

BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index

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British Diplomatic Oral History Programme

Interview with Sir John Boyd

on 17 February 1999, conducted by Malcolm McBain

M.M. Sir John, you joined the Foreign Office in 1962 after education at Westminster School and Clare College, Cambridge and almost straight away you went out to Hong Kong. Now that was '62 to '64, almost as soon as you joined the Office. What persuaded the Office to send you to Hong Kong almost immediately?

J.B. Well, if it doesn't take too much time, I probably ought to explain the run-up to that, because it is material. I hadn't thought particularly about the Foreign Office until, I suppose, my last year at Cambridge. It hadn't been in the family culture; it hadn't been something I had been longing to do for many years, but I had been a linguist at Cambridge eventually, after messing around a bit, and, at about the same time as I got into the Office, I was offered a Postgraduate Scholarship for two years in the States. This is material because I had to go to the Office then and negotiate leave in advance for two years which was not the norm; many people went away for a year, but I went away for two, and the deal I struck was that I would start Chinese at Yale. Which I did and which brought me the huge benefit of contact with American thinking on many subjects, fine language teaching, a very good historical framework and all that. I then came back to the Office already very fired up about China and the Chinese.

M.M. Mandarin?

J.B. Mandarin. They said "you have done Chinese; we will take you into the Office and put you on to consular work or something to broaden you" which I resisted strongly. After some to-ing and fro-ing I went out to Hong Kong to continue my language studies, but I had wrecked the predictive system and there wasn't then going to be a slot in Peking itself at the right time. So I stayed for two more years in Chinese training in Hong Kong - so that's how we got to that point.

M.M. And then shortly after that you achieved your ambition to go Peking or Beijing.

J.B. Yes, I still call it Peking.

M.M. So do I.

J.B. Language training, although rather chaotic, was fundamentally good in Hong Kong, and a lot of my colleagues, of course, went through the same system both before and after me; but it was a good school at the time and those of us who were single had the option of living with North Chinese families. It is hard now, in a time of Post financial scrutiny, to explain convincingly the merits of that form of language training, but we got a very good broad grounding, I think.

M.M. You said that you had specialized in linguistics at Cambridge.

J.B. No, just languages, modern languages. "I was a linguist" is what I said, and that was only by default, when I gave up trying to be a doctor.

M.M. How did you find living with a Chinese family in 1965? What was going on then?

J.B. I will tell you what was going on in my consciousness. I wasn't that interested in politics. I was interested in the Chinese family, Chinese culture; and what I learnt from that family was the small scale on which Chinese families have to operate, the limit of their assets, the disciplines of the family system to hold the whole show together; those sort of things I learnt. I learnt very good Chinese, written as well as spoken; it was a scholarly family. There were many side benefits which I didn't appreciate until later.

M.M. Did that account for the period '65-'67?

J.B. No, then I was in Peking. In February '65 I went up to Peking which was just still recovering from the 'Great Leap' and all that followed that - the famines and the huge difficulties, which, however, brought with them a good measure of social relaxation. Which is called the Liu Shao-ch'i period and, what none of us realized in

1965, initially, was that Mao was preparing his big, devious come-back against those he thought had betrayed his ideas and proposed to betray his legacy. All that was cooking under the surface, but in a funny way our Chinese was much less used, less tested initially, because there was so little contact with the broad Chinese population. I lived in a genuine Chinese one storey house, in a genuine Chinese mud alley, found by David Wilson. Our office wasn't even an Embassy, it was the Office of the Chargé d'Affaires. I would like to stress how small-scale the operation was, how few Westerners there were and how old fashioned the city was at that stage; you wouldn't recognise it for a moment now.

M.M. No Americans there?

J.B. No Americans, no Canadians, no Japanese, no Australians, no New Zealanders. Imagine, *pensez vous*. I mean we were there for certain specific, to some extent Cold War related reasons. The Swiss were there for the usual sorts of reasons. The Danes, the Dutch, and then, of course, the East Europeans who were still trying to be China's allies, but losing it.

M.M. It was already noticeable that there was a beginning of a split?

J.B. Oh, more than noticeable. In the literature that I used to buy to practise my reading Chinese there were ferocious attacks on, initially, Tito and the Yugoslavs and then progressively Khrushchev. This was the communist literature of the period. There wasn't much else you could buy. There was no contact with the street population. Some contact with educated Chinese who were allowed to work for the Embassies, most of whom, if not all of them, suffered badly in the subsequent Cultural Revolution. Remarkably though, I think I only went once in two years into the Foreign Ministry as such in my entire first posting in Peking - this gives you the measure.

M.M. How about the Chargé d'Affaires - was that Donald Hopson?

J.B. First it was Terence Garvey, a great Irishman. I could name the team - these were the first colleagues I had ever worked with in a grown-up serious job and I

enjoyed it very much. In summer we only worked half days; it was a very relaxed life style. Michael Wilford was Counsellor when I first got there and was a great leader and he was replaced by Percy Cradock; this was the first of my many admiring exposures to Percy. The point that I was about to make which re-balances the picture is that, into the second year, as the Cultural Revolution developed, my and my colleagues' ability to read Chinese came into its own and instead of being restricted to ploughing through the People's Daily, reading between the lines, we could suddenly go out and read first hand political material off the wall posters. And we felt our professional life was justified, and the substance was of great interest both to us and Whitehall.

M.M. And, no doubt, to our allies.

J.B. Certainly.

M.M. That is interesting. When did the Cultural Revolution actually come into effect?

J.B. Here I am at a disadvantage. I would have to dash through one of those books. I can't remember the time sequence very accurately, but I remember episodes. Going to a diplomatic party and people saying they had just read the Peking evening paper and did we know that Peng Chen, the Mayor of Peking, had fallen which, of course, was the start of the great attack on major political figures. The other aspect is street violence; that, of course, is well covered in Percy Cradock's book where he talks about Len Appleyard and myself coming back saying that we had seen old people being beaten, and I certainly remember those episodes. We were not, in that sense, objects of the Cultural Revolution at that stage. Nobody laid a finger on anyone in the Mission during the period I was there, between '65 and early '67; but Chinese, particularly educated Chinese, were being beaten up. Foreigners, if you like "the old lags", who had worked for the communist system, made their life in Peking, they were starting to get into difficulties; and then, of course, the next year, notoriously, Anthony Grey, the Reuters correspondent, was incarcerated, stuck inside for a very long time. The violence then, in a phase in which, I guess, the controls were breaking

down, violence spread over and hit the foreigners too. Ultimately to China's serious diplomatic disadvantage.

M.M. What was their objection to Anthony Grey? I can't remember.

J.B. He was just a hostage. A series of Chinese correspondents in Hong Kong, as I recall the story, had rioted or burnt flags or thrown Coca Cola bottles full of petrol, I can't remember the details, and had been treated, 'helped' to the normal course of law in Hong Kong. There were something like thirteen of them who were inside. There were no accusations, I think, at any stage, against Reuters or against Anthony Grey. Reuters had always had an Office very centrally in Peking, right on top of an old flat from which you could see the Forbidden City, and it was a great social centre for all of us. But Anthony Grey just happened to be the man on the spot. He had a grim time.

M.M. After that introduction to China you then went back to the Foreign Office. You were there from 1967-69. Do you remember what you were doing?

J.B. Yes indeed. I went into that great cradle - the Northern Department as it then was. I sat at the feet of very great men like Howard Smith, a marvellous man; the Assistant was Perry Rhodes who would tell you today that I was a very unlicked cub; I mean, we had learnt certain things very well in Peking; we practised certain things very well. But I didn't know the Office routine at all; I didn't know the disciplines of the Office.

M.M. Minuting files and all that.

J.B. In the specific sense, yes. But disciplines in the sense of getting papers up to Ministers on time, those were all skills I didn't have. I found it quite a baptism of fire in Northern Department. Still, Perry Rhodes was great; he did what Assistants should do, which is to train his troops; and Howard Smith was a great leader. I had the Polish and East Europe (General) desk, and I arrived slap in the middle of quite an important visit by the Polish Foreign Minister, Rapacki. I remember two or three things from that. Perry Rhodes as a good Assistant, picking up the minuting of a

meeting I should have attended but I hadn't got in on time. Probably at the same meeting, this is only legend as I wasn't there, it is said that George Brown leant across the table, grabbed the forelock of Howard Smith, who did look a bit like Hitler, pulled it down across his face like that, this was after Rapacki had been going on and on about the resurgence of Nazism and so on, and George Brown allegedly said 'and who does he remind you of?' Great man, George Brown!

M.M. He was obviously on good form on that occasion.

J.B. Yes, he was throughout my time in the Office. The third thing I should perhaps mention, because it is illustrative of what young diplomats really have to do. Tom Brimelow was our Ambassador in Warsaw, the impeccable professional, and in many ways very Yorkshire, and he came back and he taught me the great lesson that time spent in reconnaissance is seldom wasted. Rapacki was supposed to go and lay a wreath at the Polish War Memorial at Northolt and Tom Brimelow, I didn't know why, insisted that we went out early for a reconnaissance and thank goodness we did. Immediately in front of the Memorial was a little grass field which was clearly used as a lover's tryst and all the rest, and we had the spectacle of this great man, Tom Brimelow, not scorning any detail but going round himself with his own hands picking up relics of this kind of activity. It was a seriously useful lesson; you have to attend to the detail, otherwise the total picture collapses.

M.M. And then after exposure of a totally different kind to the Chinese enemy, you went off to Washington.

J.B. Let me make a slightly ponderous observation. I think the challenge for the profession right through the time I worked in the Office was somehow to drag the Chinese, no doubt kicking and screaming, into a more civilized relationship with the rest of the world, or at least a more balanced or a more constructive relationship, and that has been a constant theme. I think, if we are discussing China policy now, it is still the big remit. So "enemy" by all means and terribly difficult for people to deal with over Hong Kong and all the rest, but one had to keep one's eye on the strategic necessity for the West of trying to have a relationship with these guys.

M.M. I was thinking more of the growing tensions between the Chinese and the Russians - the Soviet Bloc countries. By that stage the Chinese had already attacked the Indians; they were a Soviet client State, so there must have been very considerable tensions.

J.B. Now, one has to ask to what extent they were reflected in the visible world in Peking at the time and the answer is, I think, you got a picture of a Chinese foreign policy that was partly illusion, partly self disadvantaging and partly trivial. They had, of course, their alliances and their visitors, but the sort of people they brought in and fêted in Peking were people like Nyerere, who was busy wrecking his own country. In my first year, I guess, Nkrumah, who I think was actually overthrown when he was flying back home from Peking, if I remember the story. So that always gave us cynical laughs in the Diplomatic Corps. And if something of apparent symbolic importance to the world revolution happened, like Johnson sending marines into the Dominican Republic, that was then the headline item, and all the old lags, British Maoists and so on, used to turn out. We had rather delightful flower pots thrown into the Mission - the only violence, (I have to correct myself, there was violence) in that first period. It was people like a lady called Elsie Fairfax-Cholmondeley throwing earthenware flowerpots through the downstairs windows of the Mission to protest against the 'savagery of the American Marines' in the Dominican Republic. It was real Alice in Wonderland, that kind of thing. There was a serious level. There was the deadly serious rivalry between China and Russia which, of course, impacted on our wider interests, and there was a kind of very phoney war with the Americans, who declared for Chiang - but there were no significant hostilities in the Taiwan Straights. The Vietnam thing, once the Chinese had satisfied themselves that the Americans were not actually going to push North beyond a certain point, was eminently contained from a Chinese point of view.

M.M. Of course, the North Vietnamese were Soviet clients.

J.B. Yes, I have to say "yes", but it was a very ambiguous thing and there were services which the North Vietnamese required that could only be delivered through China obviously. There was a Chinese pipeline, I remember - anti-aircraft guns or

whatever it was they had there. There was always a lot of railway activity under discussion down in that part and, at a given moment, there were, of course, symbolic efforts to prepare for an American invasion of China in which I genuinely think no one believed. In my book anyway, the Russian threat as a military reality was always taken very seriously. It was a double header from the Maoist point of view - it was Revisionist threat - the destabilising of his revolutionary principles - and the physical threat of this great Northern neighbour.

M.M. With troops on the border.

J.B. One was not well placed to pass judgements on that in Peking, but I presume you to be right, and that has been the greatest chess game from the '60's on.

M.M. Then you went from the Foreign Office -moving on a couple of stages - to Washington.

J.B. I am not trying to hold you up, but I am just trying to think if there any stories from the Foreign Office period that are worth mentioning. I think that George Brown's presence and character is something you have touched on. I was Resident Clerk for a bit and one caught the effects of George Brown. Murray MacLehose was Private Secretary and he used to come up, this great man, and slump exhausted, flop into an armchair in the Resident Clerkenry and gratefully take on board a whisky at the end of a George Brown day. Of course, the Office was awash with stories. Everyone knows how talented George Brown was, and someone I worked for later was John Margetson who had been George's speech writer during that period, based in a Department that no longer exists, WOCD.

M.M. What does that stand for?

J.B. Western Organisations & Co-ordination Department or something like that. Which I guess was a rag bag. I single out John Margetson as an example of a sort of officer who was just a generation ahead of me, well established, clearly doing great things; and, you know, the atmosphere in the Office has always been very collegial

and colleagues are not nasty to each other, they don't bite each others' backs the way they do in museums and, I have to say now, to some extent in Universities.

Particularly in retrospect I think that is something one has to flag up a lot about the Foreign Service, the chummy-ness of it.

M.M. I quite agree. A wonderful atmosphere and it also exists in most Embassies too, I think.

J.B. Oh, very much. I will come to talk about that later if you want. Let me give you my other George Brown story. Because I was Resident Clerk, which meant you were called up at night, there were not batteries of telephones or anything like that. There was an old fashioned dial telephone by your bed and I do remember I was on duty on the night the Six Day War began. I think I have got the right war.

M.M. This was the Arab - Israeli.

J.B. Yes, the Arab - Israeli, the second one. We knew that there was something going on and I think I was invited to call our Ambassador in Tel Aviv, I can't remember his name; anyway he said: yes, he could hear firing or whatever it was. I then woke up the Foreign Secretary who produced the immortal line - he said 'umm' and I said 'Secretary of State, sorry to disturb you; the balloon has just gone up in the Middle East and he said 'Well, in that case, I suppose I shall have to put on my trousers!' He had one of those immensely active minds and he would 'phone the Resident Clerk in the middle of the night saying ' I have been thinking about so and so and can you get me an answer on such and such' and the whole machine would start to whirl very early to meet George Brown's latest idea. A very active mind.

M.M. A tragic figure in many ways.

J.B. A tragic figure.

M.M. After that, it was off to Washington.

J.B. Sorry no, I must fill you in; I did two jobs in London: Northern Department, where, as I said, I learnt a very great deal. Then I was moved to the China Desk and again it is an interesting historical observation how little we had to do, how slim the bi-lateral relationship was with China.

M.M. Was China still part of Northern Department?

J.B. No, Far Eastern Department, and Far Eastern Department consisted basically of three chaps, in a room, writing lectures about China or Mongolia for delivery outside, drinking lots of coffee and occasionally playing not mess rugby but third room cricket with a ruler and a rubber. We rather had our tone set for us by David Wilson, who was a pioneer of many things including the habit of dressing down in the Office, coming in in a tweed jacket rather than a suit, let alone striped pants - sociologically interesting. There were three of us working on China, Taiwan and Mongolia in one room, and in a sort of cupboard under the stairs there was a man called Leo Pickles who did Japan. Again, in those days this could be done by one man and he was regarded as a curiosity. Leo had spent years and years in Japan and was said to be unpostable because he had something like eight children; I may exaggerate slightly, but it was that sort of setting. When I was posted to Washington he asked me if I could bring back one of those enormous American cars so that he could take all his family out at one time. It was the tail end of a partly imperial, partly amateur tradition, a structure quite remarkable when you think about it now.

M.M. We obviously had no contact at that stage, at least no dealings on behalf of the United Nations, lobbying for votes.

J.B. Oh yes, there was business to be done. I don't want to say there was none, but none of the kind of regular process that you see now. The processing of a strong bi-lateral relationship, or even a big and difficult bi-lateral relationship, occupies a great deal of manpower - they are all on their screens, there are piles and piles of paper everywhere, meetings round the clock, all that stuff goes into it. Preparation of Ministerial visits, not only foreign policy visits but functional visits, the co-ordination of Whitehall's position on China, all this kind of stuff. All this didn't happen. The

chap who had to write a research piece on China every week or perhaps every month would pop in and have a few words and go away - it was very cosy.

M.M. We did have quite a vigorous Research Department in those days. It no longer exists.

J.B. Yes, of course. This is a big subject, about whether the Office should purely be an operational machine or whether it shouldn't try and keep a bit more of its thinking capacity, its research capacity, its long term projection capacity than it has decided to do.

M.M. Planning functions?

J.B. I think Planners, but I am out of touch, I think Planners are still quite active and, indeed, a key element, but they tend to be run off their feet; and then what is the layer behind that that remembers the names of all the Vice Ministers and so on? I am not sure that they go into that on quite the same scale.

M.M. Presumably they rely on Posts for that kind of data although there isn't that kind of memory there either, is there?

J.B. There were distinguished figures. When I did the Polish desk there was a lady called Sophie Teichfeld, who I think was half Polish, who knew everything, and on the China side there was a well known figure called Kathleen Draycott who knew everything; there were figures like that: Frank Brewer who worked on the China problem in Malaysia in the bad old days; the Office could afford to keep them on the payroll and used them very extensively, and they also formed, I think this may still exist in principle, they formed a very thick interface with the academic community. They had time to go off to conferences. So the structures in that sense were more luxurious.

M.M. One can't help wondering whether it is entirely wise to run the Office quite so

small as it is these days - minimalist. Anyhow, from the Foreign Office - Washington. What sort of function did you have there?

J.B. I was covering Asia in the Chancery. That was important for a number of reasons. U.S. intentions towards Asia are decisive obviously, but it was part of the Anglo-U.S. interface; joint discussion of Asian topics, exchanges of information and all the rest of it.

M.M. SEATO?

J.B. SEATO was part of my desk, but it wasn't an active consideration. The big stories while I was there were Vietnam policy and ultimately the U.S. exit from Vietnam. So I was covering the Nixon phenomenon, Kissinger's re-balancing of the world, Mel Laird's managing of the Pentagon and, not strictly my desk, but I worked very closely with those working on the Congressional front - I made a particular point of getting press cuttings or summaries sent in from our Consulates to read what was in the St. Louis Post Despatch about Vietnam not just what was in the Washington Post, because in the end heartbeat America was going to decide the issue - that was a wonderful subject to work on. We, as Britain, had particular angles - we had our post in Hanoi, we had involvement in historical places like Laos in this or that international machinery, we had the extraction of British subjects from crunch situations. I think when I arrived in Washington that my first job was to try to secure compensation from the Americans who had employed him, for a Brit who had gone missing. There was a lot of specific work like that one had to do. The second big story which followed really was the Nixon China policy.

M.M. That was 1972, wasn't it?

J.B. It was '69-'73 in Washington.

M.M. Did you form the impression that there was independent U.K. thinking about SE Asia? or were we simply consulting the Americans on practically everything and following their line?

J.B. Oh gosh. I am not sure that that is susceptible of a global answer. There were episodes where British Foreign Secretaries, Michael Stewart would be a good example, were under great pressure in the House. Indeed, the Wilson administration as a whole was put under pressure for hewing too loyally to the American line on Vietnam or so it was thought. There were moments such as when shrapnel fell on our Mission in Hanoi where some British were very outspoken. We had our own positions on China which were quite distinct and to which we stuck - particularly on the China seat at the UN but also our Taiwan policy. I think, rightly, we always put a huge premium in our policy formation on actions that would benefit Hong Kong in the long run, in other words we weren't going to do things to oblige anyone that would diminish the force of our position in Hong Kong; I am sure that was right. Indo-China was not of that intrinsic weight to us, it was to some extent a function of our relations with the Americans. There were tactical differences.

M.M. So long as we kept out of it.

J.B. Well, I mean, the Americans would, no doubt, have liked to have us in. I remember one of Wilson's visits to Washington during the Johnson period. He was no doubt put under pressure to do more; that was a consistent feature of the relationship of that period. Particularly as the Australians were militarily involved, which exposed us the more. I don't have any specific contributions to make on that period.

M.M. The Americans were, of course, very strong on relations with Taiwan. They were constantly sustaining them in their opposition to the Chinese.

J.B. Of course. The Congressional feature plays strongly to this day in determining the degree of distance which the American Administration can afford to have from Taiwan and this is a current issue still. Can I just cover one other thing - the characters of the Ambassadors of the day? When I first got there John Freeman was running the Embassy - I thought an admirable figure. I was not privy to any of his domestic turmoil which I gather subsequently was considerable, but I thought he was a good example of a political appointment which actually worked, and he was highly

intelligent, approachable, a good example in that sense for the younger officers. He was succeeded by Cromer who tended not to come to the Office very early for whatever set of reasons, and sometimes he didn't shave either. However, these delays and absences caused the initial rise of Charles Powell who was his young Private Secretary and Charles had to move a lot of the Ambassadorial business, including going down himself to see Kissinger. That was the start of not only Charles's meteoric rise but his unique understanding of working hands on with top Americans. So I think that is a useful observation from your point of view.

M.M. Was Freeman appointed by a Labour government?

J.B. I can't remember.

M.M. Because there was a change of government in 1970 and you were there from ...

J.B. Yes, that is right. I must have caught the tail end of the Wilson government and Freeman was already *en poste* before I arrived, so you have answered your own question. But it was a very good appointment, whoever made it.

M.M. Then obviously it was a Labour appointment.

J.B. That's right. Of course, our Foreign Secretary the next time around, who was a fairly regular visitor, was Alec Douglas-Home.

M.M. Well, it was good that they got value out of John Freeman, who obviously did well in India.

J.B. He was brilliant in India; that's clear from everything that I have heard.

M.M. So back to China 1973 -75. There must have been a fair number of changes since you were there, well it was only six years earlier; still six years is a long time.

J.B. Well, the first is the point that you have already made, that suddenly all the big players were there. The Americans were there. It wasn't an Embassy, it was a Liaison Office but they were there. The Japanese were there on a huge scale. Very important colleagues, for us, the Australians. The Australians had had a trading relationship, a defined one, for a long time but it was operated out of Hong Kong and was described as wheat purchases, but now they had a front rank Embassy and a very important political appointee, Steve Fitzgerald, who was close to Whitlam, and one of the architects of their China policy. New Zealand had front rank people there. Canadians were important. So there was a big Old Commonwealth component. New Commonwealth had been there a bit my first time round, but were much expanded. The world and his wife had discovered China. The Germans were there in force.

M.M. The Federal Republic?

J.B. Yes, they had not been visible my first time round. The Italians and so on - Western Europe was there. Community co-operation was in its infancy. It struck me as a curiosity, but I remember meetings began to happen in Peking at that time. We would have coffee and speculate together; that was the beginning of Community co-ordination in my consciousness.

M.M. Yes, it was because we were negotiating our entry for 1973 and it was foreseen well before that. We had an Embassy by then in Peking?

J.B. Well the Embassy, sorry I am weak on precise dates. Under John Addis, who was my first boss the second time round, and this had happened before I went in, we had negotiated the change of status. We became, and that happened while I was in Washington, an Embassy. We found a form of words to regulate the issue of Taiwan between us and that's on all the records, acknowledging essentially the Chinese claim regarding the position of Taiwan - I can't remember the exact formula but it is well known; it fairly closely paralleled the formulae that were used by most other players. That was the first change. The second change was sociological. The country had not fully recovered from the Cultural Revolution, but it was on the way; there were not street events any more. The third thing, and the big subject of interest, was the issue

of the succession to Mao, how that was going to be run, who was going to come out on top. We, the Western China-watching community, focussed very heavily on that topic. Obviously it wasn't played out in public, but quite a lot of the elements in the debate, in my view, could be deduced from close reading of texts like 'Red Flag', and they did indeed give, in the end, the right clue, which was for the return of Deng Xiaoping. Diplomacy was picking up. Zoo visits, loans of animals, culture were picking up. There were British students in Peking and all that goes with that. We were still, as we are to this day, in our own old pre-Cultural Revolution quarters, therefore not out on the expanding eastern flange of Peking where so many of the new Embassies were being put, essentially in a sort of purdah. Some of the Chinese who had suffered so horribly during the Cultural Revolution were starting to re-emerge. They would resurface as interpreters or translators or whatever. I got back the same cook that I had had before the Cultural Revolution, which was very important to me. I was at this stage married, so I had small children in Peking and you see the city from a different point of view then. People starting to experiment with a Pakistani infant school, an Australian one, some people put children, briefly, into Chinese kindergartens, so one looped into society at a slightly different level.

M.M. And you were able to do that. You were able to meet Chinese?

J.B. Chinese would come from the Ministry for dinner. Chinese would come and meet distinguished visitors. People would come from the Royal Society and that kind of thing which created social occasions. Vice Ministers and ultimately Ministers would come occasionally to foreign Embassies. Business was picking up. As I say, the key question of the succession was not solved; there were several botched shots at it. By this time my boss was Teddy Youde; this was the first time I had worked with him. He was a fine man. I personally had formed the view that 'Red Flag' was telling us that Deng Xiaoping was making a comeback and, I think, some of my colleagues thought I was mad at that stage. I don't wish to claim unique wisdom, but I think I did have it right about Deng. Physically I sighted Deng for the first time when Edward Heath came. Heath had fallen as Prime Minister, but the Chinese like to make a point about loyalty to old friends, so he came all the same. It was very interesting; there were talks, at which I took the note, between Heath and Deng Xiaoping. Heath had been Prime Minister and was in a general sense very well briefed. Deng Xiaoping

had been 10 years or something down on the farm, almost physically with dirt still under his finger nails. I guess he may have been back as high as a Vice Premier but he hadn't been back that long and actually Deng was the better focussed of the two, the better briefed, more in command. They got on fine and Heath, of course, has remained a great chum of the Chinese. I found Deng's abilities, to the extent I saw him, very striking and I have, not in this room, a photograph of John Addis and myself with Deng, of which I am particularly proud, I must say.

M.M. That is a surprising observation about Deng, that he was better focussed than Ted Heath.

J.B. Yes, that was my impression. He also spat a good deal but that has been widely reported.

M.M. Who, Deng?

J.B. Deng was a great user of the spittoon.

M.M. Perhaps it was his country upbringing. So that was an interesting period of your career. Then you came back to the Treasury.

J.B. That was partly a temporary fix and partly an instant broadening and preparation for a new job. I perched in the Treasury for, I can't remember, it may have been as long as a year, or maybe only six months. I think it probably was a year and that was an experience of Whitehall and Whitehall warfare from the inside which I found extremely useful; and was a way to get to know not only the Treasury, for which I have considerable admiration, but a range of domestic departments which I had not bumped into before.

M.M. What were you actually doing in the Treasury?

J.B. I can't remember what it was formally described as, but I sat under a striking figure called Mary Hedley-Miller, who was one of the very determined ladies in the

Treasury, and I worked mostly on oil money. Those were the days, and here is another historical bench mark, when BP could not invest in Alaska without coming and getting specific permission to use so much money from the Treasury. That is a measure of how far we have come, particularly since the Geoffrey Howe financial reforms. It is extraordinary the grip, we are not talking about some ancient tyranny, the way we ran our democracy at that stage, it is extraordinary.

M.M. But then look at the mess we were in in 1976 economically.

J.B. Yes, I remember, literally candlelight occasions.

M.M. Candlelight was '73. '76 was when we went to the IMF.

J.B. You are right. I am mixing the episodes. I must have been in London just before I went to China the second time; it must have been candles because I have a physical memory. Of course it was Denis Healey bringing in the IMF - absolutely right - when I was in the Treasury.

M.M. Having the IMF forced upon him unwillingly.

J.B. Being Denis Healey, he got the best he could out of it. He was a remarkable man. The other thing I remember about the Treasury was relative lack of, (I know they have de-layered more since), the relative lack of vertical layers in the system. Stuff I did, very often ignorant stuff, as an Assistant Secretary (but there was no one else to do it in that clutch of offices) used to go very fast up the short tree. Occasionally even straight to the Chancellor. I was used to a totally different, multi-layer culture, for very good reasons in the Foreign Office; not least the way in which we have to rotate our people. That was a big change.

M.M. It is, of course, such a small department - isn't it?

J.B. True. Looking at it in personal terms, I think it probably stimulated an appetite for autonomy which I was then able to exploit in subsequent jobs.

M.M. So, from that point of view, extremely useful.

J.B. I benefited very greatly from it and also it enabled you to step back one pace from the Foreign Office and look at it from the outside but from within London in a way that is educative.

M.M. And must have been very useful when you went to Bonn as Counsellor Economic.

J.B. It was essential. Above all, politically or presentationally because the Treasury - that is no doubt why the Office in its wisdom really sent me to the Treasury - the Treasury will not trust a man in the field, particularly handling money issues, unless he has been looked over by them. Throughout my time in Bonn I had very good relations with the Treasury.

M.M. Did they have their own representative in Bonn?

J.B. No, they didn't. My office, which had four or five people, I suppose, covered the waterfront including agriculture. The Treasury, rather touchingly, did seem to like and trust our mainstream economic reporting from Bonn which was long established. The 'add on' I tried to offer was perhaps further travel and regional contact-making in West Germany so that we had a whole picture, not just a Bonn-based picture, to report. We had a very good network of Consulates in Germany who warmed to the task of sending me an impression of the local economic situation. Economic Section is a bit of a misnomer because we covered a whole range of European business with the various German Ministries. That ranged from agriculture to industrial policy right across the board and, of course, European monetary issues in which we serviced the Treasury although they were very often in direct touch when it came to a crunch.

M.M. Did you find that the Germans themselves were running these things on a federal basis or were some of those responsibilities for economic matters farmed out to the Länder?

J.B. Well, obviously in terms of formal structures; what you say, I can only nod my head to. I think that there are two useful observations. One is the extent to which dispersal of power is still a reality in the German system, something that the current coalition is running into. But to know Germany really well one has, as I say, to travel to distant parts; this is not true of all European economies. Then the sense as well that Germany is still psychologically pulled East as well as West. And while we had a separate set-up in Berlin it was very much part of the function of my section to know what was going on economically there as well. That's one clutch of observations. The other, which has struck me more and more down the years, is how differently a government operates that is almost permanently in coalition, very often with key ministries split between different parties. And later, when I was working on Community business in New York, again and again there were examples of issues we had to address where manifestly the Economics Ministry and the Foreign Ministry were issuing rather different sets of instructions to members of the German team on the ground. I think that is a feature which our political tradition is rather lucky to avoid. Down the years colleagues have commented so often from within Europe, with envy, on the degree to which Whitehall does manage to keep its total act together.

M.M. Up to now.

J.B. Well, all right! Consistent sets of instructions. I speak of what I know, not of what, I hope, doesn't happen.

M.M. Did you find that when you were in Germany that it was important to speak German? Presumably it is one of your languages.

J.B. Yes, but there is such a difference between learning school or academic German at University, of which I had done plenty, and actually deploying German, particularly for economic subjects, in the field. I would like to say what a great leader we had in Oliver Wright, who sent all the right signals - rewards and punishments in relation to German language ability, clues for young officers on keeping abreast of UK domestic opinion so that you can do your job in the field better, his own example

in flying back tirelessly to wrestle with Margaret Thatcher on German policy and his own example in the field of getting about. There was never a weekend when Oliver didn't go off to a remote part of Germany, often with considerable discomfort. He would very often take in a Shakespeare play in German and would come back and discuss it - he knew his Shakespeare backwards - at the morning meeting on Monday, having first bollocked the Civil Air Attaché on the state of the aeroplanes from Berlin. I mean, what a man! Really my model of the total Ambassador, Oliver Wright.

M.M. He told our programme in an interview that he learnt Wagner's operas off by heart from beginning to end, all his works, before going to Germany. He found this the key to the German character.

J.B. He understood the German character so well. His farewell dispatch was one of the funniest and most perceptive documents I have ever read. One of the few that hasn't been leaked in the current culture. And he would do that so fast, so humorously, so exactly. Fine man, he has remained a friend. The buzz they gave to the Embassy and the encouragement they gave to the drama group and so on was exemplary, and Lady Wright was into everything. So I don't hide the fact that, when I eventually got an Embassy of my own, Oliver Wright was one of my cherished models. He was a very funny man to boot. Anyway, enough about that - gives you the flavour a bit.

M.M. For most of the time you were there in Bonn, Britain was still very much the sick man of Europe economically; did this affect your dealing with the Germans?

J.B. Absolutely.

M.M. The Germans must have been aware of our ...

J.B. Well, I was looking at it the other way. The key demand from the Treasury was 'tell us the German secret,' and we were forever explaining the advantages, which are now seen as gross disadvantages, of the 'Mitbestimmung' system of capital control and the role of the banks and their trade union system - all the things that, if you read the FT now, they are rueing in their latest wages strike. Those were seen then as

virtues, but that is part of time's revenges. Yes, the German economy was very strong with huge marketing targets for the UK which we had to attack. Great potential for us, particularly with a relatively weak currency. A lot of money went into trade promotion. There was a perpetual bureaucratic battle about whether, if you like, the intellectual headquarters of our trade promotion should be in the Embassy in Bonn or down the road in Düsseldorf. That was one of those ping pong matches which, for all I know, lasts to this day. But there was good investment by our Government services in export promotion, invisibles promotion, right through Germany, and one couldn't complain about the recognition of what had to be done or the effort. The Germans probably despised us economically, but they continued to envy us culturally and that is the sort of card Oliver Wright played so well. Not only the Shakespeare but the style card; he expressed it - that very fine suit and one of those Jermyn Street shirts just a bit frayed - almost deliberately, and the German Ministers couldn't match this. And we had the asset, increasingly of course, of Margaret Thatcher who was a dominating personality; the Germans couldn't but admire her and I have seen her wrap Helmut Schmidt absolutely around her little finger and extract a cheque for the Rhine army almost visibly from him. There were other cards to play. The Germans were very close to the Americans themselves, but there were aspects in which they knew we were that degree closer. And we had The Queen. We had a very successful Royal Visit and I remember Oliver signing off a telegram with words to the general effect "Bugger the European Community and long live The Queen!" So that about sums it up. We did have real assets, linguistic assists too. One mustn't be too depressed. I think where I am depressed, speaking very frankly, is over the failure of British diplomacy down the years to drive a bigger wedge between France and Germany. I am putting this very crudely, but I think that has been the essential failure. We did all the right things to be close to Germany. We have done all the right things to try to forge a relationship of much better understanding with the French. And there are many, many substantive points in common. But we could never quite get a foot in between the two; that is my perception. Never quite found the device. And going around the corner to the Spanish and Italians has never quite worked out either.

M.M. It may be partly to do with our attitudes to European institutions generally, which has always been a bit reluctant, has it not?

J.B. You are putting words in my mouth and actually I don't entirely agree. I mean, colleagues, and I think Julian Bullard would be a leading one in this line of thought, said if we could get the manners right, if we could get the words right, if we could get the presentation right, some of these difficulties would go away. I actually think that the difficulties are more substantial and I don't have any quick recommendations on how to crack this; but there are profound differences in political culture between mainland Europe and ourselves. It is not that Britain is just hung up on World War Two as German ministers like to say these days. I think that there are real differences of perception about how the citizen relates to the State and who should be running what functions. Coming back to Oliver Wright, I saw him recently, and he showed me an article he had written. He said: there is one profound difference between us and continental Europe - it is known as the English Channel. Now he has genius for simplification, but I think there is a lot in that. I find it, I am reminded of it, coming back to Britain after my career and seeing the way in which we tackle subjects such as education, student clubs and organisations - we are different. Something I meant to say, sorry I am getting on my soap box, but I meant to say about my first time in Hong Kong, one of the features there, in those days, was Britain's still, if you like "colonial" in inverted commas engagement. The British were so visible in a particular kind of administrative culture. Terrific commitment of young people in organising roads, building dams. All those big water schemes were just starting in Hong Kong and there were lots and lots of young British middle class engineers with their girl friends, sports cars, dinghy sailing at the weekend, slightly too long shorts - and it felt properly a British culture and we have forgotten how much that played in the world. It is, not so long ago, how we were organised.

M.M. We don't seem to see it quite so much within the boundaries of this island, do we?

J.B. No, we don't seem to see it much within the boundaries of this island, but all our historical efforts went to other forms of organisation than actually getting on well with continental Europe, and I am not surprised that it remains difficult. In my contention, it is difficult.

M.M. An effort has to be made.

J.B. I totally agree with that, and that is one reason why resources have to go into, obviously, language training, familiarization; good people have got to be put in the Chanceries in Bonn and Paris and we must fight the good fight.

M.M. I agree, very strongly. Anyhow, after Bonn you went back to North America again. You do seem to have gone to the most important places in the course of your career.

J.B. I have never had a boring posting. This is not hypocrisy, but I am quite sorry that I never served in Africa. I have visited there extensively. I am deeply sorry that I never served in India and then there are lots of other places I could name. I have not thought of myself remotely as a kind of predestined inner circuit man, very much the contrary.

M.M. Well, I suppose, starting off at difficult posts.

J.B. I remember, actually, and I would like to give you this one. When I was first posted to Washington and, I guess, I bumped into Percy Cradock in Whitehall he said 'where are you going? I hear it is Washington'. And I said something totally idiotic like - 'Yes, I am a bit disappointed, I had hoped for something more exotic.' Percy looked absolutely astonished; I don't know if he will remember that, but I remember it now with self criticism because: a) the United States is in many senses exotic and b) I had totally missed the point; it was the political centre of the world, extremely interesting.

M.M. So this time it was New York and the United Nations. At any rate there is a certain exoticism about that.

J.B. Certainly. Of course, in a sense it was not America at all and, I mean, it was New York which we loved. We had very small children with us but we insisted on living in the city though I was only doing the economic portfolio. It was a requirement for Security Council people but not for us, - we were rather encouraged to live out in the comforts of rural Westchester. But we made exactly the right choice. I needn't go into that, but New York in family terms was great. The job was

wonderful, partly because they had de-layered and had removed the Economic Minister, partly because on the other side the political machinery and the Boss were so busy with Security Council issues that I had a considerable measure of autonomy to which I had already attached importance. And I had wonderful bosses who were prepared to trust me and to steer where necessary, counsel and so on but were not perpetually in my hair. First I had Tony Parsons, who was another great man to work for, and then John Thomson who was excellent and became a close friend. So I was extremely fortunate.

M.M. John Thomson former High Commissioner in India?

J.B. Yes, indeed. From Cambridge too, you see. He is J.J. Thomson of the electron's grandson.

M.M. What sort of issues were coming up in the UN?

J.B. On the political side, which only spilt over for us, of course, the Falklands, which was a fascinating show for us to watch; we had to defend the front against the Argentines on the economic side, which in the end boiled down to depriving them of an effort to 'reverse the verdict' in the economic context. I was responsible for the Economic and Social Council, the Second Committee, which was economic affairs, the Third Committee of the General Assembly, which was social affairs, and a whole range of relations with the Specialised Agencies - population people, development people, food people and so on. We had quite a small team but we operated very closely to instructions from specialised departments in Whitehall. Very often they would come out for a particular conference and we would set up a mixed team. I enjoyed that hugely. So from my point of view there was a certain amount of team building and steering. I had something like three First Secretaries and two Second Secretaries - outstanding characters, particularly William Ehrman who is now Ambassador in Luxembourg and Glynne Evans who is now Ambassador in Chile; they were extraordinary. Our strategic mission was, if you like, to be sensible and constructive on the range of business that goes through UN agencies, everything from better family planning regimes for the Third World to proper labelling of chemicals so that they are not dumped in Sierra Leone or whatever - all that stuff in which we were

genuinely creative - while avoiding any prejudice to the IMF and the International Financial institutions generally.

M.M. Had you anything to do with food and agriculture?

J.B. Well, they weren't based in New York. FAO was based in Rome. Yes, that fell under the general perspective of the ECOSOC subjects, so there would be issues of tipping the political balance in an organisation, voting for this or that candidate. It was a seamless, endless sort of web. Within that there were two particular things: one was maximising the constructive role of the European Community, which was visibly growing at the UN. The Americans had well-known difficulties in making their weight felt constructively at the UN. They were not paying their dues but it went beyond that. They were not always getting quick instructions from Washington. They were almost, you could say, an object of suspicion to their Administration. They were not quick on their feet tactically. Admitting all their difficulties (and it didn't solve their difficulties to put a big US political personality in charge of their office in New York; that just set up further tensions, I think), sometimes they were very good allies. Bi-laterally we were very close to them, but sometimes there were very visible tensions such as those between Tony Parsons and Jeane Kirkpatrick over the Falklands war. But going beyond that, the European Union had to try to occupy the centre of the field – “sensible” positions, if you like, in quotes - had to try to marginalise destruction from the Soviet Bloc (I will come to that in a minute) and build a constructive relationship with the moderates within the group of 77, some of whom simply wanted to tear down all existing international structures and economic strategies, (others were perfectly sensible). So I am just giving you a flavour of the daily work.

M.M. Who among the Group of 77 was interested in tearing down these structures?

J.B. There is always a heavy radical component. It would vary from issue to issue. There were people like the Indians, who felt rather permanently aggrieved by their failure at the UN to turn huge size into visible clout; there were Islamic radicals of various kinds; some Latin Americans were very radical; the leader of the G 77 was

the Mexican, in my time, notoriously radical. Some were operating on clear instructions from home, others were wild cards. So the job for us was to find out who the moderate at anyone time or on anyone issue might be; it might be the Bangladeshi; it might well be some one in the New Commonwealth who had studied in and enjoyed the UK. One was always aware of that - and of what we risked giving up by the upheavals in our educational policies towards the Commonwealth. It was an ongoing task. You ask about the Treasury concerns; I mean, the preoccupation in Whitehall, particularly in the Treasury, was to avoid having us inadvertently, at the UN, put in a single comma or phrase in some collective resolution which would give away the broader game.

M.M. They didn't want greater UK bilateral expenditure.

J.B. That goes without saying. But they recognized a serious battlefield when they saw one and, you know, the Head of Finance Department or somebody from the Treasury would very often fly out for a crunch negotiation. There was a particular series of negotiations named the 'Global Negotiations' which were focused by G 77 radicals particularly on cutting the ground from underneath the existing institutions - that was the beginning and end of it really. And that had to be resisted. In the end that was talked out of time; basically, that was the solution. That had a high level Whitehall focus. A good example.

M.M. I find that really very surprising because most of those G 77 countries were hoping to obtain benefits from these international organisations. They were the net beneficiary after all. How could they seriously work against them?

J.B. I think the answer to that, from their point of view, is that the benefits are nice and one would expect them to continue to flow, but that is not the same as hands on levers of power and, from their perception, the people who had the whip hand in the IMF were the Americans, the Japanese, the Germans and, in a moderate measure, ourselves. As I have implied, the Americans were not always the best people to present the reasoned case at the UN, but there was a huge rôle for us in getting moderate Europeans off their backsides and speaking to the same hymn sheet. My first experience after I arrived - within days we were in the Presidency in that

particular year - was to learn how to pull the Community together as the first essential of doing anything useful on the economic side. It was different on the Security Council side: we, Britain, had a strong and entrenched position and great skills which were well deployed. There were no built in Permanent Seats on the economic side and you had to play the game as it stood.

M.M. Wasn't it around about that time that we withdrew our support from that organisation in Paris.

J.B. UNESCO?

M.M. Yes, UNESCO.

J.B. There was some propaganda turbulence, I wouldn't put it more strongly than that. New York in that sense is rather parochial, New York wouldn't give tuppence for whether we were in or out of UNESCO. New York would, per contra, pay close attention to whether our contribution to the UNDP, the key development organisation in New York, or indeed UNICEF or the UNFPA was going down. We would get stick not only from the UN machine, but from many respectable and well established compatriots working in Headquarters; there were some big figures there, Joan Anstee on the economic side, Brian Urquhart more on the traditional Security Council side; but there were very respected senior Brits who would feel very let down if we were to cut down our contributions. This is, of course, one area in which there was and is a squeeze between the European imperative which is for the British government to put more money into collective and visible European aid, and our own bi-lateral activity and profile. We felt the brunt of that in New York.

M.M. That was pretty interesting really.

J.B. Yes, very interesting. One more thing, - sorry I am probably going on too long! - I actually had an ODA person on my team after a certain point and that was very good, but in any event we worked very closely with ODA in the sort of business I described and I saw their real depth and strength from that angle. One, you would have to say, 'operation' that we mounted - and this I owe predominately to William

Ehrman - we decided that we had heard altogether too long and too much about the glorious Soviet aid programme and what they were doing for the Third World. So in the relevant committee, having secured John Thomson's support and perhaps the slightly questioning support of Whitehall, we launched a speech which absolutely demolished the Soviet pretension to be a serious aid donor and pointed up to what extent their purported aid performance was based on the supply of arms. If you want to ask the question that people were asking in the talk here at Churchill College last night (the 1999 Roskill Lecture) - can you make a difference? The answer is yes. There will be specific acts or presentations or speeches at a particular moment that can sway a much wider audience; and that was a very effective, one has to say, 'manoeuvre'.

M.M. And invisible, of course, to the general public in this country. Which is one of the sad things. Anyway, after New York you came back to the Foreign Office as an Assistant Under Secretary of State - 1984.

J.B. Yes, for a rather brief period. Partly to keep me warm for my next job and partly because they were a bit short handed. The Hong Kong negotiations were in full flow. Percy Cradock, the Deputy Secretary, was fully absorbed with those. Particularly the Hong Kong Department but also Far Eastern Department and the others were feeding into that busily and the regular Under Secretary, David Wilson, was himself very absorbed in the negotiations, actually travelling out a lot and being resident on the spot in Hong Kong. So for all those reasons it was felt that for a brief period one could double-bank. There was quite a lot else going on in Asia at the time that needed a bit of a steer.

M.M. So you were focusing definitely on Hong Kong.

J.B. Well, rather not; those negotiations were already in train. Structures for negotiations were already in place. I was not a player in the '84 negotiations, but I was a player in the management of other Asian issues during that period, of which there were a number: rows with Malaysia, the repatriation of the Australian Constitution. I was involved in a lot that was just beginning. We had an active Asian policy, we had a lot of bi-lateral business, clients to be looked after and received.

M.M. What was the problem with Malaysia? Was this the one that involved aid for the Pergau Dam project?

J.B. That may have been where it began, but as I recall it the issue at the time was essentially a trade boycott. David Gillmore was our man on the spot and I remember him phoning me up because things had to be decided fairly urgently.

M.M. So it was the trade boycott. Why had they imposed that?

J.B. Well, there is always a mixture, and Prime Minister Mahathir much resented the way he had been treated by the British press. I think I am probably conflating things. There had been an issue of financial support for Malaysian and other students in the UK. There was a big change in Government education policy, funding policy, which I deplore - I have deep respect for many of the achievements of the Thatcher administration but that is one thing that has caused us to lose. I would say that as an University administrator now; but I have seen the struggle and effort that has to be made to keep up our access to this pool of future leadership talent in Asia and the struggle there always is to generate sufficient funds. A lot of rebuilding has had to happen, I think.

M.M. It is rather weird that a successful country like Malaysia, an outstandingly successful country like Malaysia, should react in this rather strong way to a little bit of self interest on our part or apparent self interest on our part.

J.B. I can follow the logic and I will respect the logic as logic. The policy result has not been good for us. It has meant it is far less clearly automatic for future leaders in those economies to come to us. Far more have gone, as a consequence, to America, Australia and Canada. I am experiencing this now in some Asia/Europe work we are doing under the ASEM banner.

M.M. Under the what?

J.B. ASEM - Asia/Europe Meetings. Regular Prime Ministerial meetings, every two years, who have issued a group of us with some homework on developing a future

road map for Asia/Europe. I think that almost the central subject we focused on is the need for closer educational links, if we are to be closer in a mutually beneficial way. Ergo, arguing back from that, I think we were undoubtedly damaged by the action which caused so much talent to flee to North America.

M.M. It did strike Malaysia much harder than anyone else in S.E. Asia, it seems, Singapore, Thailand.

J.B. I think that there was a big disparity of numbers in the first place; there were an awful lot of Malaysians coming. One of the solutions now being pursued by Malaysia is to try and set up their own English style campuses on the ground there. Whether that is the best thing for them time will tell, but it has clearly removed part of the market, geographically, from the UK to Malaysia and that can't be good for us.

M.M. Very sad really. So that was your brief period in the FCO before going out to be Political Adviser Hong Kong.

J.B. That's right.

M.M. You were there for three years?

J.B. Two years. January '85 to January '87. Just two years, which was short.

M.M. Who was the Governor at that time?

J.B. Teddy Youde again. Wonderful Governor.

M.M. He had taken over from MacLehose by then.

J.B. Teddy was in Hong Kong throughout the negotiations, the agreement. He steered it, presented it, kept the confidence of EXCO in a way I don't think anyone else could have done. He never spared himself.

M.M. EXCO was?

J.B. The Executive Council which was small, just a tableful of people chaired by the Governor.

M.M. Do you think that there is anything in the complaint by Chris Patten that he didn't do enough for 'democracy'?

J.B. I try not to get dragged into this rather personalized debate. If you apply conscience in a rather unhistorical way nevertheless to an historical period, you could probably say that particularly Labour governments way back should have moved faster on broadening the franchise in Hong Kong. I think it is a reasonable proposition to debate. However advice from Hong Kong, at that period, was consistently against it. I think that there was genuinely very little grass roots pressure for change back then. It would, at any period, have been regarded as poison by the Mainland and would have prejudiced longer term chances of stability and bringing off a settlement; and it would have been imprudent at a time when we had not thoroughly tested the water with the Mainland about the chances of our staying on. I think you have to be pretty unhistorical to take that line.

M.M. Unrealistic too!

J.B. I am currently in a row with some of the Chinese civil liberties lobby because I answered a fax, perhaps rather imprudently, from a North American academic saying what I thought, which he promptly passed around to all his friends and now my in-tray is full of stuff every day about Chinese horrors in Tibet and, of course, their appalling human rights record and so on. All of which is admitted, but it doesn't give you clues to how, somehow, day by day, to manage a relationship with China, particularly a relationship which doesn't swallow up Hong Kong. So, I think that that is about the best I can do for you on that. I think that Teddy worked very closely with the best leaders available throughout the period of negotiation and had their confidence. He, in turn, did not spare himself in terms of travel, but he came back repeatedly and laid it on the line to London about what they had to deliver. And when Teddy died there was a real manifestation of popular grief in Hong Kong in way that is not customary.

M.M. That is surprising. What was it that he required London to deliver.

J.B. To strain every muscle to deliver the best result they could. Even if it meant putting pressure on the domestic political system here, and that has been true at every stage, including in the sort of slightly incremental improvements which were gained for Hong Kong after the signature of the Joint Declaration; in other words, there is always a potential or actual cost in terms of immigration policy or presentation of immigration policy or opinion in this or that Party or domestic opinion.

M.M. Immigration into Hong Kong?

J.B. No, immigration into the UK. If you write an ideal scenario in relation to freedom of movement into the UK you run slap into the requirements of the opposite lobby which is to restrict immigration into the UK and that's been the central nature of the game. Teddy, I would say emphatically, was not marketing London solutions to Hong Kong. He was seeking to establish in London solutions to give the Hong Kong people a real chance of a future. He did his absolute best and that was recognized. And, I think, where I have to restrain myself a bit on the Patten front is that Percy's role throughout was entirely realistic - driven by absolute judgements, well balanced calculations and close knowledge of just how far Ministers could be brought in the UK. This stuff recently, not necessarily from Chris Patten but from his hangers-on, about total betrayal of liberal principles and the use of the word 'traitor' and this kind of thing, I think, is absolutely disgraceful.

M.M. What was the linkage between Hong Kong and Peking on our side?

J.B. You mean our people in Peking.

M.M. And you in Hong Kong.

J.B. I wasn't there during the negotiations which was the most interesting period. I was there after the signature of the Joint Declaration and, if you like, for the period of implementation, and my job was much less high strategic policy than making the Declaration work in practice, rapidly developing the relationship with the local

Mainland, whether in terms of local political understanding or infrastructure. This was a society that was preparing itself, at a speed of knots, for economic re-integration with the Mainland and marketing itself to the Mainland as a place they should leave alone because it was so well infrastructured, so well managed that it would redound to the success and credit of the Mainland; that was the name of the game. So the job I had from Teddy was to run with that but, of course, go to the meetings of the Joint Liaison Group, chaired by David Wilson out of London, with Embassy participation as well as my participation as Political Adviser and make sure that our corner was well defended. In particular, as part of what you might call local 'sweeping up' - and this was a very good example of an issue on which Teddy was determined to play the hand, not let it be played by others, by London or Peking requirements - we dealt with the long outstanding issue of the Kowloon Walled City about which I could go on till the cows come home. But there was a strong range of business which could best be settled locally in Hong Kong between various clutches of local authorities.

M.M. Doing your best for Hong Kong.

J.B. Certainly that's the rubric, but the tactics in the case of the Walled City were drawn up from Hong Kong, driven from Hong Kong, and the understandings with the Chinese were basically arrived at with local Chinese mainland authorities - NCNA. And I am jolly proud of it.

M.M. NCNA ?

J.B. Which is the New Chinese News Agency which was the de facto Mainland representation in Hong Kong. We received them in principle as journalists; in practice a lot of inter-governmental business was done. It was a convenient fiction. Just as the local fiction that I was not of the Foreign Office - I was the chap on the Governor's staff. I would have to say another of the duties was keeping the foreign consular corps in Hong Kong well informed and sweet. That was important, because they in turn reported back to capitals playing major hands like Ottawa, Canberra and so on, and had a good deal to say for or against our management.

M.M. There was a lot of grief expressed when we finally handed over, a lot of people with tears in their eyes and all that.

J.B. Including Margaret Thatcher on good authority and certainly the heavens wept because I was there.

M.M. But what did we actually lose?

J.B. That is not the question I ask. I ask perpetually, and I think that this is the question of conscience for everyone, did the people of Hong Kong lose anything that didn't have to be lost either by force of history or any other forces? I really think that we carved out the best deal that realistically could be carved out for Hong Kong in its actual geographical and historical situation, given also the fundamental disparity of forces between a large well armed Mainland and a very distant Mother Country. I think that was also the judgement of the Hong Kong people at the time. You have to place your bets where you can on that one. There are people who will argue, there are newspaper commentators and highly respected public figures who will argue, that this was never publicly tested in Hong Kong and I guess they are right; but on a reasonable, practical test of what was achievable and what was going to wash, I think the negotiations came out as well as they could have; and I have no truck myself with the thought that there were huge missed tricks, that had the Chinese been asked the right question they would have immediately said 'do stay for another century,' or if we had said 'we will bribe the Mayor of city 'x' he will somehow throw his weight our way, or if we had said 'Oh we will work for you to come into the WTO immediately', the GATT as it was then. I think that these are illusions.

M.M. I quite agree. Let's not forget that the Chinese were risking their lives to get into Hong Kong as it was, without any additional sweeteners. All they wanted was freedom to earn their living.

J.B. Well, the Mainland individual Chinese wanted freedom to make their living. The Mainland authorities were under domestic political pressure; of course, they were steered crucially by the personal views of Deng Xiaoping; they had to get Hong Kong

back as a sovereign act of planting the flag; and in my view nothing was going to deflect that. So, and particularly I think that this was Teddy's thinking, how can you bring in the lever of Chinese self interest, as the biggest lever you have, to persuade them to lay off and not destroy Hong Kong and its people? And, I think, broadly that was achieved. I have currently, like any newspaper reader, considerable unease about what is going on about the testing of the Basic Law in the Hong Kong courts, but leaving that for the moment on one side, one has to say in terms of general political confidence and mood music the Hong Kong thing is going pretty well; and as Baroness Dunn was saying to me at dinner last night, I mean, the surprise for her too - this is a truism but it is worth repeating from that source - the surprise, for which indeed the Hong Kong civil service were not at all prepared, was the economic downturn, which was the last thing anyone expected. They did expect political turbulence which has never happened. So by that rather crude test the Joint Declaration has done well. By the test of what is going on elsewhere you come out with a fairly acceptable assessment.

M.M. I want to come back to this question of what did HMG lose when they hauled down the Flag? I don't think they lost anything.

J.B. I think we lost very little. There were position papers being written, I remember, way back in Whitehall when I was a very young man in the Department, in the days when Far Eastern Department were seen as the people who understood China and Hong Kong Department under Bunny Carter were seen as the people who ran Hong Kong. Very little did the twain meet and in those days big papers were written, I remember and I don't think I am being indiscreet, illustrating how much not only we but the West as a whole would lose by the reversion of Hong Kong; and that was the sort of belief that prevailed in those days. I think, that at this stage in history, most of our friends and allies didn't think it absent from their expectations that we should have to give up Hong Kong. They followed the way we did it very closely. Mostly, I think, they admired the job we did. I keep saying 'we'; I must stress again that I wasn't party to those negotiations, but I defend the result strongly, and I think it brought us, on the whole, credit. Though some people regard this argument as less respectable, there is no doubt that the fact that the Hong Kong settlement is behind us has enabled the Chinese politicians to take more interest in a relationship with us. So

it has cleared an obstacle; it wasn't a prime consideration at any stage, but it is an effect. Of course, in a way, the question is obscured by what has happened elsewhere; the big subjects have rushed on us and the collapse of the Soviet Union is something that, for most people, dwarfs the issue of the management of Hong Kong; war in the Balkans, continuing chaos in the Middle East, these are all very big considerations for the world community, so they are not focused on what a fist we made of it. For us now, I think - it sounds a bit political, but I think it is a real point - not losing the focus on Hong Kong, going on (I speak now as an University person) building relations with the Hong Kong institutions, giving them as they deserve access to the global professional community - those are things that are well worth doing and which we are duty-bound to do.

M.M. I think that it is a pretty good story, all round.

J.B. I think it is a pretty good story as long as one doesn't go around saying it is a perfect story - because it never could be a perfect story. If you use the test of the perfect story you end up with the disgraceful attacks that have been printed on the series of perfectly honourable hardworking British public servants who, let it be remembered, were working ultimately to political masters in Whitehall, including the Thatcher administration. They are the people who blessed the deal. These were not deals cut by civil servants and signed off by civil servants.

M.M. Oh well, there it is. After your time in Hong Kong back, once again, to the FCO for a couple of years as Deputy Under Secretary of State.

J.B. Yes, well I did two jobs back in the FCO so I was there, unusually, for something like 5 years in total. Both jobs were absolutely gripping, quite full of toil, but much enjoyed. It suited us in family terms to bring up our small family in the UK for a change. We lived in a tiny basement in SW1 and I walked to the Office. It worked out well. The Deputy Secretary job was a very mixed bag; I mean, much of it was relations with the MOD or the various agencies, some of it was Ireland, some of it was specific to counter-terrorism co-ordination. It was full of variety and I loved it! And, now I think it is permissible, one can say that one of the functions was sitting on the JIC, again under Percy Cradock, which was a great privilege.

M.M. Was he at that stage an adviser to Mrs. Thatcher?

J.B. He was a double header. He was an adviser to Mrs. Thatcher and Chairman of the JIC and, I mean, I don't want to drag College business into this, but it was partly the issue we looked at in the Roskill Lecture last night - how you apply brains usefully in the pursuit of public business. The JIC as it was run then was a model, I think.

M.M. And it must be the route through which your planning papers or think-pieces get into the machine.

J.B. It is not the opening route. The individual departments have planning machinery which nourishes good thinking and hopefully good actions, but for Whitehall as a whole it is an admirable machinery.

M.M. Of course, it doesn't actually explain why, for example, the Falklands dispute arose or why now we are facing a problem over Gibraltar with the Spanish or why there is so much indecision about subjects like the single currency.

J.B. You are picking on three areas, on none of which am I remotely an expert. The general question is there and it was only partly answered last night: you must have good information and you must analyse it intelligently; which is exactly what was said last night; but what you can't guarantee is the political response, the political use that is made, given all the distractions afflicting Ministers. There were clearly mistakes made over the Falklands, though exactly at what stage of the intellectual process I am not entirely sure; but I think you could say generally there was a failure of political response or a failure to appreciate how the other side might read your actions. I imagine Gibraltar is essentially a problem of both Spanish and British politics rather than a failure of information in any sense. So it is a failure to handle or drive convergence of policy.

M.M. These things are two-faced.

J.B. They usually are. The currency? I have, and I don't think that it is idiosyncratic, no views on the single currency except in the sense that the FCO is often characterised, crucified and cartoonised as being a bunch of lickspittles of European tendencies, and in consequence the expectation in Cambridge, say, is that anyone who has spent time in the FCO will be very anxious to give an honorary degree to Helmut Kohl or run with a high profile for this or that aspect of European studies which happens not in any sense to be my position. I happen to have spent a lot of my career in other places and think that we have a wider vocation. I happen to think, which is in close tune with a rather deeply rooted, if you like 'old left', type of economic thinking in this College - I happen to think that being impaled on a continental-based single currency deprives us of great room for manoeuvre nationally and that the strain, if we sign up, may well have to be taken in employment policy or elsewhere. That is a sort of antique Keynesianism if you like, but I think there are quite a lot of people in Cambridge who are not terribly happy about the consequences of the single currency for the UK.

M.M. Well, it has pluses and minuses and which side you fall down on is ...

J.B. I think the government have got it about right - wait and jolly well see before doing anything irrecoverable.

M.M. That seemed to be the policy of the previous government.

J.B. That doesn't make it wrong!

M.M. No it doesn't! By no means! I think, possibly, it is the only sensible one.

J.B. My view is affected by perceptions from my time in Tokyo of the benefits that actually - not political benefits, but economic benefits - accrued very rapidly from our disengagement from the ERM trap. I am sorry you probably find me hopelessly recidivist on this, but that is where I am on the currency, as you asked!

M.M. But before we get onto Tokyo, can you just say a little bit about being Chief Clerk because I don't think I've had anyone contributing views or opinions about that particular job.

J.B. You are probably being very tactful about the previous job. There is a thing I would like to say about the previous job which is how lucky we are in the UK that basically purposes of foreign policy and the tasks of the various agencies are constant and such efforts are made to keep the total gang in harmony. The Assessment process, the JIC, which we have just talked about, is materially helpful in ensuring that, but a great deal of personal and political effort goes into making sure that we are all pointing the same way; that is a huge strength. When you see a culture or a country in which that isn't the case you see that very quickly and it is most disadvantageous. So there you are, if I am asked about my experience that's about it.

M.M. Is that a DUSS task or is that a Chief Clerk task?

J.B. That was a Deputy Under Secretary it was called. Before I took the job, it was called DUS (Defence and Intelligence) and I think people probably felt that was unnecessary exposure of the incumbent so they just politely called it DUS (Defence) after that but making sure that Whitehall as a whole was pulling together on counter-terrorism in particular in, at least, policy terms was important, as was the ongoing friendly relationship with individual agencies, and, as was proper, access to Ministers for the people running those agencies; and as goes without saying, proper Ministerial control of the whole caboodle. So I am just getting my chance to put a big tick against the way we do that in the UK, which I think is exemplary.

M.M. Do you think we ever have failures with the Ministry of Defence because they have a slightly different view of overseas commitments?

J.B. We are bound to have disputes or disagreements - that goes without saying - but we also have very good machinery for debating these things through; and I have seen various Foreign Secretaries operating with the Defence Secretary or operating, come to that, with the Northern Ireland Secretary and there are all sorts of ways, formal or

informal, of making sure that the current is right. In the formal sense, as that DUS, I used to go and sit on the Chiefs of Staff committee which was a great privilege. And once I had failed to replace the battery in my alarm clock when it was the annual photograph of the Chiefs of Staff, so I was delayed and I arrived when all these great men with all the scrambled egg were coming out of their room at MOD. And that great and good gentleman David Craig, Air Chief Marshal, called them all back in so that I could have my photo included, and I have that picture, much treasured, to this day. All I am saying is that I would counsel anyone against assuming that the current is somehow likely to be permanently bad between FCO and MOD, I don't think so.

M.M. We still have an FCO Defence Department don't we?

J.B. Yes, we do. There is a relationship down the line between individual geographical departments and people doing equivalent work at MOD. MOD often take an extremely sophisticated view of the politics of a situation and what is likely to be necessary and feasible, just as sophisticated as anything in the Foreign Office, I could say. So there is a lot to be said on that side of the ledger.

M.M. Do you think that the current fashion for open government and all that and the degree to which the Intelligence Services are being exposed to public gaze is a good thing?

J.B. I personally wouldn't have started from there. I wouldn't have invented such an open system if it hadn't somehow, step by step, become a political necessity. In the general sense I am an open sort of fellow and I have always very specifically persisted and persisted and persisted again with the Press, trying to develop a more constructive way of presenting our policies, fielding their questions - let that pass. I think there is still a respectable argument for the view that our intelligence abilities were respected the more when they were less completely open to the world. I am sure professional practitioners would argue that and I think I would agree. The key test though, and this is not avoiding the question, is, in the end, whether in practice they do their job as well or better than in the past and crucially whether the new dispensation enables them to go on recruiting really able people. I have a very high respect for the quality

of personnel they have attracted in the past. Those are the sort of tests I would apply. Not an ideal option.

M.M. Let's hope that they do continue in the same way. Finally we have brought all your labours up to 1992 when it was HMA Tokyo.

J.B. Except you haven't let me have my day in Court on the Chief Clerkery.

M.M. Oh no!

J.B. I am happy to come back to that but I would like to say a few things about the Service, obviously.

M.M. Please do.

J.B. I don't know if you have any particular coat racks you want me to hang my obsessions on but ...

M.M. Let's hang them on the Chief Clerk.

J.B. I have just had a letter, funnily enough, from a former Chief Clerk saying exactly what I would like to say: which is that the Service is an intensely human community and probably in a concentrated form, given that everyone else is so busy, it is the Chief Clerk's responsibility to make sure that colleagues continue to treat each other, but even more their juniors, and not their diplomatic juniors but all their staff right down the line, in a civilized way. As I think I said before, it is a very collegial ministry now under huge pressure - not just money, but layering and all that, but furious work pressures, with probably, let's face it, less sympathetic attention from Ministers than was true when I worked for Geoffrey Howe or even Douglas Hurd in his rather austere way. Ministers are just too busy and they have other agendas. So a lot, obviously, devolves on the PUS of the day but a lot also specifically devolves on the Chief Clerk, and the things that interested me in that job were necessary modernisation but with a human face, not forgetting the people in the field. The Chief Clerk has to travel - a lot. And recruitment of future talent. All those things, I think,

are absolute keys to the survival of the Service. It is a Service that is so highly respected and so able that it is a national asset.

M.M. Very much so.

J.B. So, I am sorry for pontificating a little bit but I do want to get that sort of line on record.

M.M. I think that sort of stands out. Nobody can really doubt that it is a vital chore.

J.B. You ask from time to time in this discussion what I think of failures. I think that there are unavoidable failures in certain areas of management in the Foreign Office. First of all, management. How do you get better management without letting it interfere with the foreign policy business as such. Looking back, I would probably say that in our efforts to modernise a particular personnel system, we probably swung the pendulum rather hard over in the direction of peer engagement (of itself good) but peer engagement in terms of timetable too - in other words, dragging off all sorts of people from all over the Office into being part of the personnel system in the interest of openness, judging their peers rather than leaving it all to the Chief Clerk and his troops, you know. There has been a penalty in terms of time for everyone, and paper. We have advanced the cause of the wives, I would like to say. That has borne fruit. At last, I see from the newspapers, they are getting their money which is a brilliant negotiating achievement for recent Chief Clerks. We failed totally, as we were bound to, to shield everybody in the Office from either being eased out or being disappointed in their expectations; because the pyramid becomes narrower, there are fewer jobs out there in the field, there are fewer jobs in Whitehall and I am conscious as, I think, are others of my generation of, having been extraordinarily lucky to have ended up where we did, whereas there are no absolutely automatic expectations at all for the next generation.

M.M. I expect that all this openness and freedom, and all the rest of it, is going to mean more people, perhaps, becoming disappointed.

J.B. Well, I am sure that people are already disappointed; that cannot but be the case. I have very able and deserving colleagues still in the Service who are not going to have Missions of their own, at least not major ones. It is a big disappointment for someone who has devoted his or her life to the game. There is no way out of that; they are disappointed. What they do with their disappointment, how they express it, is to be seen.

M.M. Yes, so it is a tricky job, in fact, Chief Clerk,

J.B. I think it is an extremely tricky job, but the reward as always, and the same applies in Colleges, is human contact. The ability, if you can, to make things a little less hard on someone or steer the result a little more humanely. Those things are important.

M.M. Do you think that the Foreign Office is going to attract the right calibre of people in the future, given that salaries are so far behind those in the City or banks ...

J.B. I may not be precisely up to date but I believe it to be the case that still some 2000 people, per annum, are applying for some 20 places. I don't think that has fallen away.

M.M. How about in the Home Civil Service generally? Is it the same situation there?

J.B. I don't really have any basis to make a current judgement on that. I do know a bit about the Foreign Service in the sense that occasionally an undergraduate will come and consult me about my views on the Service and whether they should apply. There seems to be quite a high, although perhaps narrowly focussed, interest in living overseas and working with foreigners; that current still runs strongly among young people. I think what has changed in the Foreign Office, I mean in my working life and even while I was Chief Clerk, was obviously the re-balancing in gender terms which has run very strongly, with so many able women coming forward, and the switch away from traditional disciplines. When I took the Foreign Office exams everyone was either an historian or a lawyer or something similar, the odd classicist,

that sort of thing. The people we were recruiting by the time I finished as Chief Clerk were everything from clergy to nuclear engineers, you know, musicians, poets, all on their merits, very, very able people. I have heard Percy say, and I think he meant it and I think it is right, that the sheer quality of people being taken into the Service now is probably very much higher than half a century ago.

M.M. Really? That is encouraging. Well shall we now go on to Tokyo.

J.B. Yes, Tokyo.

M.M. 1992-96. Japan still booming. Tremendously successful.

J.B. To be exact, having just pretty much stopped booming, although perhaps we didn't all notice it in '92; but I know what you are saying and I agree. Every appearance of a major economy and power that was continuing to cement its position as major role player.

M.M. You didn't have any knowledge of Japanese, I take it.

J.B. I had something like 6 weeks part time Japanese study at an establishment at Oxford Circus, that was all.

M.M. Pretty useless really, isn't it?

J.B. Well, it was a start.

M.M. Better than nothing.

J.B. Our young officers in Japan are extremely well trained. I think, as I have said before, the investment in focused language training is a key component in excellence. It is very often the envy of our colleagues. I think that without a doubt we had the strongest corps of Japanese speakers of any country in the European Union. I think that in many respects we were better than the Americans. I think that I am right in

saying that absolutely, and with no comparisons, we were the first Western country to put young officers into the Japanese Foreign Ministry to work on swaps. And they could hold their own, my young officers. They could not only speak, but they could draft and take records of meetings in Japanese. Something to be proud of.

M.M. Presumably you would recognise Japanese pictograms.

J.B. Yes, broadly. There are some variations.

M.M. They have different meanings.

J.B. Well, yes. There are three Japanese alphabets, alphabets in quotes; they all draw, ultimately, on Chinese ancestors but they have been kind of computed in different ways. There are many absolutely correct Chinese characters carrying broadly Chinese meaning within the Japanese syllabary but there are ones where meanings change. You get the same Chinese character but the meaning has changed - soup and water - things like that. Classic examples. But the real problem is that the written language has been fitted into a spoken language that is structured in a totally different way from Chinese. So it has been massacred, macerated over centuries. So the short answer is that, having done follow-up study in Japan to the extent that time permitted, I am a newspaper reader and in a very tentative way a novel reader, but my spoken Japanese is limited to dinner table conversation and I would never - I could follow professional discussions after a year or so which were interpreted for me by my Second Secretary - would never dream of doing business in Japanese.

M.M. That's fair enough. I expect you found that English was pretty widely spoken in Japan in any case.

J.B. This is where you always make these slightly hesitating Japanese noises! It depends very much who you are talking to, which Ministry you are talking to - indeed whether you are talking to people in Tokyo or further afield. One thing I can say about Japan is that people are very courteous in their treatment of foreigners; they are good to visitors and it goes without saying that they are particularly courteous to Diplomats. It doesn't follow that they all speak English - no, and rather few of them

are deeply at ease with English. I have two Japanese Fellows at this College who have been here some years and they are totally at home, obviously. We have visiting Fellows who manage very well, though there are others who come for a year to Cambridge who don't seem to get a lot out of it linguistically. But you are not going to go to a Japanese village or indeed a provincial town and find lots of people speaking English, absolutely not. So at the crudest level, as a simple visitor on your own, - that's one of the joys about Japan in my time; you didn't have to be escorted, you could go around Japan anywhere - but you had to be able to speak some Japanese to survive.

M.M. What do you think accounts for the success, the astonishing success of the Japanese since the end of the Second World War.

J.B. Well, I mean perhaps this is a slightly simple answer, but you have to remember that the War itself posed a huge, total challenge to Japanese society. Much of their traditional industry had been physically destroyed. The destruction in Japan is something the British public broadly doesn't know about. They have justified complaints about Japanese war behaviour but they haven't seen what Japan herself went through. And then the answers, the response in the general sense: all that huge effort to save, huge capital investment, drawing on original native traditions, developed an extraordinary industrial work ethic which made itself a model until recently. Now, of course, people are picking holes in it. Before that period, up until about 1990, there was a quite extraordinary picture of cumulative success. What the Japanese are hopeless at managing is semi-failure. History suggests that they respond to real crisis, but they are very - it is like trying to decide when the New York stock market is going to stop growing - it is very hard to find the moment of absolute crisis, and they have notably failed on that over the last few years. Economic response to crisis has been lacking, purgation of the Banks has been almost totally lacking until last year. A real drive to reform Japanese politics hasn't yet replaced a half-hearted drive. There has been a cumulative process of change in Japanese politics which one shouldn't laugh out of court, but it is undeniably true that they are not well placed to cope with what is facing them now. It has been enormously frustrating for countries that wish Japan well and know that in their own self interest they need a flourishing

Japan whether politically or economically. Having said all of which, I don't want to leave you with the impression that work suddenly stopped after about a year of my time in Tokyo and that there was nothing that should or could be done; I mean, right through that period in terms of exports, economic co-operation, military training co-operation, defence sales, cultural links, fantastic political links, the curve of the line was just like that - upwards. I think much of that still has the potential to resume.

M.M. Of course, overseas investment also continued after there had been some recession in Japan didn't it?

J.B. Precisely because they could get a more efficient return on their capital investment in the UK - up to a point - but significantly China, Indonesia, Vietnam and so on. That has been prejudiced by events of the immediate past year but the strategy of spreading investment has been entirely justified and vigorously pursued.

M.M. What caused the downturn do you think?

J.B. Fundamentally they had priced themselves out.

M.M. Through wages?

J.B. Wages, cost of machinery, all these things.

M.M. Rent.

J.B. Rent, of course, the rent bubble was a factor. Even now Tokyo is not cheap.

M.M. Was it foreseen?

J.B. No, a possibility of blips in all companies is foreseeable in a sense. But what was not foreseen, I think, was the scale and above all the duration of the crisis which is still with us. I think I mentioned in another context yesterday - the FT now thinks it

has seen bit of a rebound. For the first time local expat bankers in Tokyo are saying that a grip is being got of the banking situation and maybe it is not now as unreasonable as it has been to talk about an economic upturn next year, which has been pooh-poohed up till now. So maybe some of the worst is over. But the basic problem is not over, and a new form of political organisation, much more inventiveness and innovation, much speedier agreement on bringing new ideas to market - all these are needed and a complete revolution in the banking and retail sector.

M.M. That does seem to be where the main problem lies; but they are continuing to produce marvellous new goods - I think.

J.B. Maybe from your and my point of view, not necessarily from their point of view. This is one interesting reason why Japanese industry, not just Japanese scholars, want to come to good British universities and look about and form alliances; and they are consciously now trying to acquire, that sounds rather a crude word but it's probably right, to acquire ideas that can be taken back and worked up into designs and then turned into a marketable product. Hitachi have a site in the Cavendish; several Japanese industries are out in the Science Park; colleges like this are developing particular alliances, and the same goes on in other British universities in various fields.

M.M. They rely on the West for ideas?

J.B. They can manufacture the technology beautifully, but more and more, even in Japan, advanced science packages are becoming internationalised. As you know, the Japanese have quite a significant Space programme and if you look at the sort of rocket they sent up in the mid 90's, I mean you will find ideas from say Leicester University or someone from the Royal Society as well, of course, as Dutch and North American input, and so on. In other words, implicitly at least, there is a recognition that Japanese science for all its funding and strengths - and they are real strengths - can't manage on its own; it needs this fizz of new approaches from elsewhere and I think it's where we in places like this should be consciously marketing ourselves.

There was a huge, I claim no authorship except possibly for part of the original idea, but it was hugely successful - a British Festival in Japan last year - masterminded by my successor there David Wright, serviced by the British Council and all that. But from the outset we were very keen that this shouldn't be Morris dancing and Shakespeare, but there would be a serious illustration of British inventive thinking in science down the years, and actually it would have been an education to any of us to have seen this wonderful exhibition drawn from the Science Museum and so on, showing just how clever we have been in thinking of new dodges down the years; and I don't want to over-play the point, but I do think that the ability to think, whether in technology terms or foreign policy terms, to conceptualise, to put that in words or formulae that can lead to results, I see that as a huge national strength.

M.M. Interesting.

J.B. Going back to my time in New York and so on, I couldn't help noticing there how much of the key drafting, whether in economic committees or the Security Council, how much of the drafting contributions always came from the British; and I believe it is the same in NATO, and, given our determination to fight the good fight in the European context, there are lots of contributions made by the Brits in the Community - not recognized, of course, by any of the public, but it is a fact.

M.M. Resisted by the Press! How sad but still that is an interesting observation about inventiveness generally and I am sure it is true.

J.B. You either have it or you don't and I can name you people who were in the Third Room in Northern Department with me and you could tell they were people of imagination and invention and now there they are right at the top of their various bits of the tree.

M.M. So you thoroughly enjoyed your time in Japan despite the economic difficulties, travelled a lot and find it of great use at the present time.

J.B. Yes, I find it of great use and continuing interest in the University context. One of the things that was strengthened very much during the '90's was the formal science

relationship with Japan. As I think I mentioned, many functional Ministers came out; it brought the menu right away from just foreign policy, economics and defence to many, many other areas. I don't like to think that in any fundamental sense that it was a misapplied investment or a waste. I don't think so. I think that I would still argue now, as I argued so vigorously then, that this really rather cosy thing between Britain and Japan is material to the long term survival of both cultures, and I think that remains true.

M.M. They had been allies of ours at the turn of the last century; let's hope that that strength continues. Did you get much grief from these former prisoners of war while you were there?

J.B. The grief was applied not so much to me. The grief was applied in the Japanese court system and in the newspapers and, of course, at the expense of the Emperor when he visited last year; that's the bit I regret. But there were real sufferings and one meets real people who have suffered; there is a deeply moving War Cemetery at Hodogaya. So you cannot banish the thought or pretend these things did not happen; and I was personally disappointed with the way in which Japan has failed to face up in a more spectacular and direct way to this bit of history. Having said all of which, I repeat that the discourtesy shown to the Emperor last year is something which I deplore. There are others in the Prisoner of War movement who are taking a rather different tack which is trying, however difficult, to build little individual group bridges with former Japanese opponents; who are prepared to go through the painful and patient process of visiting Japan themselves and trying just by their niceness and impressiveness of their personalities to get across to the Japanese what their obligations are. We have had here in Cambridge, not in this College, a visiting Scholar who made her own effort to get alongside those British veterans living in the Cambridge area, and that was enormously successful as a personal gesture and as an expression of personal interest in their plight. I don't myself think that Japanese courts are going to rule in favour of our former Prisoners of War nor do I think at this stage is the Japanese government ever going to pay for what they regard as an issue that was settled by formal treaty in San Francisco. I had always hoped, frankly, that the Japanese private sector would help make some resounding gesture which would

remove this issue but this hasn't happened. So we all go grinding away at reconciliation; that's the best thing I can think of to do, particularly at an individual level. As I say, one perception that is relevant but not decisive is the one that visitors to Japan can discover for themselves - the extent to which the Japanese population too suffered from the actions of their own leadership; but the retribution was truly horrific: the burning of Tokyo and so on was a very horrid human event, even leaving Hiroshima out of it.

M.M. Well, I think that pretty well brings us to the end of your career, but I don't want to end on a rather sad note like that. Do you think you would do it again?

J.B. Without hesitation. I always thought when I was young that I would probably - our family tradition was medical and academic - I thought or persuaded myself that is what I wanted to do and I had periodic chews at it, none of which were totally satisfactory. I think that probably up until my last year at Cambridge I thought I would be an academic of some kind, but I am profoundly glad I wasn't. The Service provides a perfect home for people like me, who want to be active, but who are not actually first class academics; there are lots of people in the Foreign Office much brighter than me but they were nice tolerant colleagues and one could make some use of one's life. So I have absolutely no regrets and I am just very lucky that I have this as a cherry on top of the cake at the end of it, largely by luck.

M.M. Do you think you have learnt any lessons?

J.B. Yes, of the order of don't, if you are in an administrative position, don't promise what you can't deliver; and, I think, looking back to the Chief Clerk days, perhaps pay a bit more respect to the inherent difficulty of introducing change in an organisation. It does take longer, like change in Japan, it does take longer than you think it's going to - even if your ideas are basically right. So I have learnt from that and I hope I try to apply, a little bit, those notions in what is, here also, another sensitive and very interesting culture. But as I think I said, the real satisfaction for me in both the College organisation and the Foreign Office was the quality of the people, the willingness to suffer a bit together. A lot of very clever, very nice people out there, living often in rotten conditions in smaller posts, losing out quite a lot on the money

front or the family employment front, or maybe getting sick kids, but prepared to do it, I suppose, partly from a kind of instinct but partly because it is just so interesting.

M.M. Well, thank you very much indeed. I think that was a very pleasing interview - thank you.