were quite protective, not only of our own proposals but also because we didn't like interference. We felt that the people intervening didn't necessarily have the officer's interests or those of the Service in mind. When I say intervention, I mean things like the report of the Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS), Tessa Blackstone and Mig Goulding. They recommended the abolition effectively of the Diplomatic Service and its amalgamation with the home Civil Service. The head of PSD at the time, Alistair Hunter, a good friend with whom I served in Bonn, was rather seduced ... well, he could see there was something in the CPRS argument. I think he was allowed to travel to Ottawa to talk to the Canadians who have just such a system. The CPRS was described as a Think Tank. We established in the Office something called the anti-Tank

Unit in the charge of Laurence Pumphrey, who'd been - I think - High Commissioner in Pakistan. He was a very doughty warrior, I must say, very good at rallying the press, lobbying MPs and doing all sorts of useful things. A few of the CPRS recommendations were implemented but the great bulk of the report was shelved. We saw it off.

But it infected the atmosphere. It became a slight irritant in our dialogue with the rest of Whitehall. One of its recommendations was for more interchange of personnel between Ministries. There was a certain amount of cross posting: we would second people to the Treasury and they would second people to us. In theory this was a good idea but, in practice, we weren't all that in favour, because home departments, naturally enough, were ready to contemplate posting people to our missions in the countries where they had big interests – Brussels, Washington and so on. But they were no good at helping us to staff Bujumbura, Montevideo or Papua New Guinea. The number of European and North American 'civilised' postings was limited and, to the extent that it was inhabited by people from other Departments, then our ability to cycle our people through more comfortable and at the same time more demanding posts was reduced. That obviously had some negative impact on morale which meant that we had to be very vigilant about these jobs and, to the extent possible, hang on to them and stop others from getting their hands on them.

There were other interferences, notably from the PUS and powerful Ambassadors in places like Washington, Bonn, Paris and Brussels. There was interference from senior officers in the Office and, occasionally, interference from Ministers. I remember once that a very senior Minister came back from a visit abroad. We got a minute from his Private Secretary saying that the Prime Minister had thought our man in country X was useless and that we should get rid of him. That was the sort of thing we didn't like: it's very difficult to sack anyone in the Civil Service. The say-so of somebody, however grand, isn't adequate in a labour tribunal. It must be confessed or admitted that some of our colleagues for one reason or another were no longer firing on all cylinders, as is the case in many large organisations. Changing job, country every few years produces stresses not only for individuals but also their families. Medical problems, divorce, drink all featured. We sometimes had to send officers for medical checks. The usual result was that the officer was declared 'fit for normal duties'; not always what we wanted to hear! . It was important to be able ... not to put too fine a point on it ...to shelter people, to have places to hide them. But under the relentless downward pressure on budgets, that became more and more difficult. I do not think in my time I sacked anyone.



I suppose we were defensive because we felt that we were relatively weak. The Foreign Office wasn't really in control of its budget. Which department is, apart from the Treasury? The Foreign Office is also a very exposed department, both abroad and at home and to Ministers. Moreover, stereotypes live a long time and can be taken out of the cupboard and used to beat us fifty years after they have ceased to have any validity. So, we were a bit defensive. But we fought hard.

We saw the CPRS off, but there were other changes. Suddenly, we had to have interchange and the Cabinet Office sent round people to interview us to ask where we could take on staff. How many people could we take? Could they be from the academic world? We would say yes, but most of these placements were not very productive. Particularly the academics, because, avid for history they would come in and just couldn't stop reading all the back files, instead of making use of the phone, drafting telegrams, in short doing some work.

Then things changed in relation to homosexuality. We had to take a position: even to this day, there are still countries where homosexuality is a capital offence. In the 1970s, there were far more of them. So that was a problem on two grounds: postability and security. But the PUS, Michael Palliser, came over and explained it to us at a meeting. He told us that this was what the government had decided at the highest level: homosexuality should not be a bar to top-secret clearance, unless there were very specific circumstances. This was a revolution. And then there was the fact that if you could only post homo-sexual officers to the 'civilised world', that reduced those comfortable posts available to others who could be sent instead to Uganda. So that all had to be managed carefully.

Then there was the question of women. It didn't affect me very much but one of my officers was an admirable young woman, a good officer. Unlike the stereotype of the young woman officer who had to be found a nice comfortable billet, this young woman wanted to go to a hairy place. We discussed a number of postings with her. She opted for one. We were pleased. We put it to the High Commissioner but had to twist his arm. Back on leave, however, he met her and everything was fine. We were all congratulating ourselves. But, not long before she was due to go, she decided to get married so she wasn't up for the posting after all. Anyway, things have moved on since, in both directions I think.

I'd like to make another general remark relating to the interface in the Foreign Office between Ministers and civil servants, compared to the interface between Ministers and home civil servants. I don't have much experience of the home departments, but I did spend an

illuminating two months in the Treasury, before I went to Bonn. I was staggered, frankly, by the contempt some of the officials had for their Ministers. Not so much on party political grounds, although that was a factor, but on competence grounds. As a result, the attitude towards Ministers could be frankly disrespectful. In the Foreign Office, some junior Ministers may not cut the mustard or whatever the expression is, but I think we respected them, on the whole. (I am somewhat ashamed to admit that, one day, sitting in my office in Curtis Green, the telephone rang, I lifted it up and the voice at the other end said, "David Owen (then Foreign Secretary) speaking." With the telephone in my hand, I immediately stood to attention!) Thinking about this difference, it occurred to me that it could be that in the Foreign Office there is a premium on unity, because the issue is national security and prosperity, whereas in the home departments it's not - it's specific areas of policy. There's less at stake.

I should also perhaps say a word about special operations. Not what you might think. But one special operation was staffing the High Commission in what used to be called Salisbury, now Harare. This hung upon the success of political talks. Assuming that the talks succeeded, we needed to have a team that could arrive the next day, because Smith and Co. would go and Sithole, Muzorewa and Mugabe would take over. The Prime Minister and Lord Carrington were happy to send Christopher Soames. He needed staff and they needed to be good, *disponible*, with their bags packed while carrying on with their existing jobs. We had to identify this team. And keep it up to date. On - going postings meant constant and unpredictable roulement. It was all hypothetical until, suddenly, the talks were a success, and off the fully staffed team flew. Some of the original choices were still in but there had been many changes. Not even the tiniest footnote in history had a good operation. Our methodology had worked.

Another special operation arose from a minute that the PUS, Michael Palliser, sent over about the Prince of Wales. The Prince was now in his 20s and it would be appropriate for him to have a counsellor who could help with foreign affairs. I was tasked to find the right person. We put up three names and, I'm glad to say, the person I wanted to win was chosen.

SR: Who was ...?

AB: Oliver Everett. He worked for the Prince, he worked for Diana. Then he went to the Royal Library in Windsor. He was the first in a long succession of Foreign Office people who went thereafter to the Palace.

What else can I say? I've mentioned that the Diplomatic Service is very exposed. I used to sit *ex officio* on the final selection board which was run by the Civil Service Commission, both for the Diplomatic Service and the home departments. I did this in two of my jobs, as Deputy Head of POD and as Assistant Under Secretary. It was instructive to me to see how different the profile of candidates needed to be as between the home Civil Service and the Diplomatic Service. I think I'm right in saying that the gradings were A1, A2 and then B, C. The home departments would take Bs and Cs and be glad of an A2. But we only took A1s. That related obviously to intellectual capacity, but also personality. The key difference between the home civil servant and the DS officer is that one is a bureaucrat, the other has to have the potential to be both. The roles are different.

SR: And the diplomat has to be something of a chameleon, because every three or four years you have to reinvent yourself to take on a new role.

AB: Absolutely. Furthermore, one of the things you don't really realise until you are abroad is that the Foreign Office has no jurisdiction. When you're in Belgium or Mali or wherever it may be, you can't tell anyone to do anything. Except perhaps your driver. The home departments have their own jurisdiction ... agriculture, fisheries, transport or whatever it is. That imposes a huge difference in attitude, because you can't order people, you have to persuade them. And, as I said before, we are very exposed, both as individuals and as a Service. So I wanted to get that on record because I think it is a key distinction. It's not always apparent.

### **Temporary duty, Political Counsellor at UKDel (NATO), 1980**

SR: Let's move on now to your next job. How did your spell of temporary duty in Brussels come about?

AB: Having spent four and a half years labouring in the salt mines of POD, the appreciative management there agreed that I needed to be properly prepared for my next job. The outgoing Ambassador in Bonn was particularly insistent that I should have German good enough to start working effectively on day one. Because I didn't have very much German at all, that meant devoting some time to the language. The first module was a month in Munich with a family where I was very well looked after. My tutor, the wife of the house, was very assiduous and comprehensive. She had worked out a big programme, visiting, meeting people and so on and so forth, all of which was extremely helpful. The only fly in the

ointment was that, for the whole of that July, the rain poured down more or less incessantly as it can do in Munich as it's on the wrong side of the Alps. That was to be followed, after the summer holiday, by a three-month stay in Freiburg am Breisgau, right down near Switzerland on the Rhine, where I was to be a student at the Goethe-Institut. I was plugged in there and quite happy. It was a good class. My German had reached a point where I was beginning to read a little poetry. That combined with the most splendid golden October. The streets in the centre of Freiburg where I lodged were cobbled and medieval and thickly planted with maples and planes, so that the light invading these little squares and alleys was filtered through the golden leaves. It was most intoxicating, particularly as the air itself was scented with the newly crushed grapes. Memorable. After a week or two, I could recognise that the chambermaid had a different accent from the locals. She explained that she was from Berlin. My ear was becoming attuned.

All of that was going very well. There were distant sounds of strife elsewhere. In the class, we had a young man from El Salvador who was constantly being called to the telephone. That was at the time of bloody civil conflicts there where one of the leading personalities, Duarte who, at one point, had been a kind of liberator later turned into a dictator. All very troubling. Earlier in the year, Cardinal Romero had been murdered. And then we also had a young Polish priest who was also called to the telephone frequently. That was September of 1980. You will remember that on 18 September 1980, Solidarność was established as a recognised trade union in Poland. It was unique in the sense that it was the only trade union ever to have existed in the Eastern bloc which was not under the control of the local Communist party. So that was a very interesting development. It became clear that a cloud - or a wave - of tension was beginning to spread across Europe as the situation there deteriorated. We read in the newspapers about shortages of bread, shortages of meat, protests, marches, lockouts ... all the ingredients of an unhappy brew. But it all seemed very remote from me as I was sitting on the banks of the Rhine in this rather charmed location, beginning to get an appetite for the poetry of Rilke! Then, one morning, I got a call from POD to the effect that there was a problem in the Delegation to NATO: the Head of Chancery had fallen ill and nobody knew when he would be able to resume; there was the crisis in Poland, NATO's major focus, there was also an inspection looming and, further down the track, a royal visit scheduled. So they really needed a Head of Chancery. I had learnt from my time in POD that it is usually wise to do what the Department ask. So I asked when I

should start they replied that they wanted me to get the train the following day. So no passing go. A direct transfer. And that was the end of my German language training.

I arrived and was put into what they called an Aparthotel, something I'd never heard of before, right in the centre of Brussels. The wife of a former colleague kindly lent me some sheets and I bought a teapot and various other things. And I found my way out to the rather forlorn suburb of Zaventem, near the airport, where the Delegation was located. I was warmly greeted by Ken Scott, who was the Minister, a genial MoD Counsellor and, of course, the Ambassador, Clive Rose.

Anyway, I knew nothing about East/West or defence issues. The Head of Personnel Policy Department (PPD), who had overlapped with me when I was in POD, had had some involvement with defence issues. He told me, "It's terribly dreary. They spend all their time counting glickums and slickums."<sup>1</sup> I didn't know what these were so he explained: it didn't sound terribly appetising to me. But, in fact, the issues on the table were really much larger, namely how was NATO to respond to what was clearly a difficult situation in Poland, getting more difficult by the day and of such delicacy both locally and internationally, indeed globally. It was plain that it would be miraculous if things went right and anything could go wrong with unforeseeable consequences. So NATO was on the *qui vive*.

Part of my job was to sit in the UK seat on the Political Committee. I don't think we met every day, but we met quite frequently, as did the Military Committee. One of my lasting memories is of General Rogers, who was then the SACEUR<sup>2</sup> at SHAPE<sup>3</sup>. He was always standing when he briefed the Political Committee which sat in a semicircle, with Joseph Luns, the Secretary General of NATO, in the chair. The picture in my mind is quite clear: General Rogers would stand inside the semicircle and brief the assembled delegates. I couldn't help wondering whether his standing and our sitting was symbolic of the superiority of the civil power: a fundamental principle of government of all the nations represented in NATO. I don't actually know if that's the case. I also subsequently learnt that General Rogers was rather a hawk, but I can say that his briefings were extremely clinical and

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<sup>1</sup> A GLCM (glickum) is a ground launched Cruise missile; a SLCM (slickum) is a sea-launched Cruise missile

<sup>2</sup> Supreme Allied Commander Europe

<sup>3</sup> Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe

objective, to the point that one never got a clear view of what he might be thinking. I thought it was very professional and I was impressed.

The situation in Poland was deteriorating. The shortages were real and even in Poland - just imagine - there were shortages of coal because of the insufficiencies of the distribution network. The grievances of the greater public were very real and could 'legitimately' boil over at any moment. The tension arising from that - what you might call legitimate discontent - gave cover to Solidarność in pushing for political objectives. In other words, because the authorities were unable satisfactorily to meet the 'legitimate' demands of the greater Polish public for bread, meat, coal and other essentials the only other way they could stave off growing public discontent was by making political concessions. This meant that Solidarność became bolder, but at the same time more cautious because they could see that they could push more, but recognised that it had to be done very prudently. At all events, that was evident and it made everybody even more alert to the prospect of things going wrong. It speaks a lot for how delicate the situation was that the Polish authorities didn't feel that they were compelled to impose martial law until about a year later. It was a raw situation for which there was no adequate legislative or jurisdictional framework and therefore could get out of control at any moment.

As the weeks passed, NATO's focus became how to respond and, of course, collectively, because it is a collective defence organisation. With Christmas approaching, the search became more urgent. The question was what response could or should be made, bearing in mind that the last thing we wanted to do was to provoke the other side into pre-empting whatever response they thought we might be thinking of making. There were various suggestions, naval deployment in the Baltic (no, no, no!), naval deployment in the North Sea (no, no, no!). So the suggestions came and were batted down. Finally, the focus was on doing something about Christmas leave. We were, of course, listening to Russian traffic, some of which was *en clair*, no doubt deliberately so. There was a great deal of business being reported to the Military Committee from our assets in and around the Soviet 2nd military district which bordered Poland. And no doubt our discussions were not as secure as we thought they might have been. So should leave be cancelled for Christmas? Would that be a clear, unprovocative gesture? Some people were slightly uneasy about that: if people didn't get their normal leave, families would know and it couldn't be kept from the public. What would the Soviets do? Would that be a provocation if they needed one? The Germans thought it would: they had a very forceful and articulate Representative in the Military

Committee, so that was ruled out. And a succession of less united, less visible proposals followed, none of which found favour with the Germans. I can't actually remember what NATO finally decided to do as a gesture. I think what may have happened was that it was left to member states whether or not they wanted to cancel Christmas leave or to reduce it. But, by then, my time was running out.

I'd spent some weekends going round the battlefields of Belgium and, my God, they are depressing, particularly compared with the ones in Normandy. The displays in the accompanying museums of photographs of the distressed landscape and bodies hanging on telegraph wires and the terrible weapons used are truly horrific, enough to disband all military alliances for ever.

Anyway, my time ran out. Christmas came. We all went on holiday. My German training had ended long before. The next bit of my preparation was time in the Treasury, but that's another story.

I must say, for me, it was an absolute eye-opener to be in NATO at a time of such tension. One got a very clear picture of the solidarity between the nations, but also of the credibility of the organisation because it was plain that getting any kind of agreement to any kind of collective intervention on an issue like this - not offering a direct threat to any of the member states - - was very difficult. Prudence, particularly emanating from the Germans, which always has to be the battlefield if there is going to be a major conflagration in Europe, was the key variable for the health and resoluteness of the Alliance. Although the unity was there, division was there too. The actual commitment to action had a big question mark over it. I could not forget the last words that Admiral Tony Morton, our representative on the Military Committee, said to me about the Germans, "You know, these chaps are never going to fight. We should just accept that."

On that sombre note we should end this little interlude. But, of course, that all has disappeared now.

SR: Indeed, if you'd looked in your crystal ball then, you wouldn't have predicted what was to happen afterwards?

AB: Absolutely not!

**British Embassy, Bonn, 1981-85**

SR: So now we move to 1981. You went to Bonn as Economic Counsellor. How did that come about, Adrian?

AB: Well, there is a convention that, after time spent in the salt mines of Personnel Operations Department (POD), officers can expect to have some influence over the choice of their next posting. I was very keen to go to Bonn. I'm not sure that at the time I would have been able to say why, but since then, I realise that part of my interest was that a great deal had happened in Germany down the centuries that was important and continued to be hugely important to us. The same could be said of France of course but in every way France and the French were familiar to us in a way the Germans were not. Or rather the Germans were familiar but as stereotypes fashioned by the British reaction to the two World wars. I felt that Germany and the W.Germans had in some degree been withheld from me and wanted to find things out for myself, to get beyond the stereotypes that had left me feeling that W. Germany was not so much a foreign as an alien place. In my pre-posting training /briefing, one thing I noticed was that whereas down the centuries the western frontier of Germany was broadly speaking the Rhine, in the East it was a very different story, the frontier going in and out like a concertina. It must have had some impact on their outlook. In contrast, we have always had the sea.

SR: What was your German language like?

AB: A bit shaky. I had taken lessons in India, of all places. I then studied in the language lab in London to show my interest. But my German was not what it should have been as I'd had to cut short my training to go to UK Del. (NATO) on temporary duty: I hadn't even got the intermediate level. The Ambassador, who was leaving anyway, emphasised how important it was for people to have proper German, but nevertheless accepted me.

I went to Bonn, full of high hopes and deep apprehension. The job was to be the Economic Counsellor, covering European Community issues (no EU yet) and the W. German economy. I was trying to see how Germany in my head differed from other foreign countries, in particular European countries, which were places in which mostly you could feel at ease. I didn't think that would be the case in W. Germany. As I read about post-war Germany and all the problems that the German people had had to confront, I could see they were rather wary in their contacts with us, and perhaps with other foreigners too. The Major in Fawlty Towers had it right "Don't mention the war!" It was a real phenomenon, because at any moment it was a theme that could go wrong, however sensitive the handling of it might be.



With thoughts such as these I set off for Bonn. Crossing the frontier near Aachen, I felt a sensation for which I later learnt the German word - *Beklommenheit*: 'a feeling of uncertainty and concern, of anxiety about nothing in particular'. If I committed some minor traffic infraction, would a furious man in uniform come to deal with me? One couldn't expect a Mediterranean shrug to ease matters. When I got to Bonn, I found the Embassy on Friedrich Ebert Allee, the main road along which the tram ran, linking Bonn to Bad Godesberg. The Embassy seemed to be neither in one nor the other. Friedrich Ebert was leader of the SPD (Social Democrat Party) during WW1 and the first president of the Weimar Republic. His untimely death, the collapse of the Weimar Republic, the drab thorough fare and the dreary Embassy building (rumoured to have originally been designed as a hospital) reinforced the ideas I had that W. Germany was more likely to be bracing than charming.

SR: John le Carré called Bonn a small town in Germany, didn't he?

AB: Indeed: David Goodall, the Ambassador's private Secretary in real life and in a *A Small Town In Germany* , was Minister in the Embassy when I got there; a tower of strength. On the first day, I met my secretary, the other people in the economics department and called on the Ambassador.

SR: Was that Jock Taylor?

AB: Yes. An engaging, encouraging, enthusiastic person. I liked him.

And then I sat down at my desk. Before my secretary could get back to hers, the phone rang. I picked it up to hear a voice rattling away in German. "This is it", I thought, "and it is real". It was a powerful stimulus.

SR: It's hard on the telephone in a foreign language though, isn't it?

AB: Yes. No body language. My job picking up the European Community dossier and following the German economy was to inherit the contacts of my predecessor, John Boyd, and go the rounds - very frequently - of the Finance Ministry, the Economics Ministry, the Federation of German Industry, the Agriculture Ministry, the Aid Ministry, the Transport Office etc.etc. I also needed to go to Berlin to talk to various agencies dealing with invisibles, especially insurance, and to the Bundesbank in Frankfurt and the Economic Research Institutes in Munich, Kiel and Hamburg. And then there was the Foreign Ministry. The agenda and tempo for covering much of this range of contacts came ultimately from

COREPER but, apart from that, there was a healthy appetite for news from Bonn in the FCO and Whitehall more generally.

I learnt quite a bit about the strength of German economic management, the strength of the economy as a whole and also how the Germans were using structures within the European Community to support their competitiveness abroad. The liaison between the government departments other quasi-governmental agencies and industry seemed to be far more productive than I had the impression was the case in London. Maybe that's because when the Germans are doing something, they really focus. They're not so concerned about clocking off at 2:30 on a Friday to play golf or anything like that. That was one of the points that was borne in on me. But when, as happened several times a year, groups of Assistant Principals would come from Whitehall to have a little exposure to the German economy, the question I was always asked was, "How do the Germans do it?" I didn't really know the answer to that. But it seemed to me that a salient feature of German society was that, in W. Germany, one could get a qualification for acquiring skills at all sorts of levels. For example, in the tourist business, there were three grades of waitress. This reflected a very thoroughgoing analysis of the work that people actually did and how they should be rewarded for it.

SR: And with that a sort of recognition or status?

AB: Exactly. Often in Germany, for what we would regard as quite menial, unskilled jobs, you would require a certificate. One of the great benefits of the system, it seemed to me, was that once you'd achieved a qualification, however modest, it gave you confidence to go up another step. So, I felt that, in that way, the whole of the population were involved in the economy. Skills were important and craftsmen were recognised and rewarded. We have master craftsmen and apprentices, but not as comprehensively. So that was one point I always emphasised.

The other point was that when a German leaves school, whether it's to go to university to become an apprentice or whatever, he or she has to answer the question, "How am I going to provide education and healthcare for my children?" The education arrangements vary from one Land to another - because this is a regional subject not a federal one - and in some cases you have to pay, in some cases it's free and in some cases it's a mixture. But it's a question you have to answer. And, where healthcare is concerned, as far as I know, everyone has to have health insurance or pay the penalty. If you're 21 or 22, you have to address those questions. It is quite a sobering thing to have to do. (That is not to say that the National

Health Service, our great treasure, is a bad thing. On the contrary.) But it meant that people in Germany, individually, had to be aware of their economic situation for which they had to take a considerable measure of responsibility. And it's also the case, as we know, that one of the great strengths of the German economy is the so-called *Mittelstand*, the medium-sized businesses. Whereas at that time in the 80s (and things have changed, of course), it would be true to say the overwhelming majority of economically active people in the UK were employees, a corresponding figure for Germany would have shown that relatively far more were self-employed, though I never saw any statistics to support this. But just going round and talking to people, the economic worlds in which they lived were ones in which they didn't just go and collect pay, they had to take decisions about where to get supplies, how to keep customers happy - all on a small scale. People used to make fun in Whitehall about the German agriculture sector, because it was very costly at that time in the European Union context. There were a lot of half-time German farmers. In southern Germany, Bavaria and the Palatinate, Hesse and places like that, a quite typical social phenomenon was that, in the smaller towns and villages, people would have maybe a few hectares of land which they would till. But that only occupied the afternoons, so in the mornings they would work, for example, for Mercedes-Benz or one of its sub-contractors in Stuttgart. Neither job on its own would have kept them. We did write a few reports about how the Germans, notwithstanding the professions of purity they were inclined to make from time to time, used subsidies cleverly without attracting much attention ... according to the European rules something they shouldn't have been doing. And how the German coal industry, which was very polluting as a lot of the mines were producing brown coal, was kept going via the so-called *Kohlenpfennig*, the coal penny, a low tax but levied over a wide base.

In the early stages, what dominated my life was Mrs Thatcher's wanting 'our money back'. You may remember that at the Dublin European Council in 1979, the combination of Charlie Haughey, the Irish Prime Minister, and Giscard d'Estaing made plain their dislike and dissatisfaction with Mrs T. I think it was her first appearance at a European Council. I don't know whether it's true that when she spoke, Giscard noisily rustled the pages of his copy of *Le Monde* but there was some pretty overt discourtesy and anti-feminism, or whatever the right expression is. That of course made an impact on her and on us because, whatever our political inclinations might be, we didn't want the Prime Minister to be humiliated in the European context. Some German media outlets were inclined to echo this deplorable display in Dublin. But, to my delight, most of the people I dealt with were welcoming – in the

Ministries of Economics and Finance and the Foreign Office (Auswaertigesamt), of course, and the other ministries and agencies. A difference between London and Bonn in my time was that in Bonn on European policy, the lead department was - and I imagine remains - the Foreign Office. Which is where it should be, wouldn't you agree?

SR: Yes, but what about the Chancellor's Office?

AB: The Chancellor's Office is of course the supreme source of authority. Of all the people I dealt with those in the Chancellor's Office (*Kanzleramt*) were possibly the friendliest and most helpful. That, I think, was partly the way they were: they had a mature view about what the Community's requirements were at that time and the great benefit of having a more contented Britain as a partner. Some were not like that, but the great majority were. One indeed, a charming man from the Foreign Ministry, knocked on my front door one evening at about 9 o'clock. He came with a sheaf of policy papers which he just handed over, saying, "Adrian, I want you to see all these. See what the French are doing." I felt slightly embarrassed. He was so pro-us and believed so much in Europe and closer Anglo-German links. That was an eye-opener to me and also extremely helpful. Part of the welcome I got was due to the way my predecessor, John Boyd, had cultivated his contacts: his German was very good (although I think he did Chinese at Cambridge). It was all very positive.

But the way of true love doesn't run smooth. There were lots of hiccoughs on the way to the final deal in Fontainebleau three years later.

It slipped my mind when I was talking about this official in the Foreign Ministry, but something I hadn't appreciated was an expression that you would hear in German: *die feine englische Art* which means the fine or elegant English way. The Germans admired the way the British behaved towards one another, admired many of our social conventions and they also admired the way we dressed or rather perhaps I should say British fashions. I never really thought about this. I suppose I should have been more awake to it ... Mary Quant and all those people, but particularly men's tailoring. Some of them sought to be like us, you know. We had what you might call a cultural, social influence: they wanted to be near us. It was genuine and of course it was an asset. In British embassies, there are usually amateur dramatics of some sort. One of my first jobs in Tehran was to produce the cabaret for the Ambassador's ball at Christmas. In Bonn, the Head of Chancery was Alistair Hunter who was very keen on amateur dramatics. He took charge and put on a performance of Twelfth Night at New Year. He was looking for a theatre because in the building we had ... there

were no amenities, really. He asked around and somebody suggested the City Theatre, the Stadttheater in Bonn, a regular destination for international opera stars. They said yes. The show was a sell-out over several nights. It may even have played for a whole week. Odd to think back on it, the Burghers of Bonn (a small town in Germany) queuing up to buy tickets to see the British Embassy doing Shakespeare. So that gives you some idea of the closeness. Some members of the Embassy staff, unlike me, were not exactly hostile to France but not sympathetic to France and French culture but, very positive towards Germany. And that was evident in our contacts: there were real enthusiasts, both on our side and on theirs. Basil Eastwood, later Ambassador at Damascus, used to organise carol singing at his house where we sang not only traditional English carols but also learnt through the German guests to sing German carols some very beautiful but to us then quite unknown. So, we actually felt very welcome and that alienation that I sensed at the very beginning dissipated quite quickly.

We had a number of things to deal with, one of which didn't concern me directly, but it certainly had an impact: the Falkland Islands. The Germans couldn't believe what was happening and how nationalist we'd all suddenly become. We had to tell them that the Islanders had been there for five or six generations, which is more than could be said of most Argentines in Argentina. One snapshot I haven't forgotten. Some years earlier, an official Anglo-German Economic Committee had been set up. It met at six monthly intervals alternately in London and Bonn. The Germans always took us to what was called a *Schlosshotel*, some old castle which had been turned into a hotel. They pushed the boat out. In London they had to pay their own way. We just gave them a dinner or something meagre like that. One of these meetings, at a Schloss not far from Bonn took place shortly after the loss of HMS Sheffield. The atmosphere was a bit edgy. One of the Germans sat me down after dinner and, over coffee, said, "You know, for us, in the twentieth century, it's inconceivable that military force should be used in diplomacy." And I thought to myself, "In the twentieth century?" But I dare say he meant in the post-World War II period. Plainly, he was shocked, as many Germans were. But that didn't last very long, particularly as we won. Had it gone the other way, that would have been a different story.

SR: You talked about Jock Taylor being charming. Then you had Julian Bullard. He was quite a character, wasn't he?

AB: A1! An amazing man. I first encountered him when he was the Political Director. He'd come to Bonn from Paris for a meeting and we were received by the German President. So,

he must have been coming with Lord Carrington or someone like that. Tom Bridges was there on the economic side. There was a reception in the President's palace. As we went in, Julian said, "I don't think I know many people here and I've got a bit of work to do. Any where I can go?" I was not familiar with the inside of the palace. As we both scanned the large reception salon into which we had been ushered we both spotted at the same time a giant palm in a correspondingly sized pot, to which Julian made a bee line. I kept my eyes averted throughout the proceedings but glimpsed him at one point kneeling down behind said palm. As we were going out, pushing some papers into my hand, he asked, "Can you send these telegrams? They need to go quite soon". Use of time! I was impressed.

The Germans liked him and respected his cerebral approach. He was influential in London with officials, although I believe Mrs Thatcher didn't like the cut of his jib very much. There were rumours that she wouldn't have him as PUS, which is why he came to Bonn. But he went down big time in Germany. He could see the opportunity for us in the arrival of Helmut Kohl at the top. Helmut Schmidt, Kohl's predecessor, for all his high reputation in the Alliance and internationally was of course a Socialist and he and Mrs. T. didn't share the same agenda, especially in Economic policy. Whereas Kohl and the Tories at that time were more or less singing from the same hymn sheet. Julian did a lot of advocacy on the opportunity that Kohl's arrival presented to us for getting alongside the Germans in a more productive way than had been possible until then. But I think Mrs. Thatcher took against Kohl personally. There was no animosity, as far as one could tell, but she just thought he was too German, you know!

SR: He was this rather larger than life character who loved his food, wasn't he?

AB: Yes, he was a huge man physically. But very intelligent, of course, with tremendous dynamism. I watched some footage of a debate between him and Schmidt, before Genscher betrayed Schmidt and started the coalition with the FDP and the CDU. Kohl had this energy! He was very cordial. I used to accompany Julian Bullard to call on him from time to time. On one occasion, Kohl said, "Ambassador, you don't come to see me very often." And Julian replied, "Well, I don't want to wear out my welcome, Herr Bundeskanzler." To which Kohl replied, "You must come here any time you want!" So that was all to the good. But it didn't of course bear the fruit that it might have.

We wrote a paper in the Embassy with the title 'False Friends', like the translator's *faux amis* in French and English. The paper was arguing that we and the Germans understood one

another in a ... I was going to say visceral, but that's not quite right ... an almost organic way, because we were the same people, linguistically and racially. We had these natural affinities and many policies in common and expected them to be on our side more frequently, especially in the European context, than they chose to be. When as frequently happened, they sided with the French rather than us, the disappointment was all the keener. We suggested that we might try to talk to the French about this, but the Office decided that wasn't a good idea! I think the Office, saw that, within the European context, the Germans could not go forward without warm regard from the French. That was something that had to be preserved. It wasn't just about horse-trading on particular issues: they had to make the relationship with France their top priority. Everything else would have to be subordinated to that. I think that explained our disappointment on Black Wednesday. We needed help and the Germans were concerned about the impending French referendum, for which the polls were not very encouraging. Had they bowed to our requests the likelihood was that that could have unsettled the economic situation yet further and that could have rebounded badly on the European Union's reputation in France and put the referendum in peril. And, of course, they also had huge bills to pay for the integration of East Germany into the Federal Republic. So, both financially and politically, they felt caught in a trap. Mind you, it was all pretty clumsy, the way it was done by the Bundesbank. I think the French and the Germans don't have to pretend they like one another: they need one another in the European context. Without Germany, the European adventure is nothing really. And Germany needs somehow, like Gulliver, to be controlled. So that was something for us to talk about.

And then there was all of the *Ostpolitik* and the way that affected business. The Germans wanted it to progress and people like Mrs Thatcher were always very suspicious. Finally, the Wall came down. She and Mitterrand both expressed doubts publicly about whether reunification was a good idea. When I was there in the mid-1980s, the notion of the reunification, *Wiedervereinigung*, was something that as a concept trumped Europe. But of course, at that time nobody could conceive of it as a possibility. And then, it happened, suddenly, just like that. Nobody had any idea it was just around the corner.

In talking about the *Ostpolitik*, the *Bild Zeitung* – the Daily Mirror equivalent – that had its offices overlooking the Wall had a museum within its building dedicated to the so-called *verlorene Gebiete* (the lost territories) of East Prussia, Pomerania and so on. There used to be rallies in Bonn every year by the refugees who had settled in West Germany. People would give sometimes quite inflammatory speeches. But I don't think it had much purchase on the

national political mood, so we never thought it was really serious, but occasionally there would be flashes of temper and irritation at the fact that foreign troops were still in Germany, that Germany was divided and that the capital of Germany was, as one man scathingly put it to me, *das Provisorium* (a provisional entity) i.e Bonn.

What else can I tell you? Something I shall never forget is the Stuttgart European Summit when we were all very tense because it looked as though we might get the budget deal then. Michael Butler, the Economic Director, and David Hannay were there. The Minister-President of Rheinland-Pfalz pushed out the boat for the Heads of State/Government. The great and the good were all invited to a huge reception in the Minister-President's palace. There was going to be a dinner for the Heads and then we could all go home to bed. The Heads sat in the morning, they sat in the afternoon, but the afternoon session didn't break up as scheduled. It went on. Suddenly, word came through that the reception had been cancelled. Still the meeting went on. Then, after a bit, word came round that the dinner had been cancelled. Could sandwiches be sent in? We were twiddling our thumbs in the delegation office. I think it was one in the morning, it might have been two. Mrs Thatcher came back with Geoffrey Howe who was Secretary of State. Room was made for Mrs Thatcher on the sofa. She sat down and said, "What a shower they all are!" She kicked off one shoe and rubbed her foot. Then somebody who knew her better than I came forward with a glass of weak whisky which she knocked back. Then it all came pouring out. At one point, David Hannay put up his hand and said, "Prime Minister, could you just clarify?" And so she clarified. And then said, "I don't know how you can bear this stuff! I'm told you've been working on Europe for over 15 years. You must be a saint! How could you possibly stand it?" At another point, she made some savage remark about the other Heads. Geoffrey Howe demurred in his characteristic way ... perhaps it's unkind to say sheepish? She retorted, "Oh, Geoffrey!" and shut him up. But then we had to wait for the draft communiqué. The Germans, as the host delegation, were in charge of producing it. After an hour or more, word came that it was ready. It was just coming off the press. Michael Butler sprang out of his chair and volunteered to go and get it. He bounded down the corridor and came back a bit later with the text. He read it out to us in German and in English. We all listened very intently. Then I can't remember whether it was he, or David Hannay or someone else, asked, "Net? Is it net?" "No, it's not!" Michael was off again. He came back a little bit later with 'net' written in very clearly. I don't know whether it was a typo or an attempt to pull a fast one ... That was another unforgettable moment. From the same Summit, I recall a clearly



less dramatic moment. The Heads were all locked in their conclave. I was in a nearby corridor talking to a colleague when Garret Fitzgerald, the Irish P. M., suddenly appeared. You may remember his thick pepper and salt hair and rather weather-beaten face. Combined with his Donegal tweeds and jaunty air, I could have sworn he'd been whistling before he caught sight of us. At all events, the effect was certainly carefree, verging on the bucolic. Such a contrast to the stress and strain in the British camp.

Let me just add one thing, going back a bit, about the Anglo-German Economic Committee. It was one of a number of initiatives we had taken to try and get ourselves into a position vis-à-vis the Germans which rivalled, in some measure, the one they already had with the French. We had the six-monthly exchange on economic issues at official level. But then we had a programme of bilateral Ministerials. That then grew into having joint Cabinet meetings. All this was very good and positive, but there was no way we could supplant the French. And so the disappointments ... At official level preparing for some Foreign Affairs Council, everything would be right: we'd gone round all the German Ministries and agencies, all the ducks were in a row, or seemed to be. And then, on the eve, someone in the Elysee would ring the Kanzleramt. I think, in the end, there was never really any way of dealing with that.

We were at dinner in Jock Taylor's house for the visit of one of our Cabinet Ministers. One of the guests was Hans-Werner Lautenschlager who was the official State Secretary of the Foreign Ministry: in German ministries at that time there were two so-called State Secretaries, the official and the political. He was a man of considerable charm, cultivated with impeccable English. I remember sitting on the sofa with him and David Goodall. He asked David a question to which David replied rather slowly, "-ish." "What a wonderful language you have!" was Lautenschlager's rejoinder. An exchange that seemed to me to reflect remarkable amity and intimacy.

At that very same dinner party, when pudding was being brought, the Cabinet Minister said, "Oh, I must tell you a joke!" The company inclined forward to hear some British humour from a Cabinet Minister. With a sort of bogus German accent, he started, "There was this German camp Commandant who summoned all the POWs. He told them he had both good news and bad news and asked which they wanted first." The horror ... I dare say I wouldn't have done it, but I certainly wasn't near enough to kick him on the shins. Unhindered, he told his crass and feeble joke. There we are. Basil Fawlty's retired Major was spot on.

SR: Do Germans really get humour? I'm not so sure.

AB: I must say I objected to one of their cartoonists who drew a cartoon of Mrs Thatcher in an inelegant pose for a lady, with her drawers down, looking behind her at what she had done. The caption was ‘The British contribution to the European Community.’ I had a word with the Editor about that. We can be very coarse as well. Are the Germans a coarser version of us? Is that why they admire *die feine englische Art*?

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### **Head, Falkland Islands Department, FCO, 1985-87**

SR: Good morning. It’s 21 May 2019. Adrian, now we come on to your time as Head of Falkland Islands Department (F.I.D). What was it like running your own Department?

AB: I enjoyed it! I may say that it was a surprise to me. I’d finished in Bonn. I’d served in Paris, was familiar with Italy. I could speak the respective languages and was looking for something European: this could hardly have been further away.

So, I accepted my new job with a certain resignation. But I quickly began to see that it was quite meaty. This was 1985. The conflict had finished three years earlier. But there was a sea of problems to address. And there were lots and lots of elements in the situation, all of which needed quite a lot of attention.

I think I could start by talking about Number 10, where Mrs Thatcher sat. I was reading a book about Thomas Cromwell recently and I learnt that a familiar phrase around Hampton Court at that time was ‘the King’s great matter’, referring to the divorce, rarely referred to explicitly. In retrospect, I think the Falkland Islands at that time enjoyed a similar kind of character as a concept and piece of business. People didn’t want to get involved if they could avoid it as, at some point, it was likely to come before the Prime Minister. Someone who didn’t have that option was the Foreign Secretary, Geoffrey Howe. In Bonn I’d seen a little of the body chemistry between them, a particularly sensitive interface. I remember talking to one of the Private Secretaries at the time whose name is familiar to us both [Peter Ricketts]. We were discussing a draft which I wanted to send to Number 10. From our discussion I learned a new phrase: Hovian periods! I cocked an ear; clearly this particular officer was an expert in Hovian periods. That underlined how delicately one had to tread.

In addition to Number 10 and the Foreign Office, there was also Whitehall. The Departments closely involved were, of course, the Ministry of Defence, the MAFF (Ministry of

Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) for reasons that will appear later, the ODA (Overseas Development Administration) and the Treasury.

Then there was Parliament. The Opposition, of course, was very keen to prod and tease the government as the opportunity presented itself. In his obituary, it was written of Tam Dalyell M.P. that he had asked 119 questions on the whereabouts of the Belgrano before it was sunk. And there many other pressure points the Opposition could exploit.

But all wasn't entirely peaceful on the Tory side either, because interest in the Falklands touched on British sovereignty - a familiar theme - but also on the environment and, at times, the two collided. So, there was a very lively interest among backbenchers that had to be addressed. And then there was the Falkland Islands Office (F.I.O.) in London which reflected very well the views of the Falkland Islands Government (F.I.G.). And F.I.G. via the (F.I.O.) in London and directly, was in constant touch with and able to play like a piano the Falkland lobby in London, led by people like Lord Shackleton and the ex-Governor Rex Hunt. It's worth pointing out that, at that time, all telephone communications between London and the Falkland Islands were serviced by Cable and Wireless, one of the biggest employers in the Islands: this also meant that the Governor's conversations were easy to overhear if you worked for Cable and Wireless. One of the members of the Executive Council did. We felt under scrutiny in Parliament, on the telephone, not to mention in the Media - everywhere! Domestically, there were lots of actors, most of whom were supportive, but all of whom had their axes to grind: the Government wasn't being forthright enough, careful enough about environmental issues, wasn't wanting to make peace ... After all, the war was over and we didn't even have diplomatic relations with Argentina, not even consular relations: it was ridiculous that this regrettable episode had led to such a breakdown and we should be working hard to restore matters to a normal situation as soon as possible, and then there was the cost of the garrison, a figure well into the hundreds of millions per annum. These were the main issues of concern to parliament and the wider public.

In addition to that, there was the external factor, the diplomatic factor, notably the question of our sovereignty over the Islands. During the conflict, allies and partners had given us prompt and effective support, bilaterally and in multilateral fora. But three years on that was beginning to change. If I remember correctly, even New Zealand and Australia abandoned us in some UN fora, abstaining when we needed them to vote for us. Others were also getting

wobbly in the face of the Argentine campaign for bilateral talks on sovereignty. all of which meant there was plenty to do.

SR: Did you ever go to the Falkland Islands?

AB: Yes, I went several times. That was one of the dimensions: it's a very long way away and very difficult to get to. At the time there were no regular communications between the Islands and the South American mainland not to mention with the UK. This meant that the only reliable, regular connection was provided by the RAF. They ran a weekly flight, I think, from Brize Norton to Port Stanley, primarily for military purposes but civilians on government business were also carried. I don't think any member of the public could buy a ticket.

There are hardly any trees on the Islands. The climate is similar to here, but there's more sunshine and more wind. So it feels - and is - very exposed. Although it looks a long way from here, you have still got to go 2,000 miles further to get to the South Pole. There's a lot of empty space: the winds play this way and that. It's very difficult to grow trees, but you can grow sheep: that was the main economic activity which was virtually a monopoly of the Falkland Islands Company (F.I.C.), a company that belonged to Coalite, the producer of light coal. It was a fairly small operation, but it did own most of the land on the Islands. There were a few private farmers but, in sociological terms, the 1,800 people who lived there were overwhelmingly employees, rather than farmers. That probably explains why, at that time, there was very little entrepreneurial spirit. It was just sheep for wool. Teams of shearers would come from Australia. As far as I know there was no abattoir, no meat industry. From the economic point of view, it was extremely underdeveloped. The major priority was to correct that.

But a precondition for that was security. Given the distance and the isolation, it was vital to have credible assets in place. When I got the job, the Navy had a frigate on permanent station. They had a submarine - they're always a bit cagey about this, but there was a submarine whose duty it was to protect the Islands. Then there were three offshore protection vessels with guns. I'm not sure if they had anti-aircraft batteries. Then there was the military garrison. I can't remember whether it was at battalion strength, but it was more credible than the single platoon we had to repel the invasion. Then there were attack aircraft - at least a squadron plus land based anti-aircraft missile batteries. All of that was quite expensive.

Again, the figures are a bit hazy, but they were in the hundreds of millions: you can see the temptation to do a per capita calculation!

So that was the policy: we had to make sure the Islands were defensible. Another part of defending the Islands was defending our sovereignty position: we had no doubt about our sovereignty and we had been running the Islands successfully and peacefully for over 150 years. And we weren't going to talk about it: not wanting to talk about it was very unwelcome to lots of people in Europe, even in NATO, in Parliament, in the media and, a fortiori, outside Europe, particularly in places like Latin America.

Before I joined the Department, under the pressure that we should be prepared to talk to Argentina, an attempt had been made to restore relations and the first meeting - and, as it turned out, the last - was held in Switzerland. The Swiss looked after our communications with Argentina and acted for us, and the Brazilians acted for the Argentines. The meeting was convened and broke up within hours, I think: it started in the afternoon of day one and ended before lunch on day two. The reason it ended was because there had been some briefing to the press after the first meeting. Confusion had arisen over something somebody in the UK delegation had said in Spanish: the two phrases at issue were '*no estamos listos*' and '*no estamos preparados de hablar soberania*', we were not going to talk about sovereignty, let it be understood that we were not going to talk about sovereignty. I can't remember which of these verbs was used: *listos* means ready, *preparados* means something more solid than that, for example, "Are you prepared to sign the contract.?"

SR: So it implies a willingness, then?

AB: Yes. You have prepared yourself for this encounter. And, of course, we had, because it was serious diplomatic business but we were NOT going to talk about sovereignty! So the various interpretations of this caused panic. I didn't hear this first-hand, but our delegation was told to pack up and come home.

SR: When was this?

AB: I took over in September 1985 and I think this attempt had been made earlier that year or perhaps in 1984, I'm not sure. That put a damper on everything: all the sensitivities and hostilities were aroused, yet again.

So there was a very active diplomatic effort being coordinated by us abroad. And before every meeting, every conceivable body in international organisations was briefed against forthcoming meetings where the Argentines, for their part just as actively, were going to raise the question of Falklands sovereignty and why it needed to be discussed: if it could only be discussed, they argued, a solution could be found and peace could be made and so on and so forth. But Mrs Thatcher - talk about the Iron Lady - was absolutely immovable. Quite rightly so, given our situation at that time.

I remember in that context that a meeting of Heads of Mission in the Americas was held in early 1986, I think. I was produced at the meeting to tell them about our position on the Falklands, because most of them - individually and as a group - felt there wasn't a great deal of mileage to be gained in bashing people's ears in their local capitals with this topic.

A lot of them hadn't been in Whitehall in the immediately preceding years and weren't aware of the atmosphere. I remember telling them that what they had to remember was that the Falklands looked British, the islanders thought British, they walked British, they talked British - in short ... they and the Islands were British and they just had to get that into their heads and pass it on! For some of them, that was quite a revelation.

We had to brief our missions on a regular basis for meetings of one kind or another. Since the 1930s, Argentina had been run by a series of dictators. As a result of the war, the military caste had been abandoned by the public on the grounds of failure but also because they had caused the disappearance of possibly as many as 30,000 of their own citizens. They were very unpopular and the people voted in President Alfonsín, the only parliamentarian of any kind who had raised his voice against going to war. He had a strong record, with social democratic credentials behind him. His Foreign Minister was an academic, Dante Caputo. The main justification for their position was simply what they called the *integridad territorial*: this was the precious *patrimonio* which had been handed over to the Argentine Republic, the Republic of the Rio Plata, by the Spanish Crown. It was cast-iron, rock solid. There was a strong strain of legality in their approach to things. Because the position was so clear for them, and because the principle of national integrity is very important in international law, that's all they could see, really. In fact, it rather handicapped them. Certainly, it was as difficult for them to admit that there could be any dilution of the principle of territorial integrity as it was for us to admit there could be any question about our national sovereignty. So those were two very hard positions.

A lot of what went on abroad was replayed in London in Parliament and the Media. Promoting and protecting sovereignty was important.. We also had to look after the people of the Islands: what you might call the economic situation. My recollection is that the income of the FIG in 1985 was around £5 million. This came mostly from the sale of stamps to philatelists and interest on money in the bank. As a result of the conflict and all the public attention it had got, it became clear to lots of people that conditions in the Islands were pretty primitive. Something needed to be done to justify the loss of life which, for many people, was scandalously high. There was no secondary education of any kind. Much of the primary education was conducted by itinerant teachers. There were small settlements spread over this very large territory: there'd be a Falkland Islands Company house with common amenities and families would be lodged in smaller units. Some of the people were bachelor shepherds who would be in a kind of bunk house. The road between Stanley and the airport was the only road in the island outside Stanley but it wasn't asphalted. To get around a 4x4 was the solution.. Teachers travelled on horseback. They would stay maybe three weeks and then move on. The level of education and information was pretty low. For those who could afford it (those, in the main, were the independent farmers, of whom there were very few) before the conflict, they had sent their children to bilingual boarding schools in Montevideo (Uruguay) or Buenos Aires, often run by Catholic orders of one kind or another. They got a good education there and learn't Spanish! In the wake of the conflict, they were regarded by some people as unreliable quantities.

Health was the same. There was a doctor and there was a cottage hospital. But if there was anything serious, you had to go to Montevideo or B.A. There was a ship that went to Montevideo once a month.

So, faced with this, HMG had spent quite a lot of money in the immediate aftermath of the conflict to build up amenities for the people: medical, educational, recreational. But that was a short -term programme. The next step was to find a way to make the islands self -sufficient economically. HMG had already spent £3 billion on the war! The Department for which the supply is voted is the ODA.

The obvious answer to that big question was of course Fisheries. Lord Shackleton, the son of the famous explorer, had a lifelong interest in the South Atlantic, particularly the Falklands. He had been there several times and had produced a report on the feasibility of commercial fishing.

Most fish live on the continental shelf. Many years earlier the Argentines, in accordance with developing international law, had claimed their right to extend their territorial sea out to 200 miles and the logic of their claim to the Islands meant the Islands' waters out to 200 miles too. Our position was in line with practice around the UK where we claimed only out to 12 miles. The islands over which we claimed sovereignty were therefore totally surrounded, out to 200 miles, by water claimed by Argentina.

Whatever about the political factors, there were also practicalities to consider. How do you set up a fishery? How much might it cost? How would you manage and protect it? Who would pay? Would it lead to tensions at sea?. It all looked pretty unappetising. You need an infrastructure to run a fishery; scientists to do the conservation measures; you need fishery protection vessels to make sure you haven't got people poaching. And, in the case of the Falkland Islands where the waters were disputed, the fishery protection vessels themselves needed to be protected because, at any moment, opinion in Argentina could spark something. There was a lot to the downside. Apart from Argentina there were also the fishing nations - the USSR, Poland, Bulgaria, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Spain. None recognised our sovereignty. Indeed Spain, our NATO ally and about to become our EC partner was a fierce protagonist of the principle of *la integridad del territorio nacional*- think Gibraltar! and supporter of the Argentine claim.

During the conflict, we had established around the Islands a Total Exclusion Zone at 200 miles. The fishing nations' fishing effort had increased considerably after the conflict. But the Argentines had not sought to interfere with this "poaching" as, given their position on sovereignty, they reasonably might. "Poaching" was increasing substantially giving rise to a growing clamour in this country and in international fora for something to be done to protect the stocks. What's the Navy for? The answer to that is that the Navy never does fisheries protection: that is always the responsibility of the civil power. RN vessels were down there to protect against enemy attack, nothing to do with fish.

On one of my visits, I went up with the RAF and we flew around our waters. The crew took lots of photographs of those fishing. They sent us the photographs and I was interested to see that the vessels we'd actually seen from the air were Spanish. They were trespassing in our waters, inside the 12 mile limit, and apparently fishing. Another reconnaissance found some Soviet vessels doing the same thing. So here were people *in flagrante*: what were we going



to do about it? What could we say to them? Would they say that they didn't recognise our sovereignty?

A bit later, back in London, as we were mulling over this, my secretary got a call from someone visiting London: this person was Spanish and wanted to talk to someone about fishing in the Falklands. He was from the fisheries association in Galicia, north-west Spain, and wanted to know whether there was any likelihood of us doing anything about the fish. They were worried as they had now become dependent on South Atlantic fish: it was very important for them to continue to have access, particularly as they would have to survive a lengthy transition period before, as members of the EC, about to happen, they would be granted access to EC waters. He sketched out a beguiling picture. The Spaniards would go down in their ocean-going trawlers, not the factory ships. The holds would be full of Rioja and other Spanish delights which they would sell to the Islanders. They could then fill up with fish for the return trip. Everyone happy!

SR: It was interesting that he had come to you.

AB: Yes, the murmur about conservation had become something of a chorus as the fishing effort had increased. I asked him if he would be prepared to pay a licence. He replied that he would: they needed the fish. Then we got in touch with the Embassy in Madrid to report what we had been hearing and asked them to identify a few MPs for us. The result was some pointed questions from Galician MPs about the Spanish government's policy. So that was a hopeful development.

Then the question was what about the Russians? The argument seemed to be quite simple: they'd trespassed, they should be reproached and told not to do it again. Did we believe in our sovereignty or didn't we? Should we call in the Soviet Ambassador? Northern Department recommended that our approach should be made by our Ambassador in Moscow, away from the British Media and Falkland ears. Sound advice. To our relief, the Soviets said they were sorry and wouldn't do it again.

This was promising. However, there were still the brute financial aspects of it all: where was the money to come from? As our Legal Counsellor, David Anderson, said, "If you are claiming jurisdiction, you have to be able to enforce it. That's a fundamental principle." At the ODA, someone had done a back of the envelope cost, estimating that running a fishery would cost about £15 million a year. If your income is £5 million, how much could you

spare to set up a fishery. What would you get from a fishery? The figures didn't stack up. The MoD maintained that it was none of their business and said they were going to withdraw the three offshore protection vessels. There was a meeting at the Cabinet Office. Christopher Mallaby was the chairman. I rushed round to see him and got hold of John Goulden too who was the Under Secretary on defence issues. The upshot was that we lost all three Falkland Islands protection ships in just one afternoon in the Cabinet Office!

There was however an extremely helpful man in the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF) who sat in on all our meetings. He was in a very happy position, because he was not responsible for anything outside UK waters. MAFF had no jurisdiction in the Islands, their budget wasn't going to be touched. He did know an awful lot about fish and fisheries, fisheries protection and so on. We got him to work out a plan and tell us what we had to have: a ship, a plane - preferably two because there was quite a lot of water to overfly. Where would we get the money? Still the figure was around £12 - 15 million. Then we got in touch with some fisheries people in Hull. It so happened that one of them had been at Cambridge at the same time as I. That was helpful : we had known one another slightly. I told him to swear on the Bible that he wouldn't mention this to anyone else: we had to do something about the Falkland Islands economy, we wanted to establish a fishery and we had a proposition to put to him. The idea was to hire two aircraft with fold up wings which had to be conveyed at night into a ship that would go to the Falkland Islands where they could be reassembled. I emphasised that this was not policy, it was just an idea and asked whether he could see a role in this. He said he would be happy to do it.

Then we had to find the aircraft. The MAFF official said he thought he knew a source but wouldn't tell me where it was. I then got a call from him. I think he was in Ulm. I'd actually been there and I knew that the Dornier aircraft factory was there. He said he thought he had found what we needed. When he came back, we were able to flesh out the plan a little more: he would hire two aircraft which could be disassembled and conveyed discreetly to Humberside for loading onto ocean-going vessels. It would then be up to the Governor to make sure they could be unloaded and re-assembled discreetly. But we had to keep it very hush-hush, because of the number of lines of communication between the Falklands, Parliament and the press, and the vulnerability of the Governor's telephone line and the need to keep an ongoing dialogue as the pressure for action was growing. All of that meant that we didn't really want to talk to anyone except ourselves in case there was a leak, at which

point the Argentines would be convening the Security Council and things would become very untidy.

But we had to share our plans with Whitehall. The Committee convened. The MAFF man spoke about the feasibility of it all. David Anderson explained his point about jurisdiction. The MoD said if the fishery protection assets were attacked, they would of course defend them, but they were not having anything to do with fisheries protection. The Treasury asked how much it was all going to cost. And everyone turned to the ODA representative. For the ODA the difficulty was that however low compared with standards in the UK the Falklands standard of living was, the Islands could not by any means be regarded as qualifying for Overseas Aid. That of course was true. However, according to Whitehall arrangements the needs of the overseas territories had first claim on the overseas budget that was voted to the ODA. They were horrified at accepting a long - term commitment that could become much larger and eat into funds destined for countries like Bangla Desh. We had a draft paper for OD ready for submission. I wanted to know if the ODA representative would agree. We then had a row. I said that we had been asked to advise ministers: we couldn't just say that we couldn't agree. This was a very important issue in which the Prime Minister was taking a personal interest. What would happen if we abandoned the attempt to put the economy of the Falklands Islands - the future of this British territory - on a sounder footing? Unmoved. So, I suggested that I would have to put a PS on the submission saying which Departments didn't agree. The row continued a bit but the ODA representative walked out of the room disagreeing.

Anyway, we put it up to the Secretary of State, with a draft to send to the PM and OD colleagues. By then, I was a bit better at Hovian periods than earlier! Off it went and it was agreed. I should just say that there was one amusing exchange at a meeting with the Secretary of State before we sent it over. He said, "How do we actually claim our sovereignty?" David Anderson - a wonderful man, dry as a biscuit with a great sense of timing at meetings - said, "Well, Secretary of State. It's very simple really. All you have to do is tell Parliament. Just say, 'This is our territory and we are legislating for it accordingly'". Geoffrey Howe - a lawyer - was not sure, but David Anderson reassured him that was all he had to do. We drafted the statement timed for the afternoon of 26 October 1986. We sent out briefing packs to everyone across the world, timed for presentation in sync. We had a special Bren gun unit at the UN in New York as we knew that in Argentina they would go absolutely ballistic at this. We'd made numerous attempts to get them to talk about conservation, which

we thought could be an easy “apple pie” sort of thing to cooperate on internationally but in vain. I remember persuading David Thomas, the Under Secretary, that we should slip something under Caputo’s hotel room door during the General Assembly, asking for talks on conservation in the South Atlantic. There was no response. They couldn’t get off the territorial integrity thing. In fact it left them no flexibility and had weakened the conduct of their programme at an earlier stage. Professor John Beddington - now Sir John, who later became Chief Scientific Officer to the government - was a whizz at modelling fish stocks at Imperial College. Because of his expertise, he had spoken for Britain on several occasions at an FAO committee on fish stocks. He had formed a very good relationship with his Chilean opposite number. The Chileans and the Argentines have had their ups and downs over the years ... relations are better now. The Chilean had been very helpful and the Argentines, unaware of this good relationship between him and John Beddington, played their territorial integrity card for all it was worth in this committee trying to thwart the decision to have a working party on conservation of South Atlantic fisheries. That was counterproductive for them. They failed and thus dealt themselves out of the discussion, weakening their international stance.

I should also just mention that as we could now see that this plan could work, we invited the Koreans, the Japanese and the Taiwanese separately to come to London to talk about fisheries and whether they would be prepared to accept quotas, pay for licenses and that sort of thing. There was some sort of faint, positive response to that, but nothing that you could really bank on. They did not recognise our sovereignty.

So the day came. Geoffrey Howe got up, said his piece. It’s probably the case that it could be claimed that he was the last British imperialist, having anno domini 1986 added quite a substantial chunk of water and sub-adjacent seabed –to our overseas territories, over a hundred thousand square miles, I believe. The Argentines responded as was only to be expected. A lot of people condemned us in New York and John Thompson, our Permanent Representative, had a fine time repelling boarders. The Koreans, the Japanese and the Taiwanese were back in London very quickly to learn what this meant. We told them it meant that they had to pay for the fish. There was a timing factor. John Beddington had briefed us on the breeding cycles of the squid and the finfish. They swam north and then south according to the temperature of the sea. The cycle ended in February. We needed to have everything ready by then for the start of the new season.

One of the Koreans absolutely screamed when he heard what we were going to charge them! But it was a sellers' market. Happily, it all went swimmingly!

SR: Very witty!

AB: I left the Department several months later. On a subsequent visit, I enquired how things were going. Apparently, in the first year, we had collected £50 million in licences. FIG had legislated for a fisheries regime which required foreigners to secure F.I. partners to establish themselves in the Islands so some Islanders also did well.

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SR: I think you said you wanted to add a postscript?

AB: Yes. Within the Office, I detected some impatience at senior levels at the liability the "the King's matter" represented for our foreign policy. As soon as I set foot in the Private Office and other Ministerial Offices they knew it was about the dreaded subject, frequently referred in those elevated quarters as the Flaklands (sic)! I felt I should have a bell, like a leper. In FID, we felt a trifle envious of our next-door neighbours, Hong Kong Department. That was a real colony with money! We were not only the poor relation but also diseased!

When I left the Department, I was very touched to receive a present from members of the Department, 'The Falklands Islands Mystery' marked at one shilling, very likely from a charity shop. Written in the fifties, I think, it was about sinister people plotting actively against British interests in the Falkland Islands and committing dastardly acts, including kidnapping the sister of a young lieutenant in the Royal Navy, the hero of the tale. All the team had signed it. Wonderful!

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### **Ambassador, British Embassy, Peru, 1987-89**

SR: Good morning. It's 24 May. Now we move on to your being an Ambassador for the first time, in Lima of all places. Tell me how that came about.

AB: Well, I was sitting in Falkland Islands Department. The fisheries thing had started very well and looked as though it was going to transform the Falklands Islands economy. That was very satisfactory for all concerned. There didn't seem to be a great deal for me to do. We still had no relations with Argentina: there was no development there and I felt that I

couldn't do much more. I think Personnel Operations Department (POD) shared that view and they asked me what I would like to do. Partly as a result of my holidaying in Normandy, where I'd come greatly to appreciate the seaside at Houlgate, and noticing that most capital cities were not on the coast, I thought it would be wonderful to find a capital city on the coast. There weren't very many. I saw that Lima was coming up and put my name forward. I was nominated and accepted by the Board. There was a bit of a wobble because the Peruvians questioned the nomination: they were Argentina's closest supporters during the Falklands war and they had lent several squadrons of aircraft to the Argentines. The new President in Peru, Alan García, was very much a Third World, non-aligned, anti-colonialist politician. So there was a delay: I wasn't told exactly why. But when I got there, the people in the Protocol Department explained.

Before I went, I had a valedictory interview with Bill Harding who was the DUS looking after that side of the Office. He asked me if I felt ready to be an Ambassador. I replied, "You bet!" Moreover, after eleven years spent between London, Brussels, Bonn and London again, the prospect of travelling to an unknown, to me, distant continent renewed my interest in travel.

SR: How was your Spanish? Did you have to do extra Spanish training?

AB: That's quite a relevant question because I had never actually set foot in a Spanish speaking country up to that point. However, during the Civil Service Commission selection proceedings, we were invited to offer a language. I offered Italian as I had worked at it on the side as an undergraduate. After the oral in the Civil Service Commission, the examiner said to me '*Lei sa parlare l'italiano discretamente bene*' (you speak Italian pretty well) which, having never before had any test, was a wonderful thing to hear. So, I had Italian and David Logan who was dealing with me in POD said, "I'm sure you'll soon be able to turn your Italian into Spanish!" I wasn't so sure but I did spend about three weeks in the language lab.

I arrived in Peru in December, but they kept delaying the presentation of credentials. You're not exactly under the radar but you are a bit limited before you have presented. I was however able to accept an invitation from Alva Castro, the Vice President, given to four other Ambassadors, (Filatov - the Soviet, Blair the Colombian together with the Israeli and Edwards the Chilean), to accompany him on a visit to his native city, Trujillo. This 24 - hour trip was a photo opportunity for him the final act of which was a public meeting at the seat of

the Municipalidad in the Plaza Mayor. The place was full and we were all on the stage with Alva Castro and the Mayor (Alcalde), a crony of the VP, and rumoured to have connections with the drugs trade. The Vice President had waxed eloquent about the importance of the visit to Trujillo, praised the City's welcome to the 'brother Ambassadors' and was confident that the "fraternal" countries they represented would be staunch partners in Trujillo's future. Echoing and endorsing these optimistic sentiments, the Mayor was just concluding her peroration when I felt a slight touch on the wrist. I turned to find Alva Castro smiling. "Embajador", he said "*algunas palabras, por favor.*" (Ambassador, a few words please.) Of the five Ambassadors, two were native Spanish speakers, Filatov had already been five years *en poste* and the Israeli was also well dug in, whereas I had been in the country scarcely a month. I thought, 'I can't do this!' And then, 'The so and so! He knew I had only just arrived!' I was in panic. Talk about 'wee timorous, cowering beastie'! But then I reasoned that nobody knew who Adrian Beamish was and that the British Ambassador could not just sit there dumb. That wouldn't do. It took me some seconds to reach this decision, a few more to think what to say and while I was trying to work out how to put it into what I hoped might be Spanish, I found the microphone slipped into my hand. All of a tremble, I got to my feet. As we were leaving, my Israeli colleague said with a smile, "Adrian, I didn't know you knew Italian!" That was my first ever outing in Spanish!

Peru is a long way away and perhaps still not all that well known. So, I think I should say something about it. The more I think about it, the more I see there's an element of the holiday guide in this!

I first heard about South America in geography lessons at school. I had retained a few facts and remembered names such as Valparaiso and Antofagasta and Montevideo. The master who taught us geography also doubled up with Latin: this made the Latin American part more memorable in a way, because he went into the names explaining how, when the explorers were sailing down the coast, one of them must have said, "*Ah, monte video*", (I see a mountain).and then a little further south somebody must have said, "*Que buenos aires*" (What wonderful fresh air here!). True or false, that made it all more vivid. I was at a boarding school and some of the boys' parents were expats, working for Shell or BP or Cable & Wireless. I remember one boy talking about his parents' garden in Brazil: they grew pineapples in the garden as we might cauliflowers! For us, at boarding school in the 50s, accustomed to tinned beef, cabbage and potatoes this was just astonishing. With these and a few other scraps in mind, Latin America did not seem to be entirely *terra incognita*.

Moreover, at school I had quite by chance read the book about the Kon-Tiki expedition that purported to show how, long before Columbus had crossed the Atlantic, the indigenous of Latin America had crossed the Pacific on balsa wood rafts reaching Hawaii or Fiji.

SR: Was it a large Embassy?

AB: Probably average. There was a Number 2 at Grade 5, a Defence Attaché, a First Secretary (Political), a commercial First Secretary, a drugs liaison officer, UK-based technical assistance, consular and information staff: all the main services were provided. But it wasn't your traditional Embassy: it was on the fourteenth floor of a block. Quite a challenge when, from time to time, there were power cuts and the lifts didn't work. Anyway, it was my seaside location, so I was pleased about that. And it turned out that it was not far from a beachside restaurant called Kon-Tiki: handy for an informal lunch!

SR: And did you have a nice Residence?

AB: Yes. At Monterico, the rich mountain. It wasn't really a mountain, more a hill on the Southern outskirts of the city. The house was a handsome bungalow, early twentieth century in the colonial style. It was three sides around a lawn, one of which was a pergola. One of the features of Lima is that, for most of the year, it's covered in cloud. At the seaside, that's often blown away. And at Monterico too we would have sunshine while the rest of the city would be shrouded in cloud. It never rains in Lima, ever.

SR: Ever?

AB: Occasionally, there is a very light drizzle, but it might only last for half an hour. A little to the north of the city there is a cloud forest with its own microclimate.

SR: So you had to be very careful with water?

AB: There didn't seem to be a problem with water supply. Perhaps I should talk about the geography? As you lived there, you realised more and more just how 'geographical' the place was. The Western slopes of the Andes are very precipitous. How they built the railways in the nineteenth century ... it's amazing, zigzagging up the slopes.

The coastal strip 40/50 miles wide is watered by torrents cascading from the mountains, some like the Rimac, on which Lima stands, reach the ocean but many peter out, leaving arid,



desert stretches of land between the capital and other coastal cities along the 2,000 kilometre coastline. Camels are not an uncommon sight.

Within fifty or so kilometres of the Pacific, you can be at 15,000 feet in the Sierra, the system of fertile highland valleys stretching from Colombia along the Andes going on into Chile, over all of which the Inca held sway. What was their capital, Cuzco, is at 12,000 feet. The peaks go on up to 20,000 feet and above. The Inca took little interest in the coastal strip, regarding it from the military point of view as a more or less impassable glacis which, coupled with the steep mountains, would keep them safe. The Eastern gradients of the Andes are less precipitous, sloping down into the Amazon rainforest, the Peruvian share of which accounts for 60% of the national territory, but is home to only 5% of the population. It is inhospitable territory. I visited an oil well there where I saw my first sloth and learnt that it took the supply barges eleven days to come up the Amazon from the Atlantic coast. 30% of the population (the Serranos) live in the Sierra, the rest (Cholos – mixed race - and Blanquitos) on the coastal strip. So all of that takes a bit of seeing and understanding.

As far as the history is concerned, scholars have described the Conquest as a collision between THE Renaissance Superpower and the local autocracies (Aztec and Inca) that technologically had not advanced much beyond the Stone Age e.g. they had never learned to work iron or bronze. After overwhelming the indigenous powers, the Spaniards, with some help from local subject peoples, implanted their own polity (the Vice-Royalty of new Spain – Cortez 1517, Mexico, Central America and the southern parts of what are now the USA and the Vice-Royalty of Peru – Pizarro 1532, all South America less Brazil) and of course their religion. The rest is history, a lot of it. Arguably the Aztec and Inca yokes were heavier than the Spanish but, given the latter was alien, accompanied by fatal diseases from Europe (e.g. measles) against which the indigenous had no immunity, and harsh, the impact was deadly and deeply traumatic. So much so, that to this day, the indigenous people and their overwhelmingly *mestizo* (mixed race) descendants manifest an enthusiastic nostalgia for the pre-Colombian cultures.

Early in the sixteenth century, sustained campaigns by Catholic colonial clergy against the cruelties of the *conquistadores* persuaded the Spanish crown to introduce the so-called New Laws protective of the rights and privileges of the indigenous, notably exempting them and all their descendants from slavery, even where only one of the parents was of indigenous stock, one consequence was to increase mixed marriages. But by then it was late and the

local populations had already been the subject of great abuse, brutality, including forced labour in the mines, and neglect. Moreover, the execution of the New Laws left a great deal to be desired; more in the breach than the observance. It has been calculated that, by the end of that century, the population of Peru had shrunk by around 60%. The Church acted energetically to protect, convert and educate the locals.

And for all the brutality, destruction and upheaval, the Spaniards succeeded in setting in train a cultural transformation. In Peru, resistance lasted longer than elsewhere but, in the end, the local population had no choice but to submit and did so with varying degrees of resentment, docility and enthusiasm.

One of the earliest and perhaps best-known examples of acculturation is the story of Garcilaso de la Vega Inca (1539 – 1616), the fruit of an illegitimate union between a conquistador and an Inca Princess. Garcilaso, brought up largely by his Inca mother, showed great prowess at Latin and Spanish and at twenty went to Spain where, with the help of a paternal uncle, he succeeded in having his birth legitimised. He stayed for the rest of his life, never returning to Peru. He served as a captain in the Spanish army, but seems to have spent most of his time writing history in Spanish and Latin, including an account of life among the Inca before the Spanish arrived.

Spaniards, on the defensive against attacks on the Imperial record in Latin America, notably but not exclusively, from Anglo-Saxons, have asserted, “*Almenos, les hemos dado nuestra fe y nuestra sangre*” (At least we gave them our faith and gave them children), a claim that cannot be made for the encounter between the Anglo-Saxons and the indigenous tribes of North America.

Still with history, it may be worth mentioning a word that sometimes can be confusing: Creole or, more appropriately in this context, Criollo. It comes from the Spanish verb *criar* (to suckle), to nurture, to rear, care for, but had a specific connotation in the Spanish colonies referring to those of Spanish descent born in Spain’s American colonies. As time went by, the Criollos began to resent more and more the fact that their American birth excluded them from power in the running of the colonies. All the top jobs, civil and military, were given to *peninsulares*, i.e. Spaniards born in Spain. In the eighteenth century, this Criollo identity was articulated in the statement *Mi nacion es Espana, pero mi patria es Mexico o Peru* (My race or nation is Spain, but my fatherland is Mexico or Peru). This notion of identity, coupled with the currents of opinion in favour of Republics, following the establishment of the USA

in 1776 and the French Revolution, was a significant factor in animating the struggles for independence against the Spanish crown in America that began in 1808 and ended in 1824 in Peru.

From the two great Vice-Royalties Mexico and Peru, the Spanish American Empire split into a group of weak, ill-defined republics in search of stability and modernisation. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the go-to place was Great Britain. Peru needed to modernise her mines, build roads, railways, urban public transport, ports and energy networks (gas and later electricity) and irrigation schemes.

British technicians, engineers and medical men left for South America, including Peru, where their much-needed skills meant far higher pay than at home and higher social status. Going home for holidays was hardly an option. They married locally, became Peruvianised and, in doing so, honorary *blanquitos*.

They left lots of relics. One is *la hora inglesa*, literally the English hour or time, i.e. on time, then a novel concept for the locals and one that for many still remains a somewhat hypothetical notion. Another is the bowler hat. In the high Andes, a looser social milieu, staunch Victorian mining engineers would, on high days and holidays, disport themselves in their dark woollen suits and bowler hats, in many cases arm in arm with a local lady. Love being what it is and imitation the sincerest form of flattery, the local women took to wearing bowler hats too: a fashionable, though perhaps not very romantic, accessory, still to be seen in the Sierra today. As today, new technology brought new words indispensable but impossible to translate that just had to be adopted. One that gave me a little difficulty when first heard, the accent being as it had to be in Spanish on the second last syllable was *gasfitero*. I just couldn't get it and had to ask. It derives from gasfitter, a key man in the mining world. Today, it now includes plumbers and heating engineers as well. And then, as marriages were contracted and children born, things became full of colour, thus Pablo Hernandez García y Mackenzie. Or, more notably, when I was in Peru, His Eminence Cardinal Archbishop of Lima, Juan Landázuri Ricketts! And there was Freddy Cooper de Vargas, one of Peru's most prominent architects, prominent also in the failed presidential campaign of the Nobel prize-winning novelist, Mario Vargas Llosa, to whom he was a first cousin.

Just a word about the population. The people who live in the jungle, *los indigenas*, are not very numerous. The *Serranos* are the people who live in the Andes and the *Blanquitos*,

descendants of the original Spanish settlers, together with the *Cholos* (mixed race) inhabit the coastal strip. Ever since independence in 1824, Peru - the last colony in South America to become independent - had been run by the *Blanquitos* until the coup (the 44<sup>th</sup>.) in 1968 when the military took over. The military, determined that the country should no longer be governed for the exclusive benefit of the *Blanquitos*, embarked on a more collectivist/socialist approach. They handed power back to the civilians in 1980, when Fernando Belaúnde Terry, a committed Democrat, was elected. Belaúnde's focus was strengthening the democratic institutions which he managed to do but to the detriment of the economy.

In 1985, a young man in his 30s, Alan García, was elected President on the APRA ticket. The APRA Party (*Allianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana*) was founded in the 20s by Victor Raul Haya de la Torre, a Peruvian. The idea was that it should spread throughout Latin America but that never happened and de la Torre had to seek exile in Mexico. Later, he was able to return to Peru where, notwithstanding intermittent proscription from different governments, the Party continued in existence. The handover between Belaúnde Terry and García was the first constitutional transfer of power in Peru's history. Hopes were high.

Alan García stood 6'5" in his socks and was a powerful and effective speaker. He had a good deal of charm and lots of popular appeal. He was the son of an APRA couple. Indeed, his father had been jailed several times for his political activities. Alan joined the Party as a teenager. As a young militant, he caught the eye of Haya de la Torre and was sent abroad to Spain and France for study. He played the guitar, sang, wore flares and sideburns, soaking up the spirit of 1968. He encountered Felipe Gonzalez in exile in Paris. On return to Peru, he was, much to his surprise, made Secretary General of the Party and, when the time came, with Haya de la Torre's backing, was chosen as presidential candidate. His election provoked little enthusiasm in Washington, but found more support in Europe, especially in Spain and France (Danielle Mitterrand was a frequent visitor).

One of the first things Alan García did was to say that Peru would pay interest on only 5% of her considerable international debt: this had a really negative impact on the way people like us and the Americans regarded the régime. He then followed that with similar legislation in the economic field. It wasn't an entirely socialist agenda, it was a mixture: the worst thing about it, really, was that it was incoherent. Belaúnde Terry had left the economy in a mess. García's measures made it worse. There was also the savage and increasingly threatening

terrorist organisation called the Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*). They were gaining ground in the Sierra. Allied to that was the problem of the narco-traffic. Peru is – or was - the largest source of coca in the world. As the *Sendero Luminoso* became more effective militarily, denying territory to the government presence, so they were able to move on to narco-territory and a relationship developed where *Sendero* took protection money from the *narcos*, the narco-traffickers. A sinister alliance.

So when I arrived, there was García crashing the economy, with very few friends abroad and a very divided bourgeois *Blanquito* population. And a very unhappy *Cholo* population. The *Serranos* too were unhappy.

In the latter decades of the twentieth century, Peru experienced massive internal migration. Millions moved off the land and down from the Sierra to congregate in the cities and towns of the coast, where jobs were scarce. The phenomenon was called urbanisation without industrialisation. Lima, in particular, was a focus for this internal migration: they came and they squatted in their *pueblos jóvenes* - new towns - which, in many cases, were just shanties with rattan cane walls and roofs, no water, nothing, higgledy-piggledy in the sandy desert-like outskirts of Lima and the other cities. In addition to their economic problems, the *Serranos* faced another problem. *Sendero* would go into a village and find out who would cooperate with them. Those who weren't cooperative would, in many cases, have their houses destroyed or would be killed. So the villages became depopulated as the *Serranos* left for the coast. They were without jobs, without prospects, getting more and more discontented. The government's ability, notwithstanding its collectivist approach, was very limited. In a way, the goodwill was there, but the capacity to do anything was sadly lacking. So that was all very combustible: there was a lot of violence. Indeed, my very first experience of Peru was of violence: not only was it in the air, but on the ground. You'd go to a restaurant and there'd be a machine gun post outside. Other places would have armed people patrolling on the roofs.

SR: Did you have a security detail yourself?

AB: No, I didn't. I had an armoured Jaguar, but everyone agreed that I probably wasn't a target. I was prudent.

SR: Weren't there some cases of hostage-taking?

AB: The hostage-taking was in Chile, but in Peru a Russian tourist bus was blown up with a large loss of life. But I do remember going up country with my driver. In the middle of the desert, a chap suddenly appeared and waved at us to give him a lift. My driver said that we shouldn't. But we called him over and asked him where he was going and gave him a lift to the next town, his destination. But I realised later I shouldn't have done that! Sometime after that, the PUS, Patrick Wright, came on a pastoral visit and we discussed security: I didn't tell him what I had done!

I remember being invited to a *hacienda* in the country. On the way home in my hostess's car – she, a grandmother, was driving - we stopped at a traffic light. A man approached the driver's door and, without hesitating, cool as ice, my hostess drew a revolver from the glove compartment.

There was a pervading sense of insecurity. Often there would be political demonstrations and the smell of burning tyres was quite common. So it was difficult.

British interests were pretty slight. We helped with the anti - narco operation. The Americans were obviously in the lead and the European Community played a role. We had our drugs liaison officer who managed one or two coups. He was a very tough chap from the North of Ireland. I often remembered Geoffrey Howe's words at my valedictory meeting with him before going out to Peru: "We shan't be coming to see you, Adrian." Entirely understandable.

We also helped on terrorism. I remember handing over an armoured car to the Peruvians - it was multi-use and could be used against the narcos and against the terrorists.

My staff used to get postcards from *Sendero Luminoso* saying, 'We have thousands of eyes. We have thousands of hands' with nationalist images and pictures of Peruvians who had rebelled.

I had my own generator in the house, although most of the time we were on the grid. One of the policies of *Sendero Luminoso* was to cut power lines, quite frequently. As soon as the generator switched on, I knew what had happened. That, again, was a bit lowering. I have somewhere in my stud box a bullet which came into the kitchen and ricocheted around and

landed on the floor: it might have just been a reveller coming home from a party but it certainly gave them all a bit of a jolt in the kitchen.

As time went by, I came to see that the *Blanquitos*, the people running Peru, weren't people you really wanted to help much: they were so selfish. Just reverting for a second to the narco business, I hadn't been in Peru a week when I met a couple at a party who said they were going to Miami for the weekend and Federico was flying his own plane. They asked me if I would like to come. I said 'No', for a variety of reasons, one of which was not that they might be drug runners. But, later on, I thought they probably were. If they'd made me part of their group who went for weekends in Miami on their own aeroplane, my diplomatic status could have been a convenience

So it was a bit dispiriting. There wasn't a great deal to do. I wrote a dispatch on the drugs trade. I wrote a dispatch on terrorism. I wrote a dispatch on all the social problems and economic difficulties and the political prospects.

In that respect, I should perhaps come back to my house and garden. I told you there was this bald hill with a little garden and a bungalow on top. I'd left a nice garden back in London full of flowers and I was missing it. I remembered a tip in the Evening Standard that one way of composting leaves was to put them in big plastic bin liners and then leave them in the sun which would accelerate the composting process from seven years to maybe two. So I did that. Then I saw a man on the TV, the Rector of the Agricultural University, who had a sort of chat show, a discussion programme. I invited him to come to the house. We had lunch. I told him that I had never seen a lot of the plants in Peru before and suggested walking round the garden to look at them. He was delighted to do that. Then I boasted to him about my new composting plan and he asked me what kind of leaves I had used. I replied they were eucalyptus. He laughed, pityingly, and said, "What you may not be aware of is that the natural habitat of the eucalyptus is the Australian desert, where it is also called the gumtree. The leaves fall all through the year and form a kind of carpet around the trunk. There's an enzyme in these leaves which inhibits all growth which can threaten the eucalyptus!" Luckily I hadn't had time to spread any leaves because they hadn't decomposed. Botany gave us a link and we got on quite well. He was called Fujimori.

I also met Mario Vargas Llosa, the renowned novelist. He is a Peruvian and lived some of the year in Lima. He had lived in England for many years, writing his novels in the British Museum library. He sent his children to the Leys School in Cambridge, where my daughter Antonia was at school. He had fallen in love, at a distance, with Margaret Thatcher and her politics in particular!

Alan García was becoming daily more unpopular. Peru was going more and more to the dogs. Mario Vargas Llosa saw it as his patriotic duty to come and do something. Word got out and the Americans got interested in him. He was being promoted in Peru by some sort of consultancy, of which I think a current member of the House of Lords was a member. So these consultants came down from New York, linked up with Mario's supporters and talked him up as the saviour of Peru. I thought he didn't have a chance, I really didn't, because he was a *Blanquito*: they'd got rid of the *Blanquitos* in 1968. Now was the time of the *Cholos*. Belaúnde Terry had been a *Blanquito* but part of Alan García's bankability for the APRA party was that he was a *Cholo*. Mario had been living in England for a long time. He was very much on Thatcher's side, anti-Argentina, talking up supply side economics and that kind of thing. I invited him more than once to meals and argued, "You must be out of your mind to leave what you have. You have such riches in your head, you can create your own world and your own people and summon them up for millions of people around the world." Trading that for any kind of politics seemed to be a complete misapplication of talent. But he said it was his patriotic duty. He failed. Per contra, Fujimori won.

SR: Fujimori the horticultural expert?

AB: Yes, it was six months after I had left. Fujimori was half Japanese and formed his own party. He was a *Cholo*. Everyone knew who he was because he had this TV programme.

Just coming back to my encounter with Fujimori and the garden, I wanted to fructify this bald, gravelly hill on which nothing seemed to grow. So I took some advice from him and from others and I planted it with lucerne, a kind of clover and a bush called *jojoba*.

SR: Isn't that used in cosmetics?



AB: Yes. It's native to Peru. Practically everything grows in Peru, from strawberries to mangoes. Anyway, I made the hill green. I then got some hens and ducks and I built a little pond with a ramp. The ducks were just like Jemima Puddleduck: They didn't sit much on the eggs. They lay a huge number - 20 or something. They're supposed to sit on them for six weeks, but they just go chasing around. Anyway, one day there was a fierce racket in the kitchen. The cook, a lady called Jesus, was beating down a hen that was attacking her. They thought it must have been fathered by a fighting cock, a very popular sport in Peru. After supper, I asked her what had happened to the chicken and she replied, "You ate it!" An instructive lesson in home economics. In due course some of the ducks followed her to the dining room

To finish off, perhaps I should just say one thing about the Americans who, as you know, regard Latin America as their back yard. I had good relations with my colleagues on the whole. We saw quite a lot of one another because none of them had much to do. There was a population of twenty million, it was a small market getting smaller, they were resistant to a lot of advice from us, our business wasn't interested. Because America is America, every country in Latin America has a special relationship with the US. The governments all know that the Americans can bring them down very quickly. So the Americans get all the news and are usually extremely well informed. But they're very cagey. I would occasionally try to have a tête-à-tête lunch with my American colleague but he was standoffish. He was very popular, partly because when you're the representative of the most important power, you tend to be and everyone wants a piece of you. But he was also personable, affable, easy to talk to and very effective. But he wouldn't share.

SR: Was he a political appointment?

AB: No, he was a career diplomat. He went on from there to be Ambassador in Brazil and later Assistant Under Secretary.

One last point. As far as the Peruvian administration was concerned, one illustration comes vividly to mind. I got on very well with the Peruvian Ambassador in London. In the few weeks that I met him before going I found him to be a tremendous admirer of England, very keen on and very good at golf. After I'd been in Peru for a bit more than a year, he came back and was made Minister for Industry. So naturally I paid an early call on him: he was

full of enthusiasm. He told me he had launched new initiatives including one on tourism and had established a network of government tourist offices abroad in ... and I was expecting him to say the US or Europe or something like that ... but no, it was Central America. And he had appointed his daughter head of the office in Guatemala. The idea that his daughter-, or anyone else for that matter, could magic up thousands of tourists from Central America was too sad to be laughable. Some of the blanquitos were still not getting it!

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### **Assistant Under Secretary (Americas), FCO, 1989–94**

SR: Good morning. It's 3 October 2019. We've come to 1989 when you were transferred back to the Foreign Office as AUS (Americas). Did you ask to come back or would you have preferred another overseas posting?

AB: I got to Lima in December 1987, expecting to do three years. I was on leave in London in late July 1989 and had a meeting with Mark Russell.

SR: The Chief Clerk?

AB: Yes. He told me they weren't thinking of moving me as I had only been in Lima for a short while, but the sort of things they might be looking at later were Dublin, the OECD or East Berlin. I wasn't really grabbed by any of those: Dublin on the grounds that given my Irish background, I wouldn't have felt very comfortable there.

SR: You'd already been to the OECD.

AB: Yes, I didn't want to go there again. I had enjoyed my time in Bonn. E. Berlin had no appeal. In my ignorance I saw it as an unsavoury brew of Communism and Fascism. Nigel Broomfield was there at the time and things began to happen! Apparently, they did appoint someone to East Berlin but he or she never got there because Nigel hung on until *Wiedervereinigung* actually came to pass the following year when he became ambassador to Germany reunited.

I went back to Lima. I wasn't keen to extend my stay there beyond what I had assumed it would be and was surprised when, towards the end of September, I got a message asking if I could be back to start work in the first week of October. Talks with Argentina on Security in the South Atlantic had been scheduled for 8 October in Madrid. I was to lead our team.

These would be the first formal contact with the Argentines since the abortive attempt in Bern five years earlier and, it was hoped, a prelude to restoring Diplomatic Relations in due course. It was a bit of scramble and when I got to London I was rather nettled to learn that in fact Crispin Tickell was to be the nominal head of our team and would be in Madrid. At the time Crispin was head of UKMIS, New York where I later learnt he had developed a good relationship with the Head of the Argentine Mission, Lucio Garcia del Solar. Crispin – bright, energetic, sharp-edged and effective – was not bound by Office caution and liked to take initiatives. I think that he and Garcia del Solar had cooked things up together.

However, more troubling than my slightly bruised amour propre, was my discovery over the weekend as I went through the briefs, that our position on maritime boundaries offered nothing to the Argentines, was open to challenge under International Law and would in my view be un-negotiable. I rang Charles Powell. We agreed to meet first thing on Monday morning. For the Argentines as for Mrs. Thatcher, sovereignty was of the essence. On Monday morning I went across the road and showed Charles my Admiralty chart. He agreed to do what he could. The following morning as it was beginning to be time to think of leaving for the airport, Charles called to say that someone with whom he worked closely agreed.

What actually happened in Madrid was that we went into the conference room where we met my Argentine oppo, Jose- Maria Otegui, and his team, and then slogged away all day at texts, sometimes not breaking until mid-night. We had with us at all times our indispensable and brilliant Legal Adviser, David Anderson. Crispin and Lucio Garcia del Solar nowhere to be seen. But we would report keep our respective bosses in the picture and they, as might be needed, would go for a walk in the park. By Friday, I think it must have been we had agreed texts.

We alternated between the Argentine and our Embassy,... an awful building to work in, I thought, so glad I never had to work there permanently!

For me, I'd never had to negotiate a text with a foreign power before, so I learnt quite a lot and enjoyed doing it ... choosing language and making sure that it worked in both English and Spanish. It was stimulating. The most difficult part of it was the reciprocal security agreement. It's not true to say that neither Argentina nor the United Kingdom featured in it but if you read it quickly, you could have easily missed the mention of both countries: it talked about reciprocal parties, coasts, islands and that sort of thing. It all worked fairly well. The ice was broken and there followed several more meetings in Madrid, London and

Buenos Aires. Agreements were made on Fisheries , Consular Relations and Diplomatic relations after which a Charge d’Affaires was appointed and finally Ambassadors exchanged. Until then, our communications had been sketchy and scratchy. So that was all put behind us and we were able to talk to the Argentines more or less normally. But it was still a very sensitive issue in Argentina and their expectations continued to be quite unrealistic in relation to sovereignty.

Down the corridor from us was Hong Kong Department: they were getting rid of Hong Kong. We were straining every muscle to keep the Falklands British.

The parish was quite large. North America is a big place and, at that time, we had lots of consulates. In Central America, there are ten republics. There is a similar number of former British territories in the Caribbean that are now independent jurisdictions. Then there were the dependent territories which were still hanging around us like so many millstones. And then in South America there were another ten republics, not to mention the ocean islands, Ascension and St Helena. I didn’t know until that time that the people who live on St Helena are called saints; a happy thought.

SR: Did you visit all these places?

AB: No. To get to St Helena at that time, you had to take a ship from Bristol. It was a Royal Mail steamer which would steam off and arrive in St Helena in three or four weeks and wouldn’t come back for another three or four. So you couldn’t nip in and out. Now there’s an airport. I never visited there. Ascension I went to, because that was on the way to the Falklands: the planes stopped to refuel.

Then there were what you might call the technical issues which arose with Antarctica, because we were coming up to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty and that had to be renewed, abandoned or revised. Since its signature, Antarctica had become much more accessible. People had got interested in it. Pollution was starting to be a problem. So we needed to take an interest in that as well. The DTI were very keen that we should insist that our right to carry out mining should be safeguarded! The Department of Education and Science were refusing to fund the British Antarctic Survey. Boring!

Coming up also on the agenda was human rights. The big issues were Chile, of course, and reconciliation. What was going to happen? Were they going to hang all the people who had behaved so disgracefully? What was going to happen to Pinochet? There was a similar attempt to take evidence and reconcile in Argentina and in Uruguay. But the more lively focus at that particular time was what was still happening in Central America. Archbishop Romero had been murdered some years earlier and there was still a lot going on in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala. Brutalities on both sides and the Cold War hadn't quite ended. The Americans were still in Cold War mode as far as their policies on Latin America and Communism were concerned.

It was a big parish geographically and it grew larger when the Antipodes and the Pacific Islands were added. There were many jurisdictions, and lots to know about places where British interests were not very significant.

As I knew the Falklands, I thought I wouldn't go there straight away, but would go to the Caribbean dependent territories. I was frankly scandalised when I went to my first dependent territory. In 1962, the West Indies Federation that we had set up collapsed, leaving the five littlest and unviable islands for us to look after. I went on a visit to Anguilla, the Turks and Caicos Islands and the British Virgin Islands. What concerned me were the conditions in these tiny places for which we were directly responsible: they were British territories. Standards needed to be higher in an area increasingly exposed to tourism, money laundering and drug trafficking.

In the Turks there were people living in the open ... immigrants from Santo Domingo which is south of the Turks, hiding out in the scrub looking for jobs, some operating as prostitutes for the tourists. No one was taking any interest in this: and this was at a time when AIDS was a big issue. The public health facilities in Providenciales, the main island, consisted of a small clinic run by a Canadian doctor who was being paid by the ODA: that was it. Tourism was being developed, mostly with money from North America. The tourist facilities had their own medical centres with North American doctors. The locals, in the care of the British government, had nothing. Absolutely disgraceful. When I got back, I wrote a minute drawing attention to some of this and pointing out the inconsistency between what the Secretary of State and other Ministers were saying about the importance of good government and what was actually happening on the ground in our backyard, as it were. Ministers agreed that something had to be done. A dialogue was opened with the ODA. A difficulty was that

the Foreign Office was entirely responsible, the Secretary of State would have to answer in Parliament, but the ODA had the money. The traffic into these islands was increasing because of tourism, particularly package tours from North America. The nightmare which had been explained to us by someone from the Civil Aviation Authority was if a plane full of well-heeled Californian widows turned up and something went wrong, there would be a class action in Orange County and we would be taken to the cleaners. We generated a few more scare stories of that kind ...

We had the responsibility, but the ODA had the money: talk about a brick wall ! notwithstanding the fact that, according to our constitutional arrangements, the overseas territories have a first call on aid funds. They were absolutely mulish! Our plan was to boost the Governor who had no status locally. Everyone knew the Governor had no money, so if you were a Chief Minister you went to the DevDiv which was in Barbados. The head of the DevDiv was an ODA official. It seemed to me that a ridiculous arrangement had been allowed to develop.

I said what we needed was a hard-hitting policy paper that covered all the bases: we set that in motion, but it took a while to prepare. It was not the sort of work the Department had much experience of.

What we decided to recommend was to give the Governors more staff and also extra funds to do things that would support good government like having less dodgy Chiefs of Police and improved local judicial arrangements, recruiting better government lawyers, accountants and so on. It took several rather disagreeable encounters. Having failed to resolve the thing at my level, I asked Tristan Garel-Jones, who was the Minister, to talk to Lynda Chalker who was Minister of State for Overseas Development. She said no. I insisted we had to do something to avoid having egg on our face. Then we both went to see Lynda. She still said no. Garel-Jones said that he would be back the following week, at the same time. Some time later she grudgingly gave in.

On another, Falklands related issue, Sylvia Milroy – do you know her ...?

SR: Yes of course, she's married to Michael Jay.

AB: She was on a Whitehall committee that I had convened on the Falklands. I had got everyone else to agree, except the ODA because they were scared I was going to take some of their money. I told her that all but her Department were agreed and that I was going to put

this paper up. Which I did, making the point that everyone except the ODA had agreed. This went round to all the Ministers involved and the next day Sylvia came storming round to my office ... Anyway, all of this Whitehall warrior stuff was being repeated trying to get the resources necessary to boost our Governors, not only in terms of their staff - better staff, higher grade staff, but also to give them some access via us to the money because, otherwise, they would continue to be ignored. This was something we really had to do. And I was determined to do it. Towards the end of the year, I was asked by the PUS's office (it was David Gillmore at that time) to come and see him. The Public Accounts Committee, he told me, were going to have a hearing on dependent territories in the Caribbean. He wanted to know if we had a good story to tell. I told him we were just about to submit on the subject and, if our recommendations were agreed, we would.

We appeared before the Committee. Happily, by then we had taken the decisions based on the submission, so that David Gilmore was able to say that the bureaucracy was already on the ball. Few people could match David's eloquence: he handled the Committee very well, I thought.

I was busy and had to do a lot of long-haul travelling. I was probably crossing the Atlantic at least once a month, sometimes more. You could go to the Tropics any time of the year, really, but if you wanted to go, for example, to Cuba in January and then up to Ottawa, you had to have a large suitcase: I learned that after the first winter. When the Antipodes and the South Pacific were added, that of course made the strain all the greater. Usually I would fly to Tokyo and then go down. I didn't get to Pitcairn which I think is still ours but New Zealand administers. Going to South America often meant changing at Miami. Never a pleasure.

Meanwhile, Russia was being invited as an observer to sit on the NATO Committees and Greenspan was running the world economy to everyone's satisfaction. Inflation low. Growth springing ahead. Peace breaking out. Trade developing. And here were we, gripped by these ancient complications.

But, returning to the overall brief, as well as relics of Empire that had to be dealt with, we were also supposed to be promoting Britain to North America in general as well as to Central and Latin America. Our interest was peace and stability and enlarging the market for British goods, services and culture. No different from anywhere else. But our presence in the region had been starved of funds. As you know, every now and again in the Office, there are policy reviews. In the early 1980s, the Office formally took the view that Latin America was of

lower priority. And that meant that resources, in terms of people and funds to do things with etc. were very hard to come by. In that respect, Garel-Jones was a great asset with his enthusiasm for everything Hispanic and Luso, if I can introduce that rather strange word. It took quite a bit of time but he persuaded John Major to make a visit to South America...I think it may have been the first ever by a British Prime Minister. Tristan (Garel - Jones) also tried to encourage other Ministers to regard Latin America as a place where people regarded us with a friendly eye, as they did. Not only had Britain played an important role in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries financing capital investment in Latin America, but in the latter part of the twentieth century we were another Anglophone presence which could, if circumstances permitted, dilute the ever-expanding US presence. From that point of view, we were also welcome. Not a threat, only an opportunity, if you like. We tried to energise Whitehall: Ken Clarke went out a few times as Secretary of State for Trade and also as Home Secretary and later as Chancellor. And a range of other Ministers. As time went on, people became more enthusiastic because they could see what we could see.

Another element was adding to threads to the tissue of European cooperation. In most of these countries there was an EU Commission office and the Presidency Embassy would organise meetings and promotional events backed by Commission funds. We would make sure that Embassies kept involved. Back in Europe, I used to meet my German, French, Dutch, Italian, Spanish and Russian counterparts on a regular basis. I often went to Washington and Canada to meet the Americans and the Canadians. All of us were, if you like, engaged in a common policy of supporting Latin America in its new attempt to embrace democracy. In the 60s and 70s, the Latin American republics had been overthrown by dictatorships of one kind or another, with all sorts of human rights and other horrible consequences. In the 1980s, the wheel turned and an attempt at a much more genuine kind of democracy emerged: it was in the common interest of all of us in Europe and in North America to support these efforts, so there was a great deal of commonality in our policies but commercial rivalry remained keen. Where one country, for historical reasons, was in a more privileged position, they would be expected to take a bit more interest than other countries, for example, e.g. the Dutch, the French and us. In Argentina (a member of the Sterling area until 1945) we were hampered by the Falklands problem though matters improved after the resumption of relations but elsewhere, especially in Brazil, Chile and Colombia we were much more active. We all had our different strengths, if you like, and tried to be aware of what the commonality of Europe and North America policies could do to help.



Illustrative of the tenor of the times was my first visit to Moscow for consultations. It was rather moving to meet their Latin American team, led by a man who had served in the area in a senior capacity and knew it well.

After welcoming us, he said he wanted to start by making a confession. I looked at the note taker and gave him a nudge. It was a confession and also an apology to the effect that Soviet activity in Latin America throughout the post-1945 period had been aimed specifically at undermining attempts to promote democracy and justice. He said that the Soviets had promoted themselves as champions of Justice and Peace but the reality had been that all their energies had been devoted to sowing discord, disorder and subversion and of course trying to sabotage Western efforts, particularly those of the United States. In the spirit of Glasnost and Perestroika the Russians wanted his words to be noted and recorded.

SR: That was quite remarkable.

AB: Yes. I remember talking about this man to Michael Alexander. His name was I think Yuri Petrov. Michael said that he had known him at the MBFR talks in Vienna. I later learned that Petrov had left some years later and had gone to live in the US. It sounded as though he himself may have been a believer and that he wanted to let us know in the new era of mutual respect and understanding that was growing in the early 90s that the scales had fallen from his eyes. At all events he was speaking formally and wanted his remarks to be put on the record.

But alas, thereafter, we didn't get much from the Russians. After a few exchanges in Moscow and London things tailed off. The situation in Russia became more disorganised and they were very disappointed when we accepted all the East European countries into NATO. It still surprises me that we weren't somehow able to keep them on side.

Can I make some other remarks, about resources?

SR: Yes, by all means.

AB: During my time, the Foreign Office seems always to have been under great financial pressure. Thatcherian economics, of which Geoffrey Howe was an important driver in his time as Chancellor, took a bit of time to show fruit. But by 1983, things were improving. He defeated the attempt to demolish the Foreign Office building and it was restored: that presumably cost quite a lot of money. Some trickled down to what you might call

operational level. But, apart from that, I've always felt that we've been under the cosh financially. Never more so - because it affected my life as an AUS - when we were suddenly told that we were responsible for our own budgets which up to that point, we'd never heard of. I was supposedly responsible for £70 million, but all of it was pre-empted by staff and accommodation costs at home and abroad. The idea was pure fiction. But fiction or not, I was sent a Staff Officer from another Department, equivalent to a grade 9. She was admirable but left after about six months. I asked why she was leaving to become an Immigration Officer. I'd seen what Immigration Officers had to do when I was in Delhi. She replied that the money was much better. So off she went. I don't remember a successor!

All of this was a prelude to an inspection of the United States. But it was an illusion. I had no discretionary control over this budget whatsoever. It was likely that the inspectors who were looking for economies, would go for the so-called 'low hanging fruit' i.e. our consulates in the US. So, I had to go quickly to the Consulates to see for myself.

I wrote a minute to the PUS, David Gilmore, using all the usual arguments about America being our biggest operation and asked whether we were being serious about this or not. If we were going to leave it all to British business, we should be clear and do it. Then we could save a lot of money by abolishing Cincinnati, Chicago, Atlanta, Seattle, San Diego and so on. He was sympathetic but said there was really a lot of pressure. "You know, Adrian, it's all a question of smoke and mirrors." I hadn't heard the expression before. He told me that with less straw we had to make more bricks! It wasn't easy.

AB: When we were given our budgets over which we had no control, all we had was the staff and the buildings and whatever you need to run them. They are assets but also liabilities. If you downgrade your Ambassador in Washington, you save money. You sell the building or whatever. But you are left with fewer assets. So how do you judge? The input is easy - you just count up the numbers, but what is the output? It's very difficult to measure.

One of the things that we have to hope we achieve, it seems to me - and it is an output - is credibility. The key difference, I think, between being a civil servant and a diplomat is that the latter have to operate as both - to have two skill sets: you have to be able to operate successfully in Whitehall, often squabbling about money and what policy should be (sometimes they are the same thing) and you also have to be able to operate successfully abroad. Credibility needs to be achieved and maintained by the man or woman, both abroad and in London. One of things that Ambassadors know, or learn quickly, is that they can ring

up anybody: the test is whether that somebody will take the call a second time. In Whitehall it doesn't happen like that. Ministries cannot boycott one another. The personal element counts for much less. But in a post abroad, it is the easiest thing in the world for a Foreign Minister to cold-shoulder an ambassador, should he or she be so minded. So diplomats are very exposed and they need to be visible with all the advantages and disadvantages that brings: you can't escape, your name is in the Diplomatic list, at the bottom of the bottom of the despatch and so on.. I tried to make a case in my valedictory despatch that we ought to recognise this need for people with two skill sets and pay accordingly. Interestingly, I believe that now in Whitehall, desk officers in the Foreign Office are routinely at lower rates of pay than those in DFID and people at First Secretary look for transfers to the new Department for Business, Innovation and Skills because they pay so much better. This seems to me a system mistake and the disparities suggest that exposed to market forces the FCO has lost prestige and value.

I once heard someone talking about the British class system. There were the nobility, the landed gentry, the professional classes, the commercial, middle classes, the working classes and then there was a marginal group called shabby genteel. I felt, in the Foreign Office, that's exactly where we were! We had to make do all the time, trying to keep up appearances. Demanding ever more from spouses and so on not to show that there was a hole in your sock. Wouldn't you agree?

SR: Yes, they resent the fact that Ambassadors have nice houses and chauffeurs and all the rest of it which are simply tools for the job.

AB: Just to round off, being an AUS was satisfying for me because I was able to have some ideas and push them through. Given the very ephemeral and amorphous character of a lot of our work, it is good to be able to point to something that you had a hand in, that actually worked, that came to pass. I was glad to have had that opportunity and would have been

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**Ambassador, Mexico City, 1994-98**

SR: Good morning. It's 16 October 2019. Now we come onto your last posting, Adrian. Did you ask to go to Mexico?

AB: No, I didn't really. It was one of the possibilities, because at that stage I had acquired quite a bit of Hispanic experience, so it was natural that I should be in the field. But I was also in the field for some other places. The other obvious one was Brazil which was also coming up. And there was Spain. Canada was on a later timing and I don't think Nicholas Bayne who was there had any plans to leave earlier. So, effectively, the choice lay between Brazil, Spain and Mexico. The one I was mostly keen on was Madrid, but I didn't get that. So then it was between Brazil and Mexico. I thought to myself that Brazil was the bigger job, in a way - a big country and greater British interests.

SR: But then you would have to speak Portuguese.

AB: Yes. And I didn't feel at that stage in my mid-50s that I wanted to embark on a new language. Furthermore, both my daughters were at that time living in the US, Kitty in Los Angeles and Antonia in New York. Mexico was handy for both and I already had Spanish, so I decided to go for that. But I wasn't very attracted to Mexico as a place. I'd only been there once before and had a rather negative experience. I came down with a ferocious flu attack at a Heads of Mission conference.

However, I set off in good heart. It was rather amusing when I arrived at the airport in the middle of the night, the deputy Head of Protocol greeted me. He got over the formalities very soon and then said, "Ambassador, I just wanted to let you know that I've got a very nice flat if you or any member of your staff needs one."

I think it's worth saying a word about the time that we were living in. This was in the middle of the 90s. If you compare the 90s with the decade before and the decades afterwards, it was a very special time in that the world was full of hope, energy and action following the collapse of the Soviet Empire. Having been the AUS in the previous four or five years for the Americas, I had seen the impact of the overthrow of the Soviet Union and its satellites and the collapse of Communism and also the progress made by globalisation, deregulation, liberalisation of trade and privatisation. Things were really happening and people were very optimistic, not least in Mexico which in 1994 joined NAFTA and the OECD. At a jump, Mexico had suddenly joined the Euro-Atlantic group of countries. Before going, I met people in London - bankers and others - who told me that Mexico was really a country of

interest to them. It had become quite a large trader, partly because of the so-called *Maquiladoras* established along the Mexican-US border ... a very long border. San Diego to San Antonio is the same distance as London to Beirut. All along the border, the Americans and the Mexicans had introduced manufacturing plants which were exclusively established to supply the US market: it was all part of the development of the 'just-in-time' logistical process. The auto industry in Detroit would get stuff manufactured in Mexico and shipped over the border. That was the first time I had heard of 'just-in-time'. So that boosted the trade figures. As a result of that particular activity, trade generally had expanded, leaving Mexico as the second largest export market for the United States (Canada was the first with Japan in third place).

The only discordant note was when I went to see people at Barclays Bank. There was a very sceptical chap there who said he was not going to buy any Mexican government bonds because he didn't trust them. His caution was justified, as I later saw.

Anyway, I arrived, having taken the trouble beforehand to make sure I had my Higher standard Spanish exam under my belt. I'd got it when I was in Peru but I wanted to refurbish it and give a good example to my staff.

Mexico had had an eventful year because not only had she joined NAFTA and the OECD but, at the beginning of the year, there had also been a rebellion in one of the southern states, Chiapas. There were dissidents in the jungle who were burning villages and generally causing upset, trying to resuscitate the Che Guevara ideas: people were a bit worried about this. In the event, the rebels were not able to ignite the jungle let alone the country. But thanks to growing human rights scrutiny, the authorities were not able to crack down as hard as they might have liked. The trouble rumbled on. Later that year, 1994, the governing party's presidential candidate was murdered: this became an unsolved mystery which cast a cloud, made a deeper colour of grey when it turned out that the outgoing President, Carlos Salinas, who had done so much to transform the Mexican economy, had a brother linked in some mysterious way to the murder. He was put in jail. So, there was a good deal of nervousness as well as excitement at the new prospects. The Mexicans, like so many other Latin Americans, had copied American practice in having fixed term presidencies which allowed for an election and then a transition period under the outgoing President, and then an inauguration either at the end of the year or the beginning of the next. I arrived in the transition period which meant that I was having difficulty presenting my credentials as the

existing president only liked to do it in bulk: he wouldn't do it just for one but would receive a number of ambassadors at the same time.

The inauguration was due and our representative was William Waldegrave whom I'd met a few times during my time as AUS. An absurd situation to do with his ranking in the inauguration ceremony arose. All American countries are republics, except Canada and Commonwealth Islands in the Caribbean. In a republic, you have a President who is the head of state as well as the head of government. For the inauguration of the new President of Mexico, an big neighbour as far as all the American neighbourhood was concerned, nearly all the local Presidents were going to turn up, including the President of the United States. Presidents and Vice-Presidents from elsewhere, as well as Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers, were flooding in from all points of the compass. William Waldegrave at that time was Minister of Agriculture, an office that didn't rank very high in the protocol order: There was the President, the Vice-President, the President of the Senate, the President of the Supreme Court, then Foreign Presidents and Vice-Presidents etc. It's a long way down before you reach the Ministers of Agriculture. The Chief of Protocol was being very stuffy and *protocolaire* and wouldn't depart from the Mexican order of precedence. I spent a frantic time trying to find someone else to talk to because I needed to move Waldegrave up the pecking order. Otherwise, there was a risk, with so many VIPs there, that his turn wouldn't come until he had left! There was no point in talking to the existing government as they were on their way out; the new people weren't in power; I hadn't presented credentials. But I managed to get hold of Jose-Angel Gurría, now Secretary General of the OECD but at the time Finance Minister-designate. He'd had a British Council scholarship to Leeds where he had done a degree in Economics and he claimed to be fan of Leeds United. He was very busy, but I did manage to get his mobile phone number. and in a series of hectic phone calls got him to accept an approach, already rejected by the Head of Protocol. The idea was to establish an Order of Precedence separate from the Mexican Order to accommodate the European Monarchies, viz. Belgian, Sweden etc. of which the United Kingdom was the oldest. I also explained that in protocol terms in England, a Ministry can only be created by Act of Parliament, whereas a Secretariat of State is created through an Order in Council: thus, the Minister of Agriculture, was one of the most senior members of the Cabinet.

Happily, Gurria delivered: Leeds United must have been the decisive factor! We got our audience on the first day. I was both slightly disappointed and perversely pleased, as we were driving to the President's palace, to see that Mr Waldegrave's white shirt had slightly

frayed cuffs. The nonchalance of the British ruling class! But as my father used to say, “A gentleman should always be above his clothes.”

While all of this was going on, the so-called Tequila crisis blew. That meant that Mexico had run out of money and people were scrambling to sell their government bonds. The man in Barclays was right. As a result of that collapse, the IMF, under close control from the United States, mounted the biggest, until then, ever debt bailout in history – some \$50 billion, an enormous sum at the time.

Mexico’s bright prospects at the beginning of 1994 were more or less in tatters when the new President, President Zedillo (who’d also had a three-month British Council scholarship, to Bradford), took office in December. It was a rocky start. For the first couple of months, the convention of writing a first impression despatch weighed heavily on me. There was so much chaos: I couldn’t really form any impressions.

But I was aided by an institution which had been established by one of my predecessors in the 1940s, a man called O’Sullivan (or perhaps he was just Sullivan), who was the British Minister in post-World War II Mexico. He founded a luncheon club called *Los Esnuffers*. Translated, it means the Snuffers. This was a group of twelve men, of whom the chairman *ex officio* was the British Ambassador of the day. Its purpose was to meet once a month and talk about anything it chose. The only rule was that, during the course of lunch, members had to take snuff and offer snuff to their fellow Snuffers: were anyone to sneeze, then he had to pay a fine. The fines were donated to charity. You may think this is quite absurd and idiosyncratic, but the Mexicans thought it was very British. It had obviously worked from the beginning and, I believe, may still be working very well.

SR: Was membership by invitation?

AB: Yes. The British Ambassador was automatically a member *ex officio*. The other eleven were invited. The membership, you might say in a parallel with London, was drawn from the ranks of the Reform, the Athenaeum and Boodles. They were all good chaps, all extremely wealthy with *curricula vitae* to match. One of them was Miguel de la Madrid, a former President. He it was who turned Mexico away from her historic exile from the Western world by joining the GATT. That had gradually paved the way for joining the OECD years later. He was a brilliant man, quite elderly by this point, but sharp as a pin and so lucid. There were one or two people who had been *papabili* for President in the PRI (*Partido*

*Revolucionario Institucional*), the party that had governed the country since the 1930s and still had it firmly in its grip. All of the people in this group, whether they were brilliant architects, owned Media chains, had held political or public office or were wealthy, successful businessmen, had all benefited from the rule of the PRI. So, in its eleven Mexican members, you had people who had been at the core of national life in significant positions for the preceding 30 or 40 years and some still very active -the age span was wide. Collectively, they made up an immensely rich store of knowledge political, economic, social and cultural; a precious source for me as a new ambassador and I am sure that went for my successors too. In order to have lunch, you have to open your mouth to eat but with the Snuffers you also had to open your mouth to speak. Usually, the host chose a theme for lunch. On my first occasion, our host after welcoming me, asked if I would talk to them about Media and Press freedom and how it all worked in the UK. The language of this group was Spanish. I noticed in my contacts with top Mexicans that most spoke fluent American. The trick was to get them to talk to you in Spanish, in which they felt freer. Later, I realised that these, like other well -educated Mexicans, felt they had a bit of an edge over American counterparts in being heirs to two cultures. Like the Americans, they were familiar with Hemingway, Faulkner, Arthur Miller and others in the American canon but of course they also had been behind them Cervantes, Lorca, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Octavio Paz etc.

What had I been sent to Mexico to do? Not to bother about politics. It was clear to me that the Americans had the whole political scene covered: in addition to having a large Embassy, they had the largest US Consulate in the world in Guadalajara, in the neighbourhood of which tens of thousands of Americans had retired - it's like the south of Spain for Europeans.

My job was commerce, of which I really knew little. Notwithstanding the fact that the Mexican government was pursuing Reagan and Thatcherite policies they didn't really know a great deal about her or her achievements. Nor indeed did they know very much about Britain or indeed have much contact with it. In the Americas the gravitational pull of the US is colossal, especially over the border in Mexico. So, the idea, it seemed to me, was to get Britain noticed.

The first drum we started to beat ad nauseam was that Britain was the second largest foreign investor in Mexico after the US, but before Germany. We kept beating it. Then we tried to get our role as free traders into the spotlight and Mexico was a free trading country. As time went by we found other affinities and complementarities. I used to go round the country as



Ambassador speaking to people and making these same points again and again. Gratifyingly, after a while media stories began routinely identifying the UK as the second largest investor. The word was getting across.

We also saw that people in Whitehall and in the UK generally didn't know much about Mexico. There was a great deal for them to learn because, partly as a result of globalisation, there had been a huge investment in Mexican industry and manufacturing capacity which had gone unnoticed. Up near the Northern border fronting Texas, there is a city some way back from the border called Monterrey - not to be confused with the Monterey in California – where, in the middle of a semi-arid almost desert zone, an amazingly modern, thriving manufacturing city had been built: breweries, internal combustion engines, rails, cement and huge range in between. Very impressive. The people running these businesses were mostly young, highly qualified engineers, MBAs from Stanford, UCLA, MIT, Chicago and successful, with little time for sentiment. A kind of dynastic system had grown up where the daughters and sons of these different firms had married into one another's families. The atmosphere of the city, the ethos was tremendously commercial and very oriented towards the United States, into which market they were not only shipping a great deal of goods: bricks, tiles, motor engines, whisky, beer, textiles but also investing their own production capacity.

I saw that my task was to get people out from Whitehall, in particular Ministers of Trade and Ministers of Environment and other economic departments. Mexico is fourth in the world in terms of biodiversity but suffered a lot from pollution especially in the Megalopolis of Mexico City (pop. 20m.). Something needed to be done. One of the Snuffers was a genial and intelligent chap who had been Mexican Ambassador in Washington and London. I'd met him in London when I was doing the AUS job. He was very switched on and I asked him how I could get some of these top people to London. They went to the States all the time and places like Frankfurt and Paris, but they didn't go to London. He told me that I just ought to invite them. I thought I couldn't just invite them but needed a programme with a budget and so on. Then I discovered that these people were not just rich, but very rich. They were billionaires. One of them, Carlos Slim, was the then richest man in the world, according to Forbes magazine. I decided to call on him and, rather to my amazement, he agreed to see me. Fortunately for me, he was late, quite seriously late for the appointment, and I was left waiting in his office. After about half an hour, I began to get curious. I noticed that there were several canvases on the floor with their faces to the wall. I knew he was interested in art because he had built a museum in Mexico for his wife and had filled it with works by Rodin.

I turned these paintings over: there were post-Impressionists and people like Derain, Vlaminck and Bonnard.

SR: So why were they on the floor?

AB: They hadn't been hung yet. I think he'd just acquired them. When he finally came in, all of a bustle, apologising for being late, I said that I had had plenty of time to look around and had noticed that he had some wonderful paintings. And before he told me where he had got them from, I taxed him by saying that I supposed that all he knew about London was Sotheby's and Christie's. He looked slightly sheepish. I went on to explain that I was there to try and get him to London to see what had happened: Mrs Thatcher had had a big influence around the world and he needed to see what had happened in the UK. This was well received and we talked. I offered him a chance to meet the Prime Minister (but he didn't know who the Prime Minister was!).

Having been in contact with other people, I then got in touch with my successor as AUSS, William Marsden, and explained that I wanted to put together a party of six billionaires to bring to London and show them the transformation that had been effected. We had to see top people, including the Prime Minister. To cut a long story short, William got the Prime Minister to commit and thereafter others fell in behind that, no problem. We got a budget. When I green light came from London, I was able to give them a date and to offer hospitality including airfares (first class, of course). However, I soon discovered that they would all be flying in their own aeroplanes and that they all had somewhere to stay in London. In the event, HMG did not have to fork out much at all, just a few meals.

The programme had calls in London on the Prime Minister and other relevant Ministers and the Governor of the Bank of England. The Chancellor gave them dinner. It seemed to me that we should also go out of London. As there wasn't much time, we went to Cambridge in a very rattly Thameslink train (HMG paid the fares) and my old college gave them lunch. The college had recently discovered in a loft somewhere a box of Darwin's letters, one of our better-known alumni: they were being prepared for publication. A small display was arranged for the pre-lunch drinks in the Master's Lodge. It certainly had the Wow! factor. "So", I heard one member of the group murmur reverently "Charles Darwin studied here". The Master, Prof. Frank Kelly, FRS, distinguished mathematician, expert in electrical circuits and communication systems, and Carlos Slim who, in addition to owning, *inter alia*, all Mexico's telephone landline and mobile circuits, lectured regularly in the mathematics

faculty at the National University, found plenty to talk about. That was the expedition of the six Mexican billionaires to London. It was rather amusing that after we had chosen the team to go, word went round and other high worth Honchos approached me to join the trip. It made a few ripples!

So that was the main body of the work, really, making commercial connections. One of the billionaires made a small investment in start-up in the Cambridge Science Park, where we had taken them, but that apart very little came out of it in the form of Mexican investment in the UK. But it did bring more businessmen and people from Whitehall out to Mexico. From that point of view it was beneficial.

One of the firms that showed interest and got a big reward was BOC (the British Oxygen Company), which was bidding for a project in the Gulf of Mexico to extract nitrogen from the air. As the air consists of four parts nitrogen to one part oxygen it struck me as money for old rope! The scheme was to extend the life of the sub-marine gas deposits in the Gulf of Mexico by pumping nitrogen into them and thus increasing the pressure.

Our involvement began when my Commercial Secretary heard from a British businessman in New Jersey, who wasn't getting anywhere with the Pemex people there and wanted advice. Pemex, Mexico's national oil company, was set up to run all British (including Shell-mex), American and other foreign oil companies when the Mexican government nationalised all their assets just before WWII. As it happened I knew the head of Pemex and offered to talk to him.

The head of Pemex, Adrian Lajous, told me British interest was welcome because one of the company's policies was to diversify their business from America as much as possible. As things stood, American, French and German companies were all bidding. He suggested that as he was going to be in Madrid the following Friday, a meeting could be set up there. I passed that on to the Chairman of BOC in London urging him to be sure to make the appointment. A fortnight later, he came out to Mexico and put up at the Residence. At breakfast he surprised me by telling that we had been at Christ's together: we were exact contemporaries. He'd read metallurgy and I'd read English but we'd never met. BOC won the contract which was for over \$1 billion, the biggest in the company's history. To complete the story, perhaps I should add that Adrian Lajous had also been to Cambridge and that some years later the German company Linde, one of the rivals in the tendering process, bought out BOC.

So that was the thrust of our work - commercial. Our European partners, not mention the Americans, were all our rivals and energetic too. Volkswagen had a huge manufacturing and assembly plant in Mexico: they'd transferred all the Beetle production from Germany there to Mexico, to serve the whole of the Americas or maybe it was just N. America. Although that was a huge investment, historically it wasn't as large as ours. We built ours up in smaller bits as more and more people began to take an interest.

From the official point of view things went well. We had hoped to get the Prime Minister, but we did get the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor. Also, the Deputy Governor of the Bank of England.

Another visitor who came to stay was Ian Lang who, at the time, was Minister of State at the DTI. He asked me, "Adrian, do you know when we last met?" I'm usually quite good at remembering faces, but on this occasion couldn't. He told me that it was at the Cambridge Footlights. As soon as he said that, I remembered. I had helped him go through material he was preparing for an audition. It was rather amusing because when we went to Monterrey in northern Mexico, this hub of industry, we called, *inter alios*, on the Governor. He had recently been elected and was absolutely thrilled to bits at this new responsibility. He was from one of the big commercial dynasties but didn't cut the mustard commercially, so they sent him into politics. He read us his election memorandum ... yawn, yawn ... but got so excited by his own rocambolesque vistas and visions, possibly encouraged by our polite questions, that when Ian Lang and I came out, we could scarcely our laughter, shades of Monty Python.

I must switch from the commercial to talk about the political. The second choice President, Ernesto Zedillo, who had spent some weeks on a British Council award in Bradford, had seen that Mexico wasn't going to get anywhere unless there were serious political reforms. One of the first things he did was to sack the Supreme Court *en masse*. Then he also went for the next echelon down and did a purge there ... not as comprehensive – and put his own men in who were more committed to human rights and more modern constitutional arrangements. He carried out several legislative changes that reduced the power of the executive. He was very keen on encouraging pluralism. The PRI had begun as a left-wing revolutionary party, but it had become a power party and would follow any economic policy that would deliver more power. Zedillo introduced changes which curtailed its ability to do that and was, of course, regarded by many in the Party as a traitor. But these changes enabled one of the

Opposition parties, the PAN, a liberal, right-wing sort of party, to make ground. They won governorships and more junior offices. When Zedillo's term came to an end, Vicente Fox, a businessman and not a member of the PRI, became President - the first non-PRI President for and led the PAN to victory. That this switch came about owed much to Zedillo's reforms.

Fox was a good President. And alternance has since become a feature of Mexican political life. It has enabled some of the economic and social gains that came about through liberal economic policies to be consolidated into the running of the country more generally. Mexico, politically and economically, was a more together place when I left than when I arrived in the autumn of 1994.

I mentioned the Snuffers. There was one member who had gone to China at some point and to whom the Chinese government had sent as a present something like 2,000 Chinese beech trees to line the drive to his hacienda. He came from a family which had settled in Texas in the seventeenth century. (Spanish jurisdiction over Texas was brought to an end by Colonel Houston in the 1830s: there was a treaty in 1844, I think.) He was a prominent member of the Snuffers and had the air of a landed grandee which is what he was (he also had extensive brewing (think Corona!) and political interests (founder member of the PAN in 1939) and was always addressed as Don Juan, full name Sanchez Navarro y Peon. He invited Carlos Slim, the then richest man in the world, to join the Snuffers. When Don Juan reported this and that Slim would be happy to join, all were aghast. This was a *fait accompli* up with which the others would not put. No invitation was issued and a certain amount of umbrage was taken all round.

I should mention Hugh Thomas, the distinguished historian. He made his reputation as a young don with a book on the Cuban revolution and went on to write successful books e.g the Spanish Civil War, the Atlantic Slave Trade and the Conquest of Mexico bringing Prescott up to date. He was also active politically, a committed European, a great supporter of Mrs Thatcher and an early member of the Centre for Policy Studies, and later its Chairman. He became a great friend of Mario Vargas Llosa, the celebrated Peruvian novelist and failed presidential candidate. When I was in Mexico, he made several visits, one of which was to be part of a lecture series that we organised. With the support of William Marsden, AUS, we got Sir John Elliot, Hugh Thomas (who, by then, was Lord Thomas of Swinnerton), Professors Alan Knight, Brian Hamnett and David Brading all outstanding and influential names in Mexican Studies world-wide to deliver a series of lectures. In Mexico naturally

their work reached a much wider public beyond the academic community. The lectures, delivered over a period of four or five months, were well attended and widely covered in the Media. And the Mexican National Council for Culture and the Arts was happy to publish the texts.

SR: Can I ask what was it like to actually live in Mexico? One gets the impression that it's quite polluted with a lot of traffic jams.

AB: Yes, it was a stressful city. Extremely large. About 20 million people. The urban tissue is both dense and extensive: it's difficult to get out. Huge freeways cut through it, but it just seems to go on for ever and ever. It was polluted. You could feel the grit in the air. Every day in the newspapers there was a pollution score. I don't think we have that in London where the limit is, I believe regularly breached.

The stress of the huge *urbanización* and the pollution had persuaded a tight-fisted Office that there should be an Embassy house, a refuge out of the city. Mexico City is about 6,000 feet up so the air is thinner and the pollution heavier. Members of staff could book the house e.g. for a week-end or at other times. It was a great morale booster. The Mexican government was making progress on pollution, but of course it's a pretty slow business.

But the city had a lot to offer. It had after all been a metropolis for a long time; under the Aztecs, the Spaniards and now the Mexicans. These three layers have left plenty of evidence of their presences. There was plenty to do and see and any amount of places cheap and expensive in which to eat and drink. And Hollywood was not so far away; all the latest films! For me, it wasn't too difficult because the house wasn't far from the office. I had a wonderful driver who knew the city extremely well: I don't know how he did it because it seemed to me to be a kind of trackless muddle. He was renowned among his fellow ambassadorial chauffeurs for always finding just the right place to park. After an event, I'd come out and there he would be! It was after my time, when he was awarded his richly deserved MBE. He was dignified with a natural authority and a good sense of humour. Some of the drives we did were quite long and he was a great companion. I used to think sometimes, as I arrived at some anonymous modern building housing some dreary government agency, if I just sent Ismael in, he would get the business done - no problem! We used to laugh about that.

SR: Was it a big Embassy?

AB: Yes, above average, I would say. My no. 2 was a Counsellor (Commercial). I had a Defence Attache and several First and Second Secretaries divided between – Chancery, Commercial, Consular, Press and Admin as well as numerous L.E. staff. The place was rather relaxed when I arrived so I felt I had to shake things up. This led to trouble with POD. After the departure of one First Secretary, I had to wait many months before a suitable successor was proposed. During the course of what became an edgy series of exchanges between me and the Office, POD suggested at one point that I should accept a Grade 9 as the substantive replacement! But once that problem had been ironed out we settled down and got through plenty of work. Oh, I should not forget our Honorary Consuls. We had about ten.

To begin with a posting to Mexico is daunting. The City is very large, there are a great many people and the country too is big – approx. 2 m. km.2. But the people are friendly. They know who they are and don't fawn. Embassy staff enjoyed exploring outside Mexico City, so much to see of colonial and pre-colonial Mexico, not to mention the beautiful beaches of the Caribbean and the Pacific and the mountains, jungles and deserts. Highly recommended!

We had a very successful programme of Chevening scholars: I think we were able to double our allocation to 100. They were people who were going to do well anywhere in the world. Mexican culture is very rich and Mexicans take great pride in it. They also take great pride in having survived in close proximity to the United States. Until - I would say - the time I was there, American policy towards Mexico was unconsciously pushy: they didn't regard the Mexicans as *interlocuteurs valables*. They seemed to regard them as awkward neighbours from whom not much could be expected and who needed firm rather than sensitive handling. But Bill Clinton articulated a change though which, no doubt, had already been in the works some time, when he declared on one of his visits "We must now regard one another as having a common future." You could almost hear the sigh of relief from the audience. It's a very stressed relationship, in many respects, consisting of three basic elements: first, migration; second, drugs; third, trade. All three of them, as you can see immediately, are matters that bristle with difficulties and, when not prospering, cause a lot of trouble.

Mexico has come a long way and when I left very hopeful. But I believe since then the security situation – the drugs problem in other words - has deteriorated sharply but there has been progress all the same politically and economically.

SR: And the wall?

AB: Yes. What country in the world is enjoying a happy or comfortable relationship with the Trump administration? Starting with Canada.

But I enjoyed it. Largely, I think, because of the Mexicans. I was very glad to meet them. I felt that the people at the top - tough businessmen, no question - would have survived in any market. Many of them, indeed, were serving on the boards of top American companies. One of those who wanted to join my little billionaires' excursion was very proud of the fact that he'd been appointed a main board director of General Electric which at that time was run by a fearsome CEO called Jack Webb one of whose boasts was that in the course of his career he had slimmed (cruel euphemism) the Group's workforce by 100,000. The hard face of capitalism could be seen in Mexico too. One tycoon I met in Monterrey had a policy of showing the door to any employee who became pregnant. But there were others who took proper care of their workers. Such contrasts are usual in countries undergoing rapid political and economic transition. There was a lot of injustice. The basic problem in Mexico, as with all the other countries in Latin America, is that justice is weak. Judicial officials and lawyers are routinely exposed to bribery and intimidation (kidnapping of family members – a common occurrence) and the police have a long way to go before becoming a reliable instrument. I recall a vignette of that social disequilibrium. One day a new recruit (L.E.) came sidling into my office bearing a huge package. It was present for me. I told him I could not accept it, that that was not our way. If he worked well, we would treat him well. It was I thought a vivid illustration of the humble propitiating the powerful.

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Looking back on my time, I realise that I was fortunate in my postings, to some of which I went only reluctantly. Except towards the end they were rather ad hoc. But in fact, they suited me well.

My visit to the consulate in Venice in search of a loan to prolong my last long vacation made a vivid impression. Through the floor-to-ceiling windows at the other end of the Consul's spacious room, I saw the waters of the Grand Canal glinting and, moored conveniently, the Consular launch with its stern pennant shifting gently to the swell of the passing *vaporetti*. It was a picture into which I thought I could easily fit. Not many weeks later, after the induction course, it was therefore a jolt to be invited (ordered more like!) to learn Persian. I hadn't fully internalised that the Service operated worldwide and that there were many posts



that I later learnt were called 'warm and amusing'. The Venice vision was a far cry from the no-nonsense routines and realities of SOAS.

As a member of the Service, I felt as though I was on a never-ending Adult Education course. All the countries I served in had rich and distinctive cultures: Iran, France, India, Germany and two Spanish Vice-Royalties, New Spain (Mexico) and Peru. In addition to soaking up the history - in the case of Iran, India and the Latin American posts a very long and a deep history - there was also the need to perform in the respective languages. So, an intensive and extensive course, constantly stimulating, challenging and enriching. At the same time, misleading though it might seem to some, eating the Shah's caviar and drinking his champagne was absolutely an indispensable element of the essential service supplied by the Diplomatic Service to Queen and country. It was a reassuring thought.

At home, in the Office, the caviar and champagne were in short supply, but advancing public business on paper or in committee brought many more satisfactions. I was sorry not to have had more of it.

It is nearly 60 years since I joined. The Consulate in Venice is long gone. The UK has lost much prestige. Our global footprint will shrink further as those of others increase.

In the early 60s, the Foreign Office enjoyed great prestige. New entrants could expect more respectful treatment from their bank managers and, more generally, from people of their parents' generation. And contemporaries frankly acknowledged that getting in was not easy. The prestige no doubt reflected the UK's position in the world. We had our own agenda and were, moreover, America's buddy (think John F Kennedy). The importance of the issues the Office dealt with reflected by the Foreign Secretary's seniority in Cabinet, second to the Prime Minister, showed it was a serious enterprise.

Once inside, it took a little while to recognise that important as these external factors were, the quality and motivation of the people working for it, wherever they might be, in drab Whitehall or exotic Kathmandu was as important. For all, from the security guards, Office Messengers through Registry staff, shorthand typists right through desk officers and on up the chain, getting the job done properly and on time was what we were all there for. Loyalty, reliability, fair dealing, mutual respect, acceptance of responsibility, energy, speed, brains, initiative and imagination were all in plentiful supply.

Bag days left vivid memories. The Queen's Messenger wondering about his flight, the registry clerk ready with the bag and his seals, wax and lead, and within the Chancery the shorthand typists typing like fury. A particular challenge was the saving telegram - a document destined for many posts but too long or not urgent enough to be sent telegraphically. The mechanism for making the copies was the Gestetner machine. With her typewriter, the shorthand typist cut the text onto a waxed stencil, which was then wrapped around the drum and inked. The paper was passed through a pair of rollers and, somehow, the ink was transferred through holes onto the paper. In this way, lengthy texts could be copied to multiple recipients. The stencils frequently gave way, the ink sometimes splattered and splurged onto furniture and clothes. Broken fingernails were common. The photocopier had yet to be invented. But, undaunted, those committed young women (average career length eight years) got everything into the bag. And the Queen's Messenger caught his flight. We wouldn't see him for another week or more. We were all On Her Majesty's Service, key workers doing essential work, proud of it and heirs to a robust esprit de corps. Some have referred to the service as a 'band of brothers'. That's what it felt like to me, but only if you add 'and sisters'.

The Service has not escaped the effects of the UK's reduced circumstances. I understand that, since 2008, the FCO budget has been cut in real terms by 50%; that sounds pretty transformative. I trust that the brothers and sisters are as motivated and cohesive as in my day and wish them *Bon Voyage* and *Bon Courage* as HMS Global Britannia slips her moorings on 31 January 2021 bound for what De Gaulle called *le Grand Large*.