

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

Sir Roger Bridgland Bone, KCMG, 2002 (CMG 1996)

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**BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME**

**RECOLLECTIONS OF SIR ROGER BONE KCMG, RECORDED AND  
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SR: This is 2 February 2018 and I'm recording Roger Bone. Now Roger, tell me, why did you join the Foreign Office?

RB: Goodness! Well, I suppose in those days – in 1966 – as a potential graduate, one had a wide range of options. Getting a job was not a difficult thing. It was simply deciding which particular branch one would like to try one's hand at. So I lined up two or three things in industry that I could have done. And I think my tutor at Oxford suggested the FCO. The second thing is that there was a very elderly diplomat in the Foreign Office called William Strang who was Permanent Secretary shortly after the Second World War. He achieved a little bit of notoriety before and after the Second World War – he went to Germany with Chamberlain, for example. He was an old boy of the school that I went to and I met him as a youngster, a teenager. And I drew a little bit of inspiration from him.

SR: He wrote a book, didn't he?

RB: He did. I can't remember what it was called and it was a rather stilted book. But it was enough to challenge the imagination of a 17-year old. So really those two things prompted it. And then I joined the Service immediately after university. I was terribly young, 21 or 22. Looking back on it at the time, I felt that that was probably a little too early to join. I think I would have quite liked to have done something else.

SR: A gap year?

RB: A gap year at least, yes.

SR: So you joined the UN Department. Which one?

RB: It was the UN Political Department. I went off to New York for a couple of months in the Autumn of 1966 to do a reporting job in one of the Committees of the General Assembly. I went back again in 1967, just after the Middle East war as a bag carrier. I remember travelling with George Brown who was the Foreign Secretary at that time and observing sometimes from close-up and sometimes afar the activities of George Brown and his slight sort of drunken fits. And I came to the view at that stage that he was not so much drunk on alcohol, but actually drunk on atmosphere. I saw him once or twice and I just couldn't believe that he would have had time to drink all that much, but nevertheless was still full of *bonhomie*. I do remember that when we flew across the Atlantic – in those days you had to touch down in Newfoundland, you couldn't get there straightaway – and on the flight over he worked very hard with his advisers and he was 'tired' and a little 'emotional'. When we got to Newfoundland, to Gander, he decided he was going to stay on the plane and have a nap. And so he did. And we all came off the aeroplane, led by Gore-Booth, who was then the Permanent Secretary. And the manager of Gander airport came up to him and said, "Welcome, Mr Brown. Lovely to see you." And Gore-Booth never quite recovered from that during that stay! That was great fun. And then back to London and I worked in UN Department for the rest of that year, 1967.

SR: What was the Office like in those days? Very old-fashioned?

RB: It was very old-fashioned and really quite remarkable. The interesting thing was the way information moved around the Office in those days. All the minutes that we contributed to, of course, were handwritten. It was very rare to be able to get a typist to come and help you and, if you did get one, you had to wait in a queue for a young lady to come and take shorthand. It might be 24 hours before you got the result back, so you kept the typewritten stuff for things that would have a shelf life of at least 48 hours. So everything was handwritten and if, having written your very clever minute, you wanted to send it to somebody else in the office, on the other side of the building, there was a process. Behind your desk, you had a button in the wall. If you pressed it once, a messenger would appear after a couple of moments and you would put your minute inside a brown envelope, write the address on the front, hand it to him and he would walk that piece of paper to the appropriate address in the building. Now if you pressed the button twice, the same man would appear with a red box. And the red box would be open, you would put your minute inside a brown envelope, put it inside the red box and, with a special key issued at the beginning of the year,

you could lock the box. He would then walk that to the recipient on the other side of the building who would have an identical key and could open the box and then read the minute. This was how confidential information moved round the Office. When you contrast that with 20 or 30 years later, it really is quite remarkable. But, you know, the interesting thing is that that was the slow track, the way stuff moved. If anything came in that was really urgent, you didn't rely on a messenger. You got up from your desk, walked it to the next person and you walked it to the Under Secretary or to the Deputy Secretary or to the Permanent Secretary. Once or twice during that year, I saw that happen. Within 20 minutes, you could be in the Permanent Secretary's room or even the Foreign Secretary's room. So clearing all the rest of the stuff away left room for that fast track for stuff to be handled efficiently. And it worked. People were not cluttered with unnecessary things.

SR: But you still had to go through all the layers of the hierarchy?

RB: Of course. You couldn't just walk it straight to the Permanent Secretary. But you could trigger the action which led to that quite quickly if necessary.

The other thing that I remember was that it was the responsibility of the junior Third Secretary in the third room to light the fire. There was no efficient central heating, just one pipe around the room. We didn't have to lay the fire – that was done at night by one of the staff. But we were expected to be in first in the morning to apply the match! All that was in the 60s and, when I came back from Stockholm in the early 70s, it had all changed. It was as if there had been a sudden cultural shift: it was a different atmosphere, a different sense of activity, a different sense of urgency and the central heating had been sorted out. It was a totally different world, so I was just there in time to see the change. The hours people kept was interesting. You know, if you were a big First Secretary you could arrive between 9.30 and 10 and nobody would bat an eyelid.

SR: And people regularly took afternoons off to go and watch the cricket, didn't they?

RB: Oh yes, absolutely. And club membership was important, so you would retire to your club at 5.30 before going home to your long-suffering wife. It was a different world and it was fascinating.

### **1968 – 1970 Third Secretary, British Embassy, Stockholm**

SR: So then you moved on to Stockholm. That was in the days when you went off to Personnel Operations Department and they told you where you are going to go.

RB: Yes. There was no choice about it. I remember being telephoned just before Christmas at the end of my first year and told to be in Stockholm by the third or fourth of January. And I said, rather humbly, that that was fine although it didn't leave me much time. The chap at the end of the telephone – in fact I think it was Bryan Cartledge, who became a great friend later in life – I remember him saying to me, “Well of course we understand, Mr Bone. With your extensive family and your property to dispose of, it's going to be extremely difficult for you to get ready within three or four days.” Of course they knew all I had was a suitcase and could move at any point.

SR: But there was no thought of pre-posting training, language training or anything like that?

RB: No, none at all. Absolutely nothing. I knew nothing about Sweden when I got on the boat to go to Gothenburg. I remember arriving at Gothenburg in the middle of a very heavy winter. Snow was falling and it fell all the way across Sweden as I travelled to Stockholm. It snowed heavily in Stockholm and I wondered what on earth I had come to.

SR: So tell me a bit about what you did. You were again a Third Secretary, the lowest form of diplomatic life.

RB: It was an interesting time to go to Sweden. In those days, Sweden was the third richest country in the world in terms of income per head. It came after the United States and Switzerland. Of course, Sweden had not suffered the ravages of the Second World War so its industry and infrastructure were intact. They had a very efficient government in those days, a Social Democratic government which had had continuous rule for something like 30 to 40 years. They had worked out a basis of understanding with big business. It was extremely consensual as a society. They never had strikes or, if they did, they were very quickly resolved. And they were super-efficient at planning and doing what they did. The population were used to paying very high taxes, as indeed they still are. But in return for that they got a

society which functioned and worked and the social contract was fine. Everything wasn't perfect – in some ways it was a slightly joyless society. Very Lutheran in feel, rather dour.

SR: You put *smug* in your notes.

RB: Yes. It was a little bit smug. Smug because they knew they were rich, and smug because there was a kind of self-contentment about the way they organised themselves. And it was very Germanic. One forgets that Sweden was a very Germanic country until the Second World War. The first language taught in schools in Sweden was German. So when I was getting to know my future wife's parents and the older generation, they could manage a little bit of English but German was really their tongue. It was a very Germanic-thinking country and there was a lot of sympathy during the 30s for the way Germany was organising itself and the practical way in which it got things done, therefore a lot of latent sympathy for Hitler too. And even after the Second World War, there was a lot of residual respect for Germany. We saw the other day the death of the founder of IKEA, Mr Kamprad, who is very typical of this. He is known to have been a German sympathiser and to have been a member of extreme right-wing groups, the allegations go, after the Second World War. I knew some of Lena's relatives who were very sympathetic to Germans too. The role Sweden played in the Second World War – and we were still at that stage within 25 years of the end of the war – was not admired by many in Western Europe. Sweden was determined to remain neutral and had constantly to demonstrate neutrality - it wasn't guaranteed by treaty, as Switzerland was, for example. It had to demonstrate that it didn't want to be involved. And it allowed itself to come under pressure from Germany and to serve Germany's purpose during the first couple of years of the Second World War. So iron ore continued to flow from the mines in the North of Sweden, across the Baltic into Germany. And most shameful of all, the Swedes allowed the Germans to transport troops in trains across Sweden into Norway after the occupation of Norway. So that older generation of Norwegians never quite forgave them for that. But of course it all served Sweden's purpose. It stayed out of the Second World War and then continued to protest a policy of neutrality through the 60s and 70s and beyond. An unkind observer would say that they rode on the back of Western European security geometry, without having to assume any of the obligations of full participation. And maintained their wealth as they did so. So one can actually build a case for being quite sharp about the way they behaved.

SR: Did you meet Olof Palme?

RB: I did, though of course not directly. I did meet him and say hello to him. But my Ambassador in those days didn't really know him either. He was a rather curious ...Can I be rude about people?

SR: Of course you can!

RB: He was a very starchy, old-fashioned Ambassador. He had been Third Secretary in that Embassy throughout the Second World War, so he spoke fluent Swedish. But he was much more interested in the aristocracy side of Sweden. There is an aristocracy there. Links with the Royal Family were part of it. I never felt that he had sufficiently strong links with the people who were actually running the country. He was very aloof, very difficult to talk to and I found him a bit of a handful.

SR: His name?

RB: Archie Ross. He was known to his friends as starchy Archie! He was a thoroughly decent man, and a bit of a patrician – I don't want to malign his character. I didn't admire the way he ran the Embassy. There we are. Angry young man. One has a right to criticise one's elders at that age. These were the days when Olof Palme was a hugely significant force in Swedish politics and he precipitated a rift with the Americans, just before he took power, by marching in Stockholm with the North Vietnamese Ambassador and aligned himself with an anti-American cause. For a protracted period after Palme became Prime Minister, the Americans simply withdrew their Ambassador. So it was quite a significant stand-off.

It was during that time too that the Swedes became quite vocal on African politics. Because of all the sensitivities of East-Westery and their desire not to put their heads above the parapet on those issues, there was a saying in those days which was that Swedish engagements in any given foreign policy problem increased in direct proportion to the distance between Stockholm and the problem. They had very little to say about what was going on on their doorstep, but a great deal to say about life in the far distance. So they were a little bit awkward on Biafra for us and that was a terrible civil war. I frankly don't know where right and wrong lay in that. But of course, the British position was to support the

recognised government in Lagos, rather than the Biafrans. And the Swedes ... it wasn't so much government statements but certainly known government sympathies for that side and lots of involvement by Swedish individuals in helping Biafrans.

SR: And your particular tasks as a Third Secretary? Did you do a bit of everything?

RB: It was a bit of everything. I tried to get to know some of the younger politicians there. But I was terribly young – I was 23 or 24 - and in many ways that's too young to be the main member of Chancery. It was a curious Chancery. You had a Third Secretary. There was no First Secretary. Then there was a rather grizzly Head of Chancery who was a man in his late 40s, early 50s. And then some locally engaged staff who were terrific. Very effective. And then of course the Ambassador on top of that. So we didn't really have a concerted policy of attack on the political landscape. So my task was partly administrative in the Embassy, partly doing routine political reporting on what the parties were up to, all of it at a pretty low level. I was left to my own devices quite a lot.

SR: And your command of Swedish improved no end when you met Lena?

RB: Yes it did! I was sent to learn Swedish by the Ambassador, who spoke it fluently. The one good service he did for me was to arrange Swedish lessons early on. And then of course, when I met Lena, it became significant. When I left Sweden I could speak it very fluently and we still use it within the family.

SR: So you were only there two years and a bit, then back to London?

### **1971 – 1973 Republic of Ireland Department, FCO**

RB: Back to London. So I had two years or so in London before going off to Moscow in '73. The main thing I did in London was to become one of the founder members of the Republic of Ireland Department in the Office. These were the days, of course, when the troubles really took off and Northern Irish affairs were still looked after by the Home Office, rather than by a separate department of state. And the Foreign Office suddenly woke up to the fact that it needed to have the capacity to analyse the Dublin view of what was happening in the North. I'm afraid Irish affairs in the Office had been handled until then as one small part of one

junior desk officer in what used to be called the Western European Department. And it was fairly typical of the Whitehall attitude towards Northern Ireland – I don't know whether you remember that time – but it took everybody so much by surprise that these problems suddenly emerged. And it was partly because – I would argue perhaps mainly because – Whitehall as a whole had taken its eye off Northern Ireland and simply left it to the Unionists to run it with minimal supervision from the Home Office. We started life as the Ireland Department, until the Permanent Secretary pointed out we couldn't be called the Ireland Department - that wasn't constitutionally right. We had to be called the Republic of Ireland Department. After two weeks we changed the name to the Republic of Ireland Department. But they were very difficult days. Soon after the Department was founded, the Embassy in Dublin was burnt down by Irish mobs. I can remember sitting in that room on the telephone talking to people inside the Embassy in Merrion Square as that was happening and sharing that experience vicariously with them. A week later, I went with the then Chief Clerk to Dublin for talks with the Irish about restitution following the sacking of that Embassy. There were some curious things about that day as well. Our people were never really at risk in that Embassy. There was a huge crowd at the front door, but nobody round the back. So there was never any question but that our people could get out safely. And another amusing incident I remember is that, halfway through the day, somebody told me that they saw an old car being towed and parked in front of the Embassy, in the middle of the riot. And, of course, the worry was that it was bombed in some way. After the day was over and the car examined, it was a perfectly harmless old banger. The only rational explanation was that it had broken down anyway and the owners thought they would be able to get a better insurance claim if it was roughed up by the demonstrators! It all struck me as rather Irish. They were very, very difficult days. It was then that I saw for the first time the machinery of government in London handle a significant overseas problem: police were involved, the intelligence services, the Home Office and other government departments. I wasn't there long enough really to see anything emerge from all of that, but it was a first experience of seeing the Whitehall machine in action.

SR: And by then, you were saying, the Whitehall machine had become streamlined, more effective?

RB: Yes, it had. It had gripped the problem, whereas before, looking back, I don't think Northern Ireland had bothered senior government figures much. It was simply something

that was happening. It was a province being administered by the Unionists. I think it was rather neglected. Historians might think otherwise, but that was my impression.

### **1973 – 1974 First Secretary, British Embassy, Moscow**

SR: So then a posting to Moscow. They were giving you all the tricky things!

RB: Yes, well my academic studies had been Russian at university, so I had a degree in Russian.

SR: Had you kept it up?

RB: Interesting point. Of course, when I joined the Service in 1966, I had expected that I'd be sent straight to Moscow. But it was pointed out to me that the Third and Second Secretary jobs in Moscow were language training jobs. Since I knew the language, they were not going to send me to fill one of those. So I had to hang on until I became a First Secretary in 1973, which was then six or seven years after I had joined the Service and, by then, certainly I had forgotten quite a bit of it and had to bring it back to speed. But I was glad to go, although it was a particularly difficult period.

SR: This was the height of the Cold War, wasn't it?

RB: It was the height of the Cold War, and relations between London and Moscow were particularly chilly, even within that context. About a year or 18 months before I went, under the Conservative government – Douglas Home was the Foreign Secretary – we had expelled about 101 diplomats from the Soviet Embassy in London, no doubt on good grounds, but nevertheless it was seen by the Russians as a particularly vicious kick in the backside. Their retaliation was to halve the Embassy in Moscow from I think 10 to 5 – looking at the central political staff - and no new visas were granted until 1973. Ours were, I think, the first new visas to be granted when we went. We found the atmosphere when we were there very, very chilly indeed. There were two subjects on which we could talk to the Russians at a very junior political level. One was disarmament. There were interminable discussions, negotiations in Geneva on disarmament which never got anywhere, but nevertheless were one of the flavours of the time. And those talks tended to be run by experts in their field and

there were one or two Soviet experts who valued a dialogue with British experts on that subject. So that was an exception. The other turned out to be the Middle East because we had the Middle East war in '73. My portfolio in the Embassy was the Arab and Middle Eastern portfolio, so I was talking a lot to other Embassies in Moscow, particularly Arab Embassies, about their take on it all. And that brought me a little bit into contact with junior Soviet diplomats on Middle East politics. It really wasn't very substantive, but it allowed me to maintain a gentle flow of reporting, not hugely significant. For the rest of it, on politics, there was very little contact indeed. The Ambassador in those days was John Killick who hardly saw anybody. The poor guy was stuck in his room.

SR: What was he like?

RB: John – how can I say this? – was a glad hander. Terribly bubbly, enthusiastic. A warm-hearted man, who made a point of putting his arm around you and making you feel comfortable and at home. He wrote once or twice later in life and sort of kept in touch. But he was one of those kinds of people – you never quite knew what he thought of you. He never made much of a distinction between the people whom he respected and those that he didn't. It was all part of morale and keeping spirits up. But I do remember thinking towards the end of my time, "I don't really know what he thinks of me or the others in Chancery because he's never revealed anything very much." But a terribly nice man. A happy man. In terms of character, exactly the right guy to have there at that stage. He was replaced by Terence Garvey who had been High Commissioner in Delhi and came to Moscow in about ... it must have been 1974. He was a very, very different character. I liked him too. He was a very serious man. I used to go with him as interpreter and note taker when he called on the Foreign Ministry a little bit later in that period. And I witnessed what I regarded as a fascinating linguistic blunder by Terence Garvey. He didn't speak any Russian at all. Sitting talking to somebody very senior in the Soviet Foreign Ministry at one point with a Russian interpreter and me in the room, I can't remember what the issue particularly was, but suddenly Terence said to his interlocutor, "You, sir, are trying to sell me a pig in a poke!" Now first, that's almost impossible to translate. But second, it contained the word *pig* which the Russians immediately picked up and the whole conversation spiralled downwards. We were pretty much thrown out of the room, I remember. There was a lesson there: you do not use phrases of that kind to illustrate your point!

I was there when Douglas Home came for talks with Gromyko in December 1973. It was very, very icy, and I remember one exchange in particular when Home said to him, "Look, we have this silly business of restricting our diplomats to 30 or 40 km from the centre of our cities. We would be quite prepared, in London, to lift that restriction provided you do so too." And Gromyko's reaction to that was perfect Soviet logic: "We are not the people acting in a discriminatory way. In Moscow, all diplomats from all nationalities are restricted in that way. In London the only diplomats who are so restricted are Soviet and other East Europeans. You are the ones with the discriminatory practices." I remember Douglas Home sitting there, with that thin smile on his face, and there was no answer to that. That was typical of the tenor of the discussion. It was not a fruitful exchange.

But then, of course, the atmosphere changed a bit. The Russians made a point of seeing that it changed when Harold Wilson became Prime Minister in late 1974. Wilson and Callaghan came out to Moscow in February 1975 for talks. In order to make a point, the Russians fell over themselves to be hospitable and welcoming. The whole atmosphere lightened and diplomats in the British Embassy were suddenly people again and we could talk to people. Lena and I, I remember, did a great trip down to Soviet Central Asia soon after. I don't think we would have been allowed to do that beforehand. Wilson and Callaghan were immensely flattered by their reception by Brezhnev and felt that they were carrying a torch for the future and that détente would be a hugely successful thing and that they would play a major role in it. Of course it was the Russians playing games with us. Brezhnev was curiously dour man who rather liked boyish humour. I can remember sitting in the room in the Kremlin when they were talking when, all of a sudden, Brezhnev reached across the table, picked up Harold Wilson's red box and made for the door with it, to the great consternation of everybody sitting round the table! Here was this grizzly bear of a man, trying to be funny. Brezhnev was a very heavy smoker and clearly the doctors had been at him, trying to get him to slow down. He had a special cigarette box with a lock on it. The lock only allowed access to cigarettes every 10 or 15 minutes or whatever. So you could see him sitting there, waiting for the box to spring open when he could take another cigarette. It was very funny to watch. But the talks didn't really lead anywhere, except to give us the impression we were welcome again and we could talk. Gromyko went back to London, I remember, in 1976 when I was in the next phase of my life, so there was a little bit of momentum started there.

SR: And just on a personal level, was everyday life difficult with bugs in the apartments and being followed and so on?

RB: We were sensitive to the fact that all the apartments we lived in were almost certainly bugged. This didn't mean that they listened to every minute of the conversations you had. But we were conscious they had the ability to do so should they want. We knew, from intelligence sources, that the game was they would listen in from time to time. We also knew they had voice activated mechanisms which would only switch on when you actually started to speak. So in our rather childish way, when Lena and I came home from parties in the evening, we would occasionally creep into the flat and imitate farmyard noises! Very childish. We knew their interest in us as people was not that we were going to talk about office business – of course we didn't – but they were interested in family relationships and what was happening inside a family, and we all had Russian maids, supplied by the Protocol Department. That was all part of the game. So it was difficult in that sense, but we never worried too much about physical security. If the Soviets targeted you efficiently, and one or two of the defence attachés were from time to time, then life could be difficult. But for the bulk of the time you didn't have to worry about criminal activity directed against you because the Soviet authorities would never have permitted that. So we did play games with them occasionally. We had this rule which said we weren't allowed to travel more than 30 or 40 km, but occasionally at the weekend if we felt bored we would get in the Cortina and drive 50 km and sit there and wait for the motorcycles to escort us back. Which they did. Very polite and very firm. So we did behave like children sometimes, just to keep smiling. I'd spent some time as a student in the Soviet Union in 1964 and during the two or three months then I felt, in retrospect, I had spoken to more real Russians than during the two years I was at the Embassy.

SR: So they sent you back to London again. You didn't spend very long in Moscow, did you?

RB: Two years was the time you were allowed in those days. More than that was considered wrong as you could get depressed and particularly for single people it was tough. In other circumstances we might have decided to start a family at that stage. You weren't allowed to have babies in Moscow. You had to go to Helsinki, so that was a very powerful contraceptive!

## **1975 – 1978 Soviet foreign policy desk, FCO**

SR: Back to London. Soviet foreign policy desk. Interesting.

RB: It was. Those were the days when the Soviets were being particularly active in Afghanistan and in Africa. We also spent a lot of time looking at Soviet relations with Western European Communist parties. That was a particularly interesting part of policy analysis. The one thing that the Soviets always seem to fear was the risk of cross infection back into the Soviet Union from deep contact with any faction in Western Europe which was part of a democratic process. I remember doing a paper on this at the time and suggesting there was a limit to which the Soviets were willing to go in cultivating particularly the Italian Communist party which was powerful in those days. But they wouldn't have wanted it to get to the point of very, very deep and thick, meaningful, fraternal relations because it would have been a difficult entity for them to handle. They were always more relaxed at dealing with the political enemy than the political friend. Much more at ease in dealing with a Conservative government in some ways than with a Labour government. They never quite understood where Wilson was coming from. But they knew exactly where Douglas Home was coming from. It was easier for them to handle that. So a fascinating period. And of course they were flexing their wings in Africa particularly in a way that worried everybody and so close analysis was essential to everybody's security interests, we felt at the time.

SR: You also had experience of EC political cooperation in the very early days.

RB: It was and was one of the more interesting parts of those responsibilities. It was a first experience of the political cooperation machinery working in the depths. There used to be a Soviet and East European working group, normally attended by the Head of the Department with one other person going with him. In my time it was Bryan Cartledge who ran the Department and I went with him. We were discussing foreign policy issues. That was the beginning of my immense respect for the benefits that belonging to this European club actually brought us. I mean this was nothing to do with the economics, nothing to do with the rough and tumble of the CAP and the rest of it, this was solid consultation in the depths about security issues that mattered enormously to all of us. And one built up personal relationships with one's opposite numbers in all other European capitals. You might think that for a 30-year-old to know his 30-year-old colleague in Paris was no great thing, but that was

replicated all the way up the chain. So I felt that process – political cooperation – was immensely valuable.

SR: And the Political Director was Reg Hibbert.

RB: It was. Do you remember Reg?

SR: Yes, very upright with this moustache!

RB: He behaved like an irate schoolmaster most of the time. Not only with us, but more significantly with all his European colleagues as well. I'm afraid the sort of feedback we used to get from the capitals about him was very, very negative. There was a visceral dislike for Reg, I'm afraid, around the European circuit. I can remember sitting behind him at political cooperation meetings, watching the expression on the faces of his European colleagues. He was a man who had got to the top of the Office rather late in life. He'd been Ambassador in Mongolia at one point and then he'd done a couple of other things. Then, all of a sudden, he came through in his 50s and had a quite extraordinarily high opinion of himself and the extent of his own wisdom. The biggest clash I remember was with Percy Cradock on Berlin. Percy was then our Ambassador to East Germany and was sending back at fairly regular intervals, we discovered, reports suggesting that the East Germans were gradually eating away at the very strict provisions that had been agreed about the behaviour of the Four Powers in Berlin. I can't remember the exact detail of that, but Percy was worried about it. Reg felt that he knew everything about Berlin and didn't agree with this, and his way of handling it was that every time he got a letter from Percy Cradock he'd lock it away in his cupboard and nobody else ever saw it! David Owen was the Foreign Secretary and on one occasion he paid a visit to Berlin. Percy Cradock went into overdrive, complaining about the lack of response from London. So when he came back, David Owen summoned a huge office meeting on Berlin, and that was when it all tumbled out that people discovered there were letters lying around that nobody had ever seen. And again I can remember sitting in the back row, watching while this row developed across the table. I don't think, honestly, there were any victors in that. Percy clearly had his day in court, demonstrating that Reg had behaved abominably. Reg, I suspect, emerged from it all thinking that Percy's comments hadn't really resonated very much with the Secretary of State

who I think was pretty much bamboozled by the whole thing. It was fascinating clash. Percy was an extraordinarily nice man.

SR: He was the one who read Thucydides for leisure, wasn't he? Very intellectual.

RB: Many years later when we were in Washington, he used to come and stay with us and we got to know him extremely well. And of course he was much valued by Margaret Thatcher as intelligence adviser in No. 10. An extraordinarily cerebral, bright man. And a very thoughtful man. You could do no worse sin to a man like that than to ignore his correspondence.

SR: Why didn't he copy his letter more widely?

RB: It's a good point. If you were one of those who received a copy of Percy's letter, you would leave it to the principal recipient to actually initiate action. Even if he had copied it to his colleagues in Paris, Moscow or wherever, they wouldn't necessarily have put their hands up to ask what was happening.

But then during those years, Gromyko came to London – that's the main visit that I remember. It was a period of détente. The atmosphere was dominated by the CSCE in Helsinki and all of the big negotiations that went into that. CSCE was divided into different baskets of subjects. The first basket, which mattered enormously to the Soviets, was all about the inviolability of frontiers. What the Russians wanted from that conference was firm and formal recognition of Soviet control of Eastern Europe which nobody in the West wanted to give them. What we wanted under basket three in CSCE was prominence given to the importance of human rights, freedoms of peoples and all that kind of thing. So you had this impossible theological clash. Whenever one met to try and work out communiqués for meetings, one got tied down in complex terminology. And the one phrase which was anathema to the British government and to senior officials in the Foreign Office was the phrase *peaceful coexistence*. We were under firm instructions under no circumstances could we agree to the term *peaceful coexistence* in a communiqué with the Russians. Frankly, it was a silly position to take. Peaceful coexistence meant something in the Soviet definition. It meant the exercise of struggle in every form short of warfare, and so it was their blanket phrase which justified espionage and the whole thing, provided it was peaceful. What we

should have done, I think, was simply redefine the term and throw it back at them. I can remember sitting for hours in drafting sessions with others, wrestling with junior Soviet diplomats about the content of communiqués. Typical of the rather insubstantial content of Soviet – British exchanges at that time.

SR: So were you glad to move on after five years of things Soviet?

RB: Yes I was. The strange thing, looking back on it, with all the analysis that we did that time, it was perfectly easy to point to the inherent economic weaknesses of the system and the thought that, at some point, the system wouldn't survive. Somehow, it never really occurred to any of us for real that we were within 10 or 15 years of that actually happening. The Soviet economy was rigidly divided into two things: you'd have the civilian economy and you had the military economy. The civilian economy was doing terribly badly because they didn't have the resources to do it properly. The military economy was whizzing along and they still had this enormous capacity to defend themselves and to attack. None of us really felt at that point in time the moment would come soonish when the system would crumble from within. If you had asked me at that time I would have expected it to have lasted for my diplomatic lifetime.

SR: I think it took everyone by surprise didn't it? The Berlin wall, glasnost ...

RB: Yes.

### **1978 – 1982 First Secretary, UKRep, Brussels**

SR: So now you go to Brussels. That's a bit of a change. Did you know anything about things European really?

RB: No, it's fairly typical of the Service. Everything is a learning curve. But of course I was delighted to go. One felt at that time that a spell in UKRep in Brussels was a good thing to do from a career point of view. And I was genuinely interested in wanting to do it and had said so to Personnel Department. Most of the Foreign Office people in UKRep dealt with things like enlargement and the political process. But there was one slot in the Industry Department in UKRep which was occasionally taken by someone from the Foreign Office.

In those days it was the energy slot. There was a little bit of internal politics – those were the days of Wedgwood Benn and his anti-EC acolytes in the Department of Energy. And the last thing the Cabinet Office wanted was for Wedgwood Benn to send his man to sit on the Energy Working Group in Brussels. And so the finger pointed to somebody from the Foreign Office. For the first 18 months, which was until the government changed, I spent more time pushing back on the Department of Energy than actually talking to colleagues in Brussels. Energy was one of those areas where the UK felt itself to be at a huge advantage. We had oil in the North Sea and we were not going to let anybody else from the Community or anywhere else interfere with our right to dispose of that oil in a way that we felt fit. There was tremendous pressure during those years to join in an oil sharing scheme run by Brussels and by the IEA in Paris following the Iranian oil crisis in the early 1970s. And so much of the difficult discussion, particularly in Energy Councils, was pushing back on the Commission's desire to have some formal arrangement in place in case we ever faced similar circumstances again. It never got to anything, because the UK put its foot down and said while it wished to be a good European, there were limits. This was our resource and we were not going to do it. And Benn absolutely revelled in that kind of discussion. He would bring with him senior officials from London who thought similarly. Trying to aim off a little bit in briefing sessions with him and pointing out you could achieve exactly the same objectives without being rude to people was part of the battle.

SR: And the Permanent Representative was Michael Butler, was it?

RB: It was Donald Maitland to start with, then Michael Butler. I admired and respected both of them. Donald was very meticulous, very careful and precise. He was a tiny man, if you remember, and he used to have a tiny ruler and a small red pen. The way that you knew whether he had read your brief when you sat next to him in COREPER was whether he had been through your paper, underlining it with his red pen and using his little ruler. If he'd done that, you could relax and you knew that he knew it a hundred percent and there was no need to be concerned. A piece of paper that he hadn't given that treatment to - that was when you needed to be a little bit careful. Those were the sessions of COREPER, the ambassadors' consultation sessions. But his mastery of the whole scene was absolutely first-class, as indeed was Michael's. Michael was kind to me. A moment arose two thirds of the time through my posting in Brussels when Personnel Department suddenly rang up and said they'd like me to go back to Moscow. That caused a certain amount of anguish at home, as you can

imagine. The last thing we wanted to do. We'd just had Christopher and were keen to have another child. The last thing we wanted to do was to go back. Michael very kindly weighed into battle for us and told London that I was needed in Brussels. So I owe him a great personal debt.

Much of the time was spent in the deep detail of the business of Energy Working Group which ranged across all sorts of curious things. I remember one interminable subject was about energy labelling and the point there was that we were trying to establish an open playing field for all white goods, wherever they were manufactured in Europe, to have free access to other markets within Western Europe. One of the barriers was that nations were still insisting on having their own energy labels on their goods and harmonising those labels was a work of art. I was struck at the time – it was one of the periods when particularly the Italian government were very busy saying at senior level how integration was very, very important and everything to be done to achieve that. Whereas down in the depths the Italian Representative on the Energy Working Group was digging his heels in to protect Zanussi from any domestic competition from other white goods. So it was a taste of the hypocrisy sometimes, and the way that nations behave. But there you are. We were doing first drafts of real bits of legislation, so it was a huge education to have that experience.

SR: Working in UKRep is not something many people do lightly because there are such long hours and such a punishing schedule of meetings. Was it like that?

RB: Yes it was, partly of our own making because we are so punctilious in the way that we dot every *i* and cross every *t* and cover every angle. The internal briefing process in UKRep was labyrinthine. But yes, there were very many late nights and those Working Group meetings could go on for seven or eight hours at a time. Home life was at a premium. It was very tough. At the end of those four years it was our turn to take the Presidency – I think it was our second Presidency. And of course, the full force of Whitehall is thrown into that exercise. We went way over the top in administering it. That doubled the workload for the six or twelve months leading up to it. Typical British fashion, I'm afraid. We didn't win many friends and allies, frankly, for the way that we did it. We were regarded as too heavy-handed, too dominant, too dominating. And, I think, probably rightly.

## **1982 – 1984 Private Office, FCO**

SR: And then you went to Private Office. So from one really busy, demanding job, to possibly one of the most busy, demanding posts in the Office. Did you reflect about this? Did you have second thoughts about it?

RB: I came back from UKRep in April-May, something like that, and for two or three months, I was an Assistant Head of Department in one of the European Community Departments, but very soon after that was then invited to join the Private Office starting from the middle of the summer. So I could have refused and continued to do what I was doing and I remember reflecting on it for something like half an hour, before deciding that one couldn't really turn down a challenge like that. It is hugely demanding.

SR: All encompassing, I would say!

RB: All-embracing, yes. There were two very different men that I worked for, but Geoffrey Howe for example, who was the second of the two, was one of those people who almost needed no sleep at all. He could get by with two or three hours a night.

SR: This is a huge advantage.

RB: Yes, well in fact I think the British political system has the habit of throwing insomniacs to the top.

SR: Margaret Thatcher was the same, wasn't she?

RB: She was much the same. And so travelling with Geoffrey - I went on all the European trips with him - we would talk and drink until fairly late into the night, until 12 or 1, and then go to bed. And I would wake up at 6, knowing he had a two-hour start on me on the papers. That's not a happy position to be in!

SR: And was a lawyer, of course, so he had that legal command of a brief, the detail.

RB: Absolutely. If you put a document into his box, he would sometimes mischievously annotate page 65 just to make a point. Intellectually, he was a hugely satisfying man to work for. His mind was completely abreast of all of the issues that were there. I found him an extraordinarily nice man to work for, extremely good at what he did. Francis Pym was a little different. I admired him too, but he was a different kind of politician. He was one of the last of the true patricians in the Conservative party who regarded politics – perhaps this is unfair – as a vocational occupation, rather than a passion. He found it more difficult, I think, to get his mind round some of the intricate details and the subjects we were dealing with than Geoffrey did. Francis had a wretched time with Margaret Thatcher in the one year that he was Foreign Secretary. I think she was still recovering from the loss of Peter Carrington – she never quite got over that. Francis Pym was a kind of compromise candidate to replace him, from the Ministry of Defence. She treated him a little bit like an errant schoolboy, would speak to him abruptly and he was not really allowed very often to expound at length on the things that he wanted to say. I remember, on one occasion, accompanying him to a meeting in Paris. I think it might have been an OECD meeting. And as we were getting onto the plane at Northolt, news came through that the Prime Minister had that very minute summoned a meeting on a European issue, clearly timed for when Francis was going to be out of the country. Childish things, but he was made to feel that he was not crucial.

SR: Of course it was the same with Geoffrey, later on.

RB: Yes. In the first year of Geoffrey's time, it was significantly better by comparison with Francis. But it deteriorated later on. The first few months with Geoffrey were better. Margaret Thatcher had this thing about the Foreign Office, but she didn't have a thing about certain individuals. Whenever we had to brief the Prime Minister on preparation for a European Council, for example, on the most sensitive issues, papers would of course flow from the Private Office in the usual way. But that wasn't the main way we briefed her because we had the impression that whenever she saw a piece of paper with Foreign Office on it you started at a disadvantage. And so we used to send three individuals across to brief her, sometimes without the Foreign Secretary knowing that it was happening. And it would have been Michael Butler, David Williamson (who was the senior Cabinet Office man on the European Communities), then either David Hannay or Robin Renwick, depending on who was doing that job at the time. She had immense respect for those three and would listen to

them: that wasn't the Foreign Office, was it? They were advisers. In a sense, we had to play silly games ensuring that the views of Whitehall were at least deployed to her.

SR: You were at Fontainebleau?

RB: I went to Fontainebleau as Geoffrey Howe's Private Secretary for that European Council when agreement was reached on getting our money back. I can remember vividly being in the anteroom, the outside room, while there was blood all over the table in the room inside. The principals were in the room by themselves. There were no Private Secretaries, just the Heads of Government. John Coles was Margaret Thatcher's Private Secretary in those days. Suddenly in the middle of the night, the door was flung open and Margaret Thatcher emerged, eyes blazing and gazing round the room. In a very loud voice she said, "They're insisting it's their money and I'm telling them it's mine! Now where's John with my brief?" And it was just a little vignette that summed the whole thing up. But that was an extraordinary tour de force. One couldn't emerge from that without huge admiration for the way that she performed, absolutely first class.

SR: They seemed to be Titans on the political stage then, didn't they? Can you name anyone today with the same clout?

RB: No, I don't think you can. I think Margaret Thatcher was in a league of her own. She was very conscious of her sexuality. We've heard this from other people.

SR: The Mitterrand quote about her having the eyes of Caligula and the mouth of Marilyn Monroe!

RB: She was conscious that that was one of her weapons. I can remember on one of these occasions when we went to one of these European Councils, the plane was configured as a sofa and chairs as it used to be in those days. She was in the centre, listening to her advisers. Ten minutes before we landed she said, "That's it. Finished." and then proceeded to make herself up. That was part of the preparation for getting off the plane. She was very conscious of the visual impact she made on people and the impact she made as a personality on the opposite sex. I once saw her in the same room as Machel - from Mozambique I think he was? - at the other end of the political spectrum. I can remember the two meeting and seeing

this kind of flash of respect for power between them which was quite extraordinary. So she had that ability to communicate in this way and she used it to huge effect, of course, in places like Fontainebleau. All her Foreign Office officials were telling her to be careful not to poison the atmosphere too much - you don't achieve things by being rude to people. But of course they were wrong. She knew exactly what she was doing and how she was doing it. Extraordinary performance.

SR: Indeed. What else do we need to talk about from your time in Private Office? Gibraltar?

RB: Yes, another tricky issue. My memory is a little vague on the details of that but it was to do with whether the border could or should be opened or not. It was a time at which the status of Gibraltar and the status of Gibraltarians came to a head and we had a number of Anglo-Spanish sessions. The Spanish Foreign Minister's name was Moran. The only time I saw Francis Pym totally lose his temper was in session with Moran in which Moran appeared to impugn Pym's sense of honour and dignity. He probably tried to say that Pym was lying or dissembling about something and, all of a sudden, this rather placid man lost it and was absolutely furious with him. And I admired Francis for behaving in that way, because he was right.

The other thing I remember particularly from my Private Office time was the curious case of Sarah Tisdall. Do you remember that?

SR: Yes, I do. She was quite junior, wasn't she?

RB: Yes, she was very junior and she had one of the positions of trust in the outer office, in the Private Office. She was a clerk and she had to work very long hours. These tended to be people of the most junior rank in the Office, but who had nevertheless been singled out as potential movers from that rank. They were bright young people. Sarah was a very quiet individual, working in that outer office. It was all about Greenham Common, the arrival of Cruise missiles from the United States. We got a paper from the Defence Secretary, Michael Heseltine, addressed principally to the Prime Minister, but copied to the Foreign Secretary and a couple of other Ministers too, about the arrangements for the arrival of the Cruise missiles. It would have given the date, it would have given the timing, it would have given some thoughts as to how to handle the whole thing logistically given that Greenham Common

was surrounded by angry ladies at that time. And so this paper came in and the process in the Private Office used to be that it would go to one of the Private Secretaries to look at first and to process. In this instance, it came to me and what you did as Private Secretary was to perhaps scribble something on the paper, a message to the Foreign Secretary. Sometimes you could put a little bit of paper on top of it and do a message. On this occasion, I had scribbled something on the top. And then it was the Private Secretary's responsibility to scribble the distribution the paper would have inside the Foreign Office. So that piece of paper came in, I processed it in that way. It then went to the outer office and to Sarah, whose job it would have been to do the copy action before giving me back the top copy to put in the Foreign Secretary's box – that's the way it used to work. Sarah, when she saw this, was apparently outraged by it. Her conscience pricked, she didn't like what she saw: it was the subterfuge, the central policy issue but also the fact that part of the paper was about how to mislead the protesters and so on. So Sarah took a copy of it and put it into a brown envelope and walked round to the Guardian newspaper and pushed it through the front door.

SR: But she didn't say anything to anybody in the office?

RB: No. She just did it. Now when it had been leaked – and the Guardian had given full vent to it – the government took out an injunction obliging the Guardian newspaper to hand back the copy that they'd got. They resisted very strongly to start with, but eventually did so. The editor of the Guardian was a man called Peter Preston and he said subsequently that one of the worst decisions he had ever made was to hand the paper back. When it was handed back – to the Cabinet Office I suppose – of course people saw that it had my handwriting all over it, in the top right hand corner. And so the investigation focused on the Private Office and on me and on the outer office and a little bit on whoever else in the Foreign Office might have seen it - there were perhaps three or four other people. They established very quickly that it had come from a photocopier in the Private Office and so they knew that one of us had been responsible for leaking it. It was one of three or four clerks and me in that case. The Foreign Office said that they couldn't deal with it and it was a matter for the police. The police came into the Private Office and spent about two weeks closely interviewing people. I had my fingerprints taken, as one does, and so on. Eventually, Sarah owned up. But she didn't own up immediately. It took her a week or ten days.

SR: So she let her colleagues go through all of that?

RB: Yes she did. That's the main thing I was very unhappy with her about it at the time. I think the police worked out quite early on who it was. So none of us I felt would be arrested or anything. But it took a while.

SR: But upsetting all the same.

RB: Particularly for the other young people in the outer office because they were certainly under suspicion. Eventually she owned up. She was taken away by the police. I had the distressing business of having to talk to her parents who rang and wondered what on earth was happening. But what really distressed me was the severity with which she was dealt. She served I think six months in prison. The damage done to HMG by that leak was absolutely minimal. It really didn't damage the security of the country. It was a political gesture to make clear what the government thought of the Greenham Common protesters and the fact that the Official Secrets Act meant what it said and people would be punished. But of course the climate was gradually changing at that time and it was the following year that Clive Ponting, an official in the Ministry of Defence, leaked papers about the Belgrano affair to Tam Dalyell in the House of Commons and nobody was prosecuted for that at all. That was just a year later so Sarah, I think, was probably the last of those who were dealt with in that rather heavy-handed way. I just felt that it was way over the top. But by that stage, by the time they had brought the police in to handle it, it was out of Foreign Office hands completely. So I felt cross with her for putting her colleagues through that, but on the other hand very cross, looking back, that the machine had dealt with it in that way.

SR: Who was the PUS at that time?

RB: I think it would have been Anthony Acland. Difficult.

SR: Roger, I think that's a good place at which to stop. Thank you.

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### **1984 – 1985 Visiting Fellowship, Harvard University**

SR: This is Suzanne Ricketts recording Roger Bone on 8 February 2018. In our last session, we covered your eventful time in Private Office after which they gave you a little reward and sent you off to Harvard.

RB: Yes, I had a wonderful year with a visiting fellowship at Harvard. It was at a time when it was a little difficult politically to do that because it was the Thatcher period and she didn't approve of civil servants taking sabbaticals. So we weren't allowed to call it a sabbatical. It's down in my CV as a career development attachment! So we had to stick very carefully to the wording at that time. But in fact it's an immensely useful thing to do politically. Harvard is a wonderful place and, unlike most British universities, Harvard and Yale have strong political traditions. There tends to be a revolving door of people coming out of an administration, doing some time at one of the universities and then going back into the administration. So had Mr Dukakis won the presidential election in the autumn of 1984, I would have known half the administration the following year. That wasn't the case, but it was still an immensely useful year from the political point of view. And of course tremendous fun to be there. We had to take a number of seminars and do bits and pieces of public speaking. We weren't let loose on the student body as we weren't fully accredited professors or teachers, but nevertheless we had quite a bit of informal contact with them as well. Tremendous fun and I would strongly recommend it for people mid-career.

### **1985 – 1989 Political Counsellor, later Head of Chancery, British Embassy, Washington**

SR: So that was a good introduction for you then to go on to be the Head of Chancery and Political Counsellor in Washington.

RB: Yes, I spent four years in Washington. In fact throughout I was the JIC representative and for the last two years of my time combined that with the Head of Chancery role, and as a Political Counsellor for the first two years as well. But most of my time was spent focusing on the intelligence community either inside State Department or the huge phalanx of intelligence analysts at Langley and other bits and pieces of the intelligence machine. The advantage of all that was that one emerged with a tremendous understanding of the importance of that relationship between Washington and London. It's an extraordinarily – nothing new in this – powerful relationship. It means that senior political figures on both

sides of the Atlantic are, on the whole, reading precisely the same bits of intelligence at the same time. And so it's easy for senior politicians, even from different political backgrounds, like Blair and Bush for example, to come sometimes to the same, if not entirely justifiable, but nevertheless the same conclusions. The big difference between the two communities is that in Washington, as everything else in that great country, the intelligence process tends to be a competitive one, whereas in London, of course, it's entirely consensual. I'm sure the process is similar now, but in my time, the machine in London would produce perhaps half a dozen pieces for senior Ministers to read on a Thursday morning in what was called the Red Book. They would be the result of a careful process of synthesis and consensus in the JIC machine, so that we could all say to Ministers on Thursday morning, "This is the word of God, as revealed to the London intelligence community." In Washington, you had competition between the State bit, the CIA analysts, the analysts at the NSA and the analysts in the various services. And so, based on the same intelligence, it was quite possible in the United States for different scripts to be submitted to different Ministers at the same time. The art for us in Washington was puzzling out which particular version was going to be paramount at any particular time. So that was fun. One needed to know the version that was going to the President every week if one could. On the whole, it was possible to work that out.

SR: Tell me about how you got to know Ollie North or am I jumping the gun?

RB: That was a fascinating part of the experience. Ollie was first introduced to me quite early on in my time in Washington.

SR: Was he Deputy National Security Adviser?

RB: No, at the time he was much more junior. He was a National Security Council staffer. I forget exactly what his rank was. He was maybe two thirds of the way up the hierarchy.

SR: Immensely distinguished service record.

RB: Absolutely. He was a Vietnam veteran and his room was a kind of shrine to Vietnam. He had his helmet in the corner on a table and he had his memorabilia, and so when you visited him you were very conscious that this was a military man. He was a fanatic, a right-

wing fanatic, but my impression was he was an intensely religious man. A very committed and a very driven man. And a man with a compassionate side. I know that one of his colleagues in the National Security Council contracted and died rather quickly of cancer during that time – his name was Don Fortier. I know that Ollie spent quite a lot of his time, during a particularly busy period, with the family and helping and so on. So there was a tremendous sense of doing the right thing about Ollie. He was driven and he had his own political agenda. He was a key contact for us on all things to do with security and counter-terrorism. I used to go and call on the Assistant Secretary in State Department who ran the counter-terrorism portfolio, a nice man called Bob Oakley. And whenever I'd finished talking to Bob, he'd turn to me and said, "I suppose you are now off to the NSC to get the real policy from Ollie?" So even within the establishment, he was seen as a key man.

The true extent of his significance became clear over Libya. There was a time in early 1986 when the Libyans had been responsible for an attack on Americans at a nightclub in Berlin and there had been various other atrocities committed. Everybody thought that the Americans were beginning to steel themselves to do something about Libya. At the end of March or the beginning of April, the Embassy in Washington suddenly got an instruction from No. 10 to say that nobody in the Embassy, from the Ambassador downwards, was to talk to any American about Libya, because it was being handled directly on the hot line between No. 10 and the White House. That's the sort of instruction that no Ambassador likes to get, let alone thrusting Political Counsellors in the Embassy. So we were very unhappy about that. But about two or three days into this period of purdah, I got a telephone call from Ollie North asking if I would like to pop down to the NSC for a chat. So, having discussed a little bit with one or two in the Embassy, I went. Ollie was sitting there with all his memorabilia. He had three bits of paper on the table. He pushed two of them across and said, "Read this." The first was the first communication from Reagan to Thatcher which had gone maybe three or four days earlier. The second was Thatcher's reply to Reagan. The gist of that was that, at first blush, Margaret Thatcher was rather doubtful about doing anything particularly significant. (The American request, I should have said, was to use the UK as a base from which to launch a bombing raid on Libya.) The first reaction – I think this is now in the public domain but it wasn't for some time – was rather hesitant. No doubt the lawyers had got at her, but it was actually quite a big thing to allow your territory to be used for that sort of aggressive intent. And so Ollie shoved these two things across the table and said to me, "How do we persuade her? What do I write back to persuade her that this is the right

thing to do?" So, bearing in mind the blanket instruction we had had, I was frank with him. I said I was under wraps and couldn't actually discuss this very much with him – I knew him well enough to be able to say that. But, nevertheless, we went through the content of both exchanges and focused on things like clarifying the legal position and all that sort of stuff. It enabled me to go back to the Embassy and to construct the most extraordinarily clever telegram, concealing the fact of course that I had actually spoken to Ollie North, but giving a pretty fair assessment of what the next step in American thinking would be. Then, a few days later, Margaret Thatcher said yes. The raid took off from Lakenheath in the UK and the bombers went down to Libya. They had to bypass France and Spain as they were not given overflying rights in those countries, so they had to go round the Bay of Biscay. Which meant a very complicated series of air to air refuelling operations. But the raid was carried out, as you know. A few days after that, No. 10 eventually lifted their skirts and showed us the exchange of correspondence. The interesting thing was that the letter from Reagan to Thatcher which had tipped the balance was pretty much word for word the draft that Ollie had been working on, on his desk. This really brought home to us the closeness of that man to what was going on in the White House. That's significant in the wider context, because there was a lot of speculation, particularly over the Irangate business, as to how close to the White House Ollie really was. We knew that he was very, very close. His influence was hugely significant.

Just an aside on the Irangate stuff and all that. I remember being asked by people in London, at that time and later when the whole thing came out and Ollie North was arrested, whether we'd had any inkling of what he was really up to with this sort of triangular business.

SR: Contras and Nicaragua?

RB: Yes. Well it was a complicated deal. The idea was that Israel would supply arms to Iran, the Americans would then replace the arms supplied to Israel and the money got from Israel would then find its way to the Contras in Nicaragua, and that was the way it was working. We could honestly say, all of us, that we were never told anything by the Americans. But it's also honest to say that because we saw so much of the traffic, the intelligence traffic, we had a suspicion, but certainly not the detail of what was happening.

Leaving that to one side, Ollie was an extraordinarily important contact for us across the whole range of those issues at that time and immensely helpful. He was a fanatic. He used to travel under a pseudonym. He never travelled on his own passport. He was a bit paranoid about being an object of attack. And I seem to remember that his pseudonym at one point was Mr Good. So I can remember the telephone operator coming through to me at the Embassy saying, "There's a guy called Mr Good on the telephone. Will you take his call?" And this was Ollie, sitting in the back of a car somewhere, not prepared to reveal who he was. So a strange man. But, as I started by saying, a determined individual, driven and absolutely certain that he knew what was right, what needed to be done and went for it. Very American and, in many ways, an admirable character.

SR: He was pardoned in the end, wasn't he?

RB: Yes. None of them ever went to prison over the Irangate business. But it was a huge fall from grace. A few days after his arrest, I wrote him a letter from the Embassy. I felt that I wanted to say, on a personal basis, how sad I was and to wish him well. I never got any reply to the letter and I never saw him again after that. I sometimes wondered whether it was an unwise thing to do, whether the letter would ever be produced. But of course it wasn't. He wasn't the sort of man who would do that sort of thing. Despite it all, I liked him and admired him to some extent. But you had to be careful in dealing with him.

SR: How very interesting. Is there anything else about your time in the Embassy? Who were your Ambassadors?

RB: We had Oliver Wright to start with and then Antony Acland. Very different characters. Oliver was larger than life and liked, I think, by his American contacts. Antony was a rather more austere man, a rather more difficult man I think we all found to work with, with an explosive temper from time to time. I shouldn't perhaps say this, but it seemed to me that he didn't understand the principles of man management very well. I remember, on one occasion when I was Head of Chancery, he took me to one side and said, "Now the thing you have to understand about management is that every now and again, pick the organisation up and shake it by the scruff of the neck and you'll be astonished at what falls out!" I thought to myself, "Well, that's one way of doing it." I think that generation ... Antony was a very nice

man as well, he was very good to me in lots of ways. But it wasn't the style of management that I would have wanted to imitate. I think others found him difficult.

SR: He'd had difficult personal circumstances, hadn't he? His wife had died.

RB: His wife died and he remarried while we were in Washington. He did indeed have a difficult time. But he had a very happy second marriage. That was our impression. And we met Jenny, a very nice lady, good for him I think. It did get much better towards the end of his time. But – how can I put this? – he wasn't an intellectual heavyweight. He was an old style mandarin who had risen to the top, with lots of excellent ambassadorial qualities. But not an easy man to handle. All of it indiscreet!

### **1989 – 1991 Head, Economic Relations Department, FCO**

SR: So can then we move on to your next slot which was back to the Office, Head of Economic Relations Department? Did you know anything about economics?

RB: No! It was actually rather strange. I remember when I was asked to do it, I asked to go and see then then PUS. I'm trying to remember who it was. Was it John Coles or David Gilmour? I said to them that I was flattered to be offered this, but I was not an economist and it seemed rather ill-advised to put somebody in that position who hadn't had detailed economic training. And the reply I got was typical Foreign Office. I was told that was precisely why I was being put in that position. I had lots of economists working for me who could put me right, but the real point was that if I understood what was going on, then there was a reasonable chance that Ministers might too. And the last thing they wanted was for Ministers, as it were, to be blinded by science with lots of clever arguments from the economists. So to have somebody who would be able to sift through the jargon and the detail and present clear advice to Ministers was regarded as the right profile. And therefore you started with somebody who wasn't an expert. All a bit bizarre.

SR: A huge learning curve for you.

RB: A huge learning curve and a very valuable one. And there was something in it, you know, because the economists at the Foreign Office were terrific, but they rarely agreed on

anything. It was great fun and it was a period when Latin American debt was one of the most significant international issues being discussed. Getting into the detail of that and seeing the way in which the world banking community and governments failed to grasp the nettle of sustaining impossible debt burdens was quite a lesson to learn for the future, because that was what was really going on. People were terribly worried about the moral principle that you couldn't and shouldn't forgive debt. So reconciling the impossibility of payment with the need to demonstrate that you couldn't just get away with it was at the heart of the moral debate at that point. Latin America eventually struggled through, but it was a lesson that wasn't really learned properly at that point. Subsequently too, it's a continuing issue. Much of the time as the Head of ERD was also spent looking at Eastern Europe and at Russia.

One of the most interesting things was that as Head of ERD you had a role to play in helping to prepare the annual economic summits, the G7. And so I went to Houston with the team in 1990. In 1991 it was the turn of the UK to host the economic summit. Lots of issues discussed across the board. The most sensitive one, it seemed to me, was how the big economies – the Western economies - should be reacting to the turmoil in Eastern Europe and in Russia. That was period when Gorbachev was in power, until the Autumn of 1991. Both in 1990 and at the London Economic Summit in 1991, really the issue at the top of the table was what the West should be doing, not just saying, about what was happening in Eastern Europe and in Russia. And the real concern was how much hard help, as distinct from advisory help, consultations and technical help, the West should be prepared to give.

Matters came to a head in the run up to the London Economic Summit in 1991 when Gorbachev, in advance, wrote quite a complicated letter to Heads of Government, which made it pretty clear that he was looking for a substantial gesture from the West. He didn't spell out in pounds and pence what he wanted, of course he didn't, but it was a plea for help. That's what it amounted to. All the wise heads around tables in London and the other capitals said, "Goodness me! You've got to be careful about this. We can't commit ourselves. We don't know what's happening in that country. We really do have to be careful." And so it was decided to send the British Sherpa – John Major appointed Nigel Wicks in those days – to Moscow to talk to Gorbachev. I was invited to go with him. And so the two of us set off for Moscow. Rodric Braithwaite, the Ambassador, joined us when we were there and the three of us went into the Kremlin and sat round a small table. There were maybe six people around the table all together, with Gorbachev. He presented to us exactly

what it was he was hoping to get. It was a long and rambling discussion and Nigel, of course, was under instructions to limit the enthusiasm. For me, it was astonishing, after all those years in Russia with hardly any access at all, suddenly to be whisked into the Kremlin in that way. So it was a slightly tricky conversation. Gorbachev came to the summit. History shows that he made a plea for as much help as possible. There was a slightly – to me – niggardly communiqué from ... I forget whether it was from all 7 or just John Major speaking on behalf of the 7, but again it made a great issue that Russia must help itself, and we were there to help Russia help itself, it was up to the West to provide technical assistance, aid and advice. Everything short of the grand gesture. And, of course, within three or four months of that session, Gorbachev had gone. So you can argue that the West was right to hold back, because he wasn't going to be there very much longer. But I remember emerging from that exercise feeling that the West had missed an opportunity really to get a foot in the door and to demonstrate a commitment to helping in a real and substantial way. If you'd pinned me against a wall, I would have found it hard to put substance into that, but I had that feeling that a huge opportunity had been missed. And I've no doubt it probably fuelled some of the feelings in Moscow that the West wasn't going to help in any significant way at all. A difficult situation.

My other reflection on those days working with the G7 was the beginning of my concern about the validity of that particular bit of economic and political geometry. With the exception of Japan, the G7 was exclusively a Northern hemisphere, developed country club. Of course you could argue that the G7 had interests in common and needed to meet and talk, but to have as the pinnacle of a consultative process a body which quite clearly excluded the leading emerging economies struck me as the wrong recipe for the future. There was an enormous amount of almost self-congratulation around the table that we were the club and we knew how it was to be done. I remember there was an extraordinarily nice man who was the Deputy Secretary in the Foreign Office at that time called Nicholas Bayne, who wrote at least one book on the G7, defending it as the right sort of mechanism to have in existence at that time. An entirely credible argument – I admired Nicholas enormously. But it nevertheless felt to me that it slightly missed the wider point of how to be inclusive. And it was a point that came home a little bit more when eventually I lived and worked in Brazil.

## **1991 – 1993 Assistant Under Secretary for Transnational Issues, FCO**

SR: So then they promoted you to Assistant Secretary for Transnational Issues. So this was cutting across the subject based departments?

RB: Yes it was. I can't remember whether it was formally called Transnational Issues, it was subsequently. We gradually built that portfolio during that time. They were the bits and pieces of Under Secretary responsibility that didn't fit at that time under a regional command. And, as time went by, those bits and pieces began to assume more and more significance in the Whitehall machine, because the other Whitehall departments dealing with those functions ... their instinct was to turn to that bit of the Foreign Office as the way into Foreign Office thinking. So that command played quite a significant role in the early pan-Whitehall discussions on drugs, on money-laundering, on trying to control international fraud. We were the department almost exclusively dealing with the Air Services Agreements. And, of course, environment – the big flavour of the decade. And it was that command which prepared all the papers for the big meeting in Rio in 1992 which really kickstarted the whole focus on international environmental policy. So it was tremendous fun, sitting astride that and watching all these bits and pieces beginning to develop. It also meant that I had under my command, as it were, the financing of some international organisations: OECD – the budget for that, and the behaviour and activity and financing of the UN specialised agencies which was a little controversial in those days. I remember we were still outside UNESCO, I think, at that point. We had withdrawn in a huff a few years before because of the way it was run. We had worries about the International Labour Organisation and particular worries about the World Health Organisation. That's a little story which perhaps is worth telling. The head of the WHO during the time was a Japanese gentleman called Nakajima and he had an atrocious reputation internationally. We suspected that he was corrupt, but we weren't sure. But certainly the way he ran that organisation didn't seem right at all and all the major donors, without exception, were unhappy with him. But he was a Japanese citizen and the Japanese government took pride in the fact that they had a Japanese citizen as the head of one of the specialised agencies. They disregarded his qualities and put more emphasis on the fact that he was Japanese. So I went off to Tokyo at one point for talks on UN affairs and used that opportunity to try to bring home to the Japanese that we all had rotten eggs sometimes doing things internationally and we had to be brave enough to stand up and accept that. And I'm afraid it didn't cut any ice. It was a very tough conversation. Mr Nakajima was re-elected

for a second term at the WHO and history shows, I think, that he in effect bribed a whole range of emerging countries to vote for him. By bribed, I mean tilting the resources of the WHO in such a way that they benefited some countries rather than others. So not a successful exercise.

SR: Sounds like material for a Yes Minister episode there.

RB: Yes, absolutely! The other interesting thing was dealing with the Libyans and Lockerbie. Lockerbie loomed large. We had a tripartite group, the French, the Americans and myself, who all met every two or three months to follow and monitor how we should handle the Libyans from a security point of view. The one thing that I remember from that period is that in about 1991 I think it must have been, the early part of that, we suddenly saw some intelligence material which suggested that perhaps Gadhafi was about to hand over two principal suspects in the Lockerbie exercise for trial in Scotland, which was what we were asking. We couldn't quite understand why he would want to do that, but we didn't really understand the tribal rivalries inside Libya that might be leading to that. But we took it very seriously and prepared ourselves for that. I was told that I would be the lead man in talking to the Libyans, if ever that were to happen. I think that was because they didn't want a Middle East expert to be in the front line, because that would have opened up the possibility of wider discussions. We needed to focus it just on the logistics of this particular exercise. As part of preparation for that, it was thought right that I should go to Scotland, to Barlinnie Prison, because the prison authorities were preparing cells for these two suspects, just to show how seriously we took the whole thing. And two cells were constructed which would take account of the religious requirements of two gentlemen from Libya: they were facing in the right direction, with their own ablutions and so on which were really quite important. It was thought that, for the sake of verisimilitude, I should actually go and look at these things so that I could say to the Libyans that I had been and could personally assure them etc. etc. So I went and I spent a day inside Barlinnie which was an absolutely awful experience. It's a terrible prison. I'd never been inside a big prison before, so perhaps I can't compare, but certainly it was a shock. The cells were there and I was able to come out agreeing that everything had been done to make things as comfortable as possible for these two suspects. I then went to Lockerbie and I met the Procurator Fiscal in Scotland who would be leading the prosecution. I remember I went through the evidence very carefully with him. I came away from that with the impression that the evidence against these two men was certainly

compelling, but very circumstantial and not conclusive. But nevertheless it was judged sufficiently compelling for a case to be brought. But, of course, at the end of the day it never happened and the whole thing disappeared again and it wasn't until some time later that one of them, Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, was surrendered. There was a trial in the Netherlands and then imprisonment in Scotland eventually and then of course the man's release, when he was diagnosed with cancer. But, interestingly, even till this day, some of the Lockerbie victims' families do not actually believe that that man was responsible for what happened. It is a difficult issue to analyse. So we almost got them back for trial in Scotland, or thought we did, but it never happened.

SR: There are special challenges also in dealing with an issue that is so much in the headlines.

RB: Yes. Going to Lockerbie was still fairly raw at that time. Just shocking.

The other thing that I remember from that period was leading the UK team in bilateral negotiations with the US on a mutual legal assistance treaty, called an MLAT. I mention it only because it was a very turgid process. It took 2 – 3 years, I think, to work its way through. Most of the issues centred around the American definition of extraterritoriality, their belief that they had the right to exercise jurisdiction over crimes against America outside the US. It was a complex exercise. It was also difficult to get Whitehall together. We had lots of interminable, very difficult, pan-Whitehall discussions in the preparations for those sessions. But we did eventually get agreement on a treaty. I tend to think that it plays a significant part, beneath the radar screen as it were, in ensuring the two countries can cooperate effectively, particularly in areas such as money laundering, international drug trafficking or whatever. It's a vital bit of the bilateral framework.

SR: Do you want to say something about the Earth Summit in Rio, before we move on?

RB: Not really. It's well documented and I think so much water has flowed under the bridge since then. But there was a sense of excitement about what we were doing at Rio. This was a huge, massively important international issue and there was a huge amount of satisfaction when we got to the end of that conference. It was what we thought was something. I don't think I've got much more to add without getting into the real nitty gritty. But the Brazilians

were very proud to be hosting it. One thing I do remember was the draconian way in which the Brazilians emptied Rio to enable this vast number of international leaders to meet. All the *favelas* were just swept away and undesirables thrown out of the city.

### **1993 – 1995 Assistant Under Secretary for Eastern Europe, FCO**

SR: So then you moved back to dealing mostly with the Soviet Union but also other parts of Eastern Europe.

RB: That's right. I shifted focus a little bit for a short time from '93 until early '95. I'd started to agree with Personnel Department at that point, maybe a little bit earlier, that we desperately wanted to do Stockholm, because of family reasons and interests. In those days, it was still possible to talk informally to one's senior colleagues and get a bit of an understanding about what was going to happen. I'm not sure it works like that now. So I knew fairly certainly, although it wasn't confirmed, from '93 onwards that Stockholm would come my way. But I had to wait for the incumbent to leave. I think that if I'd not been so wedded to that, it would have been time to go off somewhere in '93. But we decided we wanted to wait for Stockholm.

SR: You had been in London for four years ...

RB: Yes, and we ended up doing six. Which is a long time. The prospect of going to Stockholm was the prize for us a family. So I spent I suppose about 18 months looking again at Eastern Europe and a little bit at the Balkans, but I was not a major policy player in the Balkans thing because that was being handled by the Political Director and others there. A little bit at the beginning. I went to Sarajevo quite early on and I think I was probably one of the first to meet Karadžić.

SR: What was he like?

RB: Weird. It was a surreal experience. I flew into Sarajevo at a moment when there was a lull in the fighting and then I was driven up the mountain next door to Sarajevo to Pale which was the sort of redoubt at the top of a hill, where Karadžić had his headquarters. I remember being struck by the total silence of the forest that we drove through: it was as if there was no

wildlife there at all – a very, very weird experience. I spent an hour or so talking to Karadžić and his Prime Minister, whose name was Krajišnik I think. He was a professor of English literature at a university and we had a sort of surreal conversation about Shakespeare. I remember Karadžić showed me some maps of the area and tried to point out the bits that he thought were important and sensitive and all of that. And I came back to London with a lot of detail on that. But it was quickly overtaken as being totally irrelevant as to what was actually going to happen. My impression was of a lack of reality, surreal.

But for most of the rest of the time, my focus was on our relations with the bits and pieces resulting from the breakup of the Soviet Union. I travelled to Tbilisi, and to Baku and to Yerevan in Armenia. We already had a representation in Baku because of the significance of oil production and we opened up Embassies in the other two places.

I was immensely impressed by the Armenians whom I met. They were having a terrible time at that point. There was a nasty little war going on in a place called Nagorno-Karabakh, a little enclave of territory disputed in Armenia and Azerbaijan. So that was happening at one end of the country and the Armenians had their constant problems with the Turks at the other end. And so the country was completely isolated. I stayed in the only hotel that was functioning in Yerevan and we had a generator in the hotel producing electricity for one hour a day. This was October/November time and we went to meetings in the government departments with the Armenians where we all wore overcoats the whole of the time. But they were such a gentle and civilised people that I warmed to them. I came away feeling desperately sad on their behalf. We did open an Embassy there fairly soon after that. But it was not a comfortable place for the incumbent to live, I'm afraid. And then I travelled in the newly liberated Baltic States. I remember particularly going to Latvia when they had the ceremonial blowing up of the old Soviet radar station on the coast. I've forgotten its name now – Skruna, or something like that. As this thing came tumbling down there was folk dancing going on!

But there was an awful lot of activity in that area: we provided quite a lot of technical as well as financial support for some of those countries. Various London institutions like the Bank of England were helpful and active in sending people to help these countries find their feet. So it was a satisfying but brief visit to parts of Eastern Europe I hadn't been to before. One of the ironies was that, when it had been the Soviet Union, the UK had been pretty much the

only significant Western power which had never formally recognised the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union. That meant we could never visit those territories. Had we gone as diplomats from Moscow or anywhere else, it would have been interpreted as de facto recognition. And so we didn't know a lot about the situation on the ground in those countries.

SR: You wrote in your notes 'Yeltsin as prima donna'.

RB: Yes, that was the time when Yeltsin came across the Atlantic, ostensibly on a visit to Ireland first and then on to the UK. It was famous for the fact that when the aeroplane touched down in Shannon there was a huge Irish delegation to meet him. Yeltsin never made it off the aeroplane. It was pretty clear he was drunk on the aeroplane and they had to do without him. He never actually trod on Irish soil to say hello to his brief Irish hosts. It was a fascinating period but I was not directly involved in the preparations for his visit.

SR: Nor those for Her Majesty's visit to Moscow?

RB: No. I remember it happening. It should have been of huge significance that the Queen went. At the time it was. But it seems to have receded into history. Nobody talks about it or thinks about it now. I find it hard to remember anything particularly significant about it, except that it happened!

### **1995 – 1999 Ambassador, Stockholm**

SR: So now you get to go to Stockholm, your dream posting. 1995. Did you go straight there? There was no break for training or anything?

RB: No. Too late to train! It was terrific from a family point of view to go back to Sweden. We continued of course to know the country extraordinarily well. We'd been in and out of Sweden every year during our married life. We always spent part of our summer holidays in the country, so felt that we kept in touch with it. And Sweden had gone through – and was still going through – quite significant change, both socially and of course politically. It had joined the European Union in the early '90s – it formally happened in June of that year, 1995. (We arrived later that year.) And so you had Sweden, for the first time, playing a formal role

in a hugely significant political and economic role in a Western European organisation. The assumption in London was that this was terrific news, because it meant that we would have a very like-minded, peripheral member of the European Union with doubts about all the fundamentals of integration and the rest of it and a very useful ally across a whole range of issues. In many respects, that turned out to be right. I had endless, detailed conversations with senior Ministers on issues as they arose and, for the most part, found a huge meeting of minds on the way in which those things should be handled. It wasn't, however, entirely like that. I remember Malcolm Rifkind came to Sweden in early 1997. He came specifically to get a ringing endorsement for the British approach to the European Communities which was steady as you go, expand to the East but no more moves towards integration and all that kind of thing. And certainly, publicly, he got a good resonance from the student population, for example, in Stockholm. I remember he wrote to me after the visit to say how much he'd enjoyed the public part of his visit. And he was well received at government level as well. But, just beneath the surface, there was more than a sense of irritation at the way in which we were pushing the envelope on those issues. It didn't entirely suit the Swedes to be 100% with the Brits with this profile in Europe. Matters came to a head on one occasion, during John Major's time as Prime Minister. He was giving a press conference somewhere, in the margins of one of the European Councils. Göran Persson, the Swedish Prime Minister, was giving a press conference somewhere else in which he was actually quite critical of the posturing that John Major and others were showing. John Major was furious with this. I was told that a scribbled minute came out of No. 10 against the report of Göran Persson's activity, saying 'I will not have this man in London!'. This was sent to me in Stockholm to sort out. What do we do? I can remember having a number of very quiet conversations with the then Permanent Secretary at the Swedish Foreign Ministry on ways of bringing the two men together and getting over this little hiccup in the ostensibly excellent Anglo-Swedish relationship. It took a little while. But it worked eventually. It showed that we were taking Sweden a little bit too much for granted as an immediate and automatic ally in European affairs. So all that was happening at the political level.

But as, I think, with probably most Western European ambassadorial postings at that time, more and more the way that you could help as an Ambassador was as much on the commercial side as on the political side. And although Anglo-Swedish business works pretty well, and there's tremendous familiarity through language and whatever, it wasn't entirely straightforward and that last sort of 5% of misunderstanding often became apparent in the

way companies talked to each other. It was a time when BAE Systems – or British Aerospace as it was – had taken an interest in the Swedish defence industry. Negotiations began between BAE Systems and Saab Military Aviation on some kind of merger or coming together. This was politically very difficult because it was the first time that the sacrosanct Swedish defence industry – actually quite a significant factor in Sweden – was playing footsie with a big, dangerous predator outside the country! There was quite a lot of instinctive opposition at government level to this, although Saab Military Aviation themselves were themselves very keen on it. Swedish industry is really run by one big family called the Wallenberg family. They control most of the big international Swedish companies, as well as one of the banks in Sweden. They do this through a central holding company called Investor. The Board of Investor consists of the heads of most of the big multilateral global industries that the Swedes have. Of course it included Saab and Saab Military Aviation. One of the younger Wallenbergs, Marcus – he’s now one of the two who run the empire, but at that stage he was still quite a young man – was asked to oversee this particular transaction. He worried about it enormously. He came round to see me several times quietly in the Residence, asking lots of questions about British Aerospace’s intentions, could they be trusted and all of that. The interesting thing was that the Swedes were used to dealing with Southerners in the UK, city types. But British Aerospace, of course, was a Northern company and the Swedes really didn’t know what to make of this different accent and different types of personality. And so I was being asked very basic questions like, “Are they trying to take us for a ride? Are they going to just wipe us out? Is this the intention?” The Swedes were manufacturing a fighter aircraft called the Gripen which actually fitted in to the profile of stuff that BAE Systems were doing. But an unkind analyst could argue that to take that aeroplane out of the equation might also have served British Aerospace’s purpose. So the fact that the Wallenbergs confided in me quite closely gave me an excellent basis on which to advise Dick Evans and the people running BAE Systems. So I got to know the BAE Systems hierarchy extremely well during that period. At the end of it all, after it happened, I seemed to have pleased both sides, because Marcus Wallenberg was in touch to say how enormously grateful he was that I had been able to step out from under an ambassadorial hat and help Sweden. It worked, but it was a delicate balancing act.

There was also the time when the British company, Alvis, bought Hagglunds which was a heavy defence industry right up in the North. That was happening at the same time. There were times when I would ring Swedish cabinet ministers simply to underline that this was

legitimate business and that resisting cooperation with a Western European ally or fellow member of the EU or European Communities didn't sit well with Sweden's new profile in Western Europe. I remember on one occasion, some time later, a senior Swede told me that that had resonated in the Swedish cabinet when they were looking at whether or not to give permission for these sorts of deals to go ahead. A very hierarchical process in the Swedish government that they needed to approve. Sweden was going through this transitional process at that stage, allowing the nasty outside world to come in and take a bit of its defence industry. So the commercial side loomed quite large and quite rightly so. I think that is the case for all Western European Ambassadors in that period and since.

One last little footnote. The Swedish intelligence services have always been important to us. Throughout the Cold War period, they were the masters of tracking Soviet military activity in Northern Europe. So we depended on them quite heavily during the whole of that period and there was quite a close relationship between the two communities. That persisted, and I've no doubt probably still persists today. I remember one amusing incident. I gave a large dinner on one occasion for both communities when they came together for consultations. The Swedes brought along some very aged former members of the Swedish intelligence community who came to this wonderful house that I had in Stockholm. Built by the students of Lutyens. Lovely, but smallish – not like Delhi or anything like that! During this dinner, one of the elderly intelligence officers took me to one side and pointed to one of the fireplaces at one side of the huge drawing room and said, "That's where we bugged you at the beginning of the Second World War!" As we discussed last time, there were some very difficult periods in the relationship at that time.

It was hugely enjoyable for us as a family and I was grateful to the Service for letting me do that job. Our daughter was educated in Sweden for three or four years.

SR: There can't have been many other fluent Swedish speakers in the Service?

RB: No, I think that's right. And that mattered enormously. And having Lena there, it gave us a tremendous entrée.

SR: Well, you just talked about ringing up Cabinet ministers. You can't do that unless you have a really good command of the language.

RB: Precisely. And yet, you know, until the early 1990s we were not permitted to serve in the countries from which our wives came. Do you remember that?

SR: I do!

RB: The only two exceptions to that were the Americans and, for some illogical reason, the French. So many British diplomats married young French ladies that they couldn't hold the line! But for everybody else, the theory of conflict of loyalty was there and you couldn't do it. Which was daft. The advantage of having that 'in'.

SR: Do you want to say something about immigration? You put in your notes 'importing instability into a hitherto homogenous society'.

RB: Yes, it's one of the changes that Sweden was going through. It started earlier than that, in the 1980s, when Sweden began to open its doors, particularly to people from the Middle East. Do you remember that Middle East organisation called Abu Nidal which was rabidly anti-British? Intelligence sources told us that one of the headquarters for Abu Nidal during that period was in Malmö, in Southern Sweden. And my predecessor in Stockholm, for a period, had a 24-hour armed guard because of this. By the time I got there in 1995, they had decided that wasn't necessary. But the Residence was still guarded 24 hours a day by dedicated security officials. The assessment was that they were most unlikely to want to foul the nest in Sweden by doing something silly. They were there because Sweden had been welcoming, and that's where they based themselves. But it was a period when Sweden was particularly generous with its immigration policy, took in a lot of people from the former Yugoslavia, from Croatia particularly, but from all that Balkan region. They had had a tradition of taking Latin Americans in – lots of Chileans from that period. They had taken Czechs and Hungarians when those problems occurred. And some Africans – that started at that particular time – there's a very large Somali population in Sweden. They suddenly felt that they had probably bitten off more than they could chew. And have had problems ever since. The instinct to be generous is still there, even during recent times. They've been much more generous in their immigration policy than any other Western European country with refugees from North Africa, for example. But it has led to real inner city problems, in Stockholm, in Malmö and in Gothenburg, with incidents of real violence. So it has been a

wake-up call for them. I think the problem is the rate at which immigrants have been welcomed and their inability to assimilate them in a way they thought they'd be able to do. Particularly true of the Somalis. There was an Anglo-Swedish angle to that. The Somalis use a plant as a drug called qat and it has a kind of soporific effect if you chew it. It's a national thing for the Somalis. The Swedes banned it – it's on their list of prohibited goods. But, for a time, it was not banned in the UK – you could find it here. And so a trade developed bringing stuff in from the UK and the Somalis managed to persuade innocent Brits to put this stuff in their suitcases. We had one or two UK citizens in jail in Sweden because they'd thought they were doing their Somali neighbours a favour and were caught bringing the stuff into the country. But Somalis, more than any other, seemed incapable of being assimilated properly into local society and were a big problem for the Swedes. So it has introduced a degree of instability into society, to which they were not used. But they've done it for absolutely admirable reasons. They are prepared to act in that kind of humanitarian way when they feel that's the right thing to do. They deserve a lot of credit for that. But until the 1960s, Sweden was a very ... what's the word? ... a very homogenous society. You rarely saw a black face on the streets in the 1960s. Or indeed from any other non-Northern European part of the world.

### **1999 – 2004 Ambassador, Brasilia**

SR: Interesting. And now finally we move on to Brazil. Why Brazil? Did you ask for it?

RB: Well, when it came to that point in the cycle, it was probably going to be my last assignment in the Service. It was still at a time when you could talk fairly informally to senior colleagues about what you were going to do. And when it became apparent that I was not going to be offered Washington or New York, I remember saying to the PUS – it was John Kerr in those days – what I would really like to do is one of the big emerging economies. Having done a medium-sized posting in Western Europe, doing another European posting wouldn't have been a particularly different or stimulating experience. And the other thing is that the emerging economies were the flavour of the month at that particular time – it was the BRICs and all that sort of thing – and it struck me (and it turned out to be so), that as our Ambassador in one of those big emerging economies, you actually had a greater sense of both independence and of being at the centre of things than I could ever have hoped to do in Stockholm. There's so much which goes on bilaterally between European

countries and, as an Ambassador, you have to pedal hard sometimes to keep up with what was happening. When you're sitting in Brazil, or India, or China, everybody still needs you to understand and explain the country that you're in and so you do feel yourself to be the spider at the centre of the web, rather than somebody running around the web to see what everybody else is doing. So that appealed to me as well. The BRIC that was available was Brazil, so I remember John Kerr ringing up and asking whether I would be prepared to consider it. I thought about it over a weekend and, the more I thought about it, the more excited I felt.

SR: But did you know any Portuguese?

RB: No, no! So I was sent off to learn Portuguese in Stockholm for a few months and worked very hard with it in Brazil when I first arrived. I managed to get myself to the level where I could communicate and handle the media. But the problem with learning a language in your early or mid-50s is that it tends to go in one ear and out the other! So while I was there, I was reasonably competent but, within two or three years of coming away, I'm afraid it disappeared. I went back to Brazil a couple of times again after I'd left and one on my own devices and I thought at one time I might be doing something in Brazil privately as a business consultant. Several years later after my retirement, I became one of the Prime Minister's Honorary Ambassadors for British business, associated with other things that I did after I left the Service. Of course they picked up on the Brazilian connection and I was sent back to Brazil to do a kind of junior ministerial style visit in that capacity. It wasn't so many years after I had left Brazil, but the language had pretty much gone. I'm not particularly proud of that.

But it was a wonderful time. We enjoyed it enormously. I remember being taken aside by Robin Cook before going off to Brazil. This was before the message about commercial diplomacy had really become very widespread within the Service. Robin Cook said to me that, of course, there were the political things to do in Brazil: Brazil was a member of the UN Security Council and usually is, and the whole of the Argentinian dimension and the Falklands and all of that. And economic reporting was very important from there. But he said the main way in the future that Ambassadors to countries like that would be judged would be the impact they made on British industrial interests. And that, frankly, was what he was interested in. And that was the first time that a senior Minister had been quite as explicit

on that to me and I was impressed by him. In some ways, I suppose he was a difficult man to work for. But I was impressed by his commitment to our Service and his commitment to make it work, his commitment of support to individual Ambassadors. It was all there. I thought he was an extraordinarily effective man to be working for. I'm not sure whether that's shared by others.

SR: I think so. A lot of colleagues in the Office admired his parliamentary skills as well. He was a great parliamentarian.

RB: Yes. And a man of great principle as we saw on Iraq as well.

The other thing that marked a little bit of a change at that point – I remember that John Kerr was talking to me about it – was that, until then, we had tended to send to Brazil people with experience of the region, people with a Latin American dimension. But we wanted at that stage to signal that we were sending somebody who was coming from the centre and who had done a range of stuff, of global significance and not just of Latin American significance, because most of the big Departments in Whitehall wanted to open up a dialogue with the Brazilians to the extent they hadn't had before. Particularly true of the Treasury, for example. We bucked the trend and actually increased our economic staff in Brazil in those years at a time when everybody else was being squeezed down. There was a real recognition that the country mattered, in economic dialogue terms. So that was part of the message as well.

When I got there, I found that the UK, it seemed to me, was not taking sufficient interest in the opportunities that Brazil was beginning to offer. Its currency had stabilised, economic management was in good hands – this was during the Cardoso period, of course. The economy was effectively run by young technocrats in the Ministry of Finance and in the Central Bank, all of whom had been educated outside the country and knew exactly what they were doing. It seemed to me throughout my time that, provided the government left things to professionals of that standard, Brazil wouldn't go far wrong. And that remained the case, even through the Lula period because he knew how to delegate effectively. And so that really was the time at which a whole range of outside countries were beginning to take a renewed interest in investment in Brazil. But I found that the UK's share of new foreign direct investment there was under 2% of the total which didn't really reflect what we could

do. I spent a lot of time talking to big British companies talking about the opportunities, sometimes with success, sometimes not. I remember, for example, going to Enfield to talk to a couple of members of the Tesco board and telling them that I was fed up with seeing French and Portuguese superstores growing up all over the place. But the answer I got from Tesco's was that they had a Chairman and a CEO who were viscerally opposed to doing business in Brazil and that was the end of the matter. There were a number of companies that had their fingers badly burnt during the difficult times and we were slow to react, it seems to me, to the change in circumstances. Business did pick up while I was there, particularly so from some of the big unlisted companies in the UK. JCB did extremely well. Anthony Bamford came out and I took him to see the President and other senior people. It's easier for a company that's not listed to take a medium- and long-term punt than it is for a big listed company that has to worry about its shareholders every twelve months. Their patience paid off and they now have a good, flourishing business in Brazil. So mixed performance on the part of business.

My knowledge of BAE Systems also increased while I was there because they were busy trying to sell the Swedish aircraft, the Gripen. So there was a kind of continuity there. But BAE Systems during that period represented all that was wrong about the way of handling the Brazilians: they did it on a kind of in and out basis. They had a very junior guy in country and with senior heavyweights coming in and out to talk to the Brazilians. That is not the way to deal with Brazil: they like to be loved. It's a very Latin country. You have to invest a lot of time and emotional energy in having your arms around them. The French did it brilliantly. The French President would ring Cardoso every three or four weeks, just for a sort of 20-minute chat. That was wonderful, but you could never persuade a British Prime Minister to do that sort of thing, because of time constraints. We were not geared, in many ways, and the mindset was not such in some of these big industries to do it in an effective way. So BAE Systems had some limited success while I was there but, on the whole, did not go down terribly well. One of my selling points when I left Brazil eventually was to try to persuade BAE Systems to use me as their man in Brazil for a time. I'd gone quite a long way down the path of talking to them about being a consultant with that sort of hat on until other things intervened and I ended up working for Boeing. Which was infinitely better than working as a consultant for BAE Systems! So I was not impressed with the way they performed in Brazil. There was a lot of room for improvement. That was fairly typical of lots of other companies as well.

My other main, political memories of the time were of the extraordinary adoration given to Tony Blair, particularly during his first term. Brazil was one of the only countries that he visited outside Washington and the European network during his first term. He hadn't yet earned the nickname Blair Miles – that came in the second term. So he went to India and then he came to Brazil. I'd never seen anything like it. He was greeted like a pop star, cameras all over the place, crowds following him everywhere. He had to fight his way through crowds to get his appointments. He loved it! The Third Way was the toast of the town. It was popular both intellectually and socially as being the magic way forward. And President Cardoso also admired him as a younger politician.

Just a word about Cardoso. He was an extraordinary man. I admired him enormously. He's a rare example of a very senior academic who could also run something effectively. His grip on the country, his grip on economic management was quite extraordinary. He was there until 2002 and then was replaced by the populist, left-wing Lula. There were huge worries internationally about the transition from one government to the other. The Bretton Woods institutions – the IMF – set aside the biggest standby facility that it had ever put in place to try to help smooth that transition. In fact, it was hardly ever drawn, because the transition was incredibly well managed on the economic side between the two administrations and Lula never really tried to intervene to micromanage the economy. He knew how to delegate – that was one of his great strengths. And so when I left in 2004 it was still quite a success story. Things went downhill when Lula left and Dilma Rousseff succeeded. She was very much a micro-manager and, I'm afraid, upset the rather delicate balance that had obtained until then. I met her once or twice as a Minister for Energy during that time and didn't take to her particularly. A rather cold and aloof personality.

SR: And what was Lula like?

RB: He was an extraordinary man. One of my closest contacts in Brazil was a man called Cristovam Buarque who had been the Rector of the University in Brasilia – quite a big and respectable university. He was the intellectual face of the left wing in Brazil and became Lula's first Minister for Education when he came to power. But I knew Buarque before that – he used to come round to lunch occasionally and chat. I remember on one occasion he said, "You've got this strange title of Sir in front of your name. That means you must be a British

aristocrat.” So I said, “Hang on! You’ve got the wrong end of the stick. These are things the British government occasionally hands out, perhaps instead of money.” I described to him my relatively modest origins – semi-detached house in the suburbs of London and all that. He looked at me with a rather puzzled expression and said, “So, you’re practically working class!” A few weeks later he rang me up and asked if I had met Lula. I said that I hadn’t as he was hardly ever in Brasilia and he wasn’t a great mixer with foreigners. He didn’t speak any other languages except Brazilian Portuguese with a heavy accent that was difficult to understand. So Buarque invited me to go with him to an event and he would introduce me. It was a reception somewhere for the party and, at one point, he took me up to Lula and he said, “Lula, I’d like to introduce you to the British Ambassador. He’s a representative of the working class.” At which point, Lula flung his arms round my neck and gave me an enormous kiss. I wondered what my colleagues back at the Foreign Office would have made of this! I can’t claim to have got to know Lula terribly well. He really wasn’t available, I’m afraid, even as President, as Cardoso had been, to contact from the diplomatic community. And he also liked to drink fairly heavily. He was not always around during the day. But a tremendous character.

SR: You were based in Brasilia, but did you travel a lot?

RB: Yes. Most of the staff were in São Paulo or Rio. São Paulo because that’s where the bulk of the business happens. In Rio because of the emerging significance of the oil industries there. We had lots of British companies moving into Rio. The British population there was blossoming. There was a town twinning arrangement between Rio and Aberdeen! Guess who got most advantage? So a lot of Scottish families were moving in and settling.

One of the main difficulties in dealing with Brazil is the sort of conflict between central government and the power of the individual states. It’s actually a rather loose federal system and it’s not always easy for the writ as set out in central government to apply. We found that particularly when dealing with the interests of the oil companies in Rio. I can remember on a couple of occasions having stand up rows with the Governor of Rio, with British oil men with me, complaining about moving the goalposts on local taxation and regulations. So it was tough for people to find their feet there. Understanding the Brazilian regulatory framework was very, very difficult. They really needed a well-informed Embassy to help them. The best way to do business in Brazil at that time or to start to do business there – and I’m sure

it's probably still the case – is to do it in partnership with a Brazilian entity, rather than to move in and try and do it all by yourself. But that's not the way the oil majors necessarily behave, so some of them had real problems. Petrobras was the body they had to deal with, but you never quite knew, when you were dealing with the Minister for Energy, whether you were dealing with the boss of Petrobras or with the government. The line was blurred between the two and they would play both cards against the middle whenever they needed to, to do so. So it underlines the point and the significance of an Embassy in a country like that. British business needs it, arguably more than perhaps in a more developed part of the world.

SR: In your notes, Roger, you talked about Blair's second term and the impact of Iraq.

RB: Yes, this was probably the most difficult thing I had to do while I was there. Because Brazil played a significant part on the UN Security Council as a kind of swing voter, other countries would follow Brazil's lead. We tried very hard to explain in detail as we went over our thinking on Iraq and why we thought we needed to take action. I remember that somebody senior from the intelligence community came out from London and I took him to the top of the Foreign Ministry. We revealed a great deal of the material we were getting from sources at that time and I sat there while it was explained to the Brazilians that, of course, there were stockpiles of chemical and other weapons there. We knew precisely where they were, because we'd been told where they were. We saw that the Iraqis were very carefully positioning large crowds of people in areas where we couldn't get to ... all this kind of stuff which was being fed to us from external Iraqi intelligence sources, all of turned out to be wrong in the end. There we were, impressing on the Brazilians just how firmly we believed this intelligence material. Subsequently, after we had taken action, my American colleague and I were summoned by the Brazilian Senate to a public hearing and asked to explain precisely why the action had been taken. She and I were provided with pretty much exactly the same brief that Colin Powell used in the UN Security Council, when he talked about the lorries with equipment and the designs of the transport that was moving all this stuff around. We spent a lot of time with the Senate that afternoon explaining why we had done all this and, of course, really within a matter of weeks, the whole lot was shot out of the water. It didn't do a lot for our credibility, I'm afraid. I felt, as an Ambassador out on the circuit, the damage that was being done to our international credibility. At a personal level, I knew the Brazilians well enough to get over it. The Foreign Minister, a nice man called Celso Lafer, had become a close friend. He, of course, understood what had happened. So it

didn't damage my effectiveness with the central organs of government but, my goodness me, it was an uncomfortable experience!

That was the time when the Prime Minister started to have meetings of senior Ambassadors in London. He would summon a few of us back for a consultative process. Hearing Tony Blair argue, after the event, that the only thing that mattered in world politics for the UK was the relationship with the United States: we needed to be shoulder to shoulder with the US on everything because that was where our interests lay and we did not want to break that relationship or upset it in any way. That was when the fanaticism of Tony Blair became apparent to me. He was using, in a way, some of the phraseology I'd heard from Oliver North, "We must do the right thing." There was a conviction there. And it was a kind of religious conviction. That worried me enormously. I changed my view of Blair at that point. I admired what I saw when he came to Brazil, but I'm afraid the glamour wore off fairly rapidly. Lots of others must have that experience, I think. But it wasn't a pleasant experience to be an Ambassador in a country like Brazil on that particular issue at that time. The other big visit we had was from Prince Charles. He came and spent three or four days in country and I was impressed with the way he performed and the way he talked to President Cardoso and other senior ministers. It was on the environment and he knew his subject extremely well. It was the first time that I'd heard him in serious, private dialogue. I wasn't quite sure what to expect. But it was a thoroughly competent performance.

SR: He's passionate, isn't he?

RB: Yes he is. We had a good trip to Rio and then I took him up country which is what he really wanted to do. We went to a very remote part of Brazil called Tocantins. If you imagine the map of Brazil, it's west of Brasilia and north. Underneath the Amazon and above the Pantanal in the south. Pretty remote area with lots of tribes. We had a development project in one part of that state. The Overseas Development Ministry were running a turtle protection project, of all things, but it gave us an in. I took him there – it involved a flight to the capital of the state, Palmas, and then a small plane and a long trip on a river barge to get to this remote part. He absolutely loved it. The funny thing was that I'd been there before to prepare the way and told these lovely people whom I'd met, through a local interpreter because of the local dialect, that he was longing to come and visit them, but please don't go to the trouble of giving expensive presents, he's not coming for that.

Anyway, we turned up at this place and, at the end of the visit, we were taken across to a thatched straw hut and on the table in the middle, there was an object with a cloth over it. Prince Charles and I were summoned forth to stand in front of this, a speech was made and then the cloth was taken off. It was a kind of bronze statue, a figure of an almost entirely naked man (except for a very strategically placed bit of cloth) and at the feet were animals writhing about and people with their hands up. The tribal headsman who handed it over said that this was a present to Prince Charles in recognition of his worldwide role in protecting the natural environment. And when you looked carefully, you could see that the face was Prince Charles. Except that he had a full head of hair and the ears were pinned back. We looked at this thing and I thought I would die! Charles was terrific. He grinned and said he was amazed and deeply touched by this gesture. His equerry, who was with us, couldn't get over it and made absolutely certain that it made the BBC World news twice, two nights running with a close up of the statue. Many years later, when I met Charles back in London, I asked him where the statue was. He said it was in Kensington Palace. Tremendous fun. And then they said to him that they'd like him to know that in their new capital city they were going to erect a life-size version of the statue. So somewhere in the middle of Brazil ... But I was very impressed by the visit and the importance of an effective, working royal visit. It was the first time I'd seen that, at that level, from the Royal Family. I was very impressed by him and by the effect of the visit.

The last thing I wanted to mention about Brazil was the relationship with Argentina and the Falklands angle. Brazil and The Argentine had always had a slightly volatile relationship, with roots deep into history. You can look at it in social and cultural terms in that Argentina has always been the richer of the two countries until about 30 years ago. Then, when that balance shifted, it made it worse, because there's nothing more awkward than having a poor neighbour suddenly becoming a rich neighbour and all the sensitivities that come from that. But it served our purpose because the Brazilians were always privately a little bit sympathetic about the Falkland Islands, about Malvinas. We used Brazil for years as a staging post for fighter aircraft going down to the Falklands. They would touch down in Rio, refuel and then fly on. As time went by, the Brazil-Argentine relationship became a little more stable with the emergence of an economic movement in Southern America called Mercosur to which both parties belonged. Both parties made a real effort to get on with each other a little bit more. And so we did begin to wonder, towards the end of my time, how much longer we could depend on them. I suppose it remained the most sensitive of the issues during my time.

As I left, it was still fine. I think I'm right in saying that we no longer need to use it as a staging post.

Lots of other things about Brazil! Fabulous place to be. The Carnival in Rio – which starts this weekend – is wonderful. Brazil is not a safe place to walk around in, but the Carnival felt safe. It was really the first time I'd been in a huge, open space with about, probably more than 100,000 people, all enjoying themselves at the same time and all happy at the same time. That doesn't happen very often – maybe at Old Trafford occasionally – but there was nothing quite like that experience. Brazilians are just lovely. They really are tremendously gregarious and warm-hearted and Latin. And they share with the UK, with British people, one very important quality and that is the art of self-deprecation. They can laugh at themselves in a way that I think we can.

SR: Not many countries can.

RB: I think you're right. The Germans certainly don't.

SR: And the French certainly don't!

RB: No, the Germans probably only laugh at the French! No, it's not a Western European habit on the whole. The Brazilians have it in spades. I can tell you a short anecdote which illustrates that. It's about Lula. When Lula was campaigning for the Presidency in 2002, on one occasion – and this was a story told me by one of his aides – he went into a school in São Paulo. It was the rich man's school, a private school, run on British lines, very expensive to get in. It was brave of Lula to go and campaign somewhere like that. After he'd spoken to the boys, one little boy put his hand up and said, "Mr Lula, I'd like you to know that I very much hope you win this election." Lula was immensely pleased by that and said, "Well, good, but why is that?" "Because, Mr Lula, my Daddy says that if you win this election, we're all going to move to Miami!" And the fact that Lula and his team could tell that story against themselves to a foreign Ambassador I thought was terrific. Most people wouldn't!

SR: Good anecdote. Roger, do you have any parting comments? Anything about your career as a whole, looking back?

RB: I was certainly very grateful to have had the chance to do so many different things. The main worry I took from Brazil was this whole business of the international political consultative machinery and the inappropriateness, in my view, in the short- and medium-term, of the G7 as a forum. I mentioned this earlier in our conversation. I just don't feel that gets it right. I think it's a divisive tactic between Northern and Southern hemisphere. That's the political side of it.

From the personal and social side, I've thoroughly enjoyed every posting that I've done, for lots of different reasons. For family reasons and then for more topical and political reasons. With a good dose of activity at the centre. So really no regrets at all. And I did find that having that enormously varied experience in the Service stood me well when I moved into the private sector and built, in effect, a second career in corporate and business life. I think if I had narrowly focused on one particular area, that opportunity probably wouldn't have arisen.

SR: I think that's a good note on which to end. Thank you very much indeed.