

BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index

ELLIOTT, Mark (born 16 May 1939)

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I - THE FAMILY

The Elliotts are a huge tribe, at least if one judges by the national telephone directories. There is a fair concentration of them at the western end of the England/Scotland Border country, where they boast an Elliott (or Elliot, the preferred local version) tartan, and are commemorated in Tullie House Museum in Carlisle as among the most loathed and vicious of the clans of Border reivers. But my father's family can trace no connection with Scotland. There is a family tradition of some sort of Huguenot origin, but this is not supported by any evidence. However there is abundant evidence of Elliotts in the Wisborough Green area of Sussex, dating back at least to 1454. A plot of land near Wisborough Green was known as "Elyottes" in 1564. By the eighteenth century Elliotts feature regularly in parish records as yeomen, churchwardens and holders of other offices.

Thomas Elliott, born at Wisborough Green in 1724 to another Thomas and his wife Mary née Parkhurst, appears to have been the first to establish himself in the village of Rudgwick a few miles north, near the Surrey border. He moved there at about the time of his marriage in 1760 to Susan Chiles. He and his younger brother Parkhurst Elliott seem effectively to have run the Rudgwick parish. Thomas's son, yet another Thomas, was born there in 1765, and married Ann Greenfield in 1787 (on the same day that another Thomas Elliott, probably Parkhurst's son, married Sarah Greenfield - quite a day for the two families). At some stage Thomas and Ann moved to the farm of Hornshill two miles west of Rudgwick, and Thomas is described as "of Hornshill" on his tombstone in Rudgwick churchyard when he died at the age of 79 in 1844. Their eldest son, inevitably christened Thomas, was born in 1790; John and William followed soon after. In the next generation there were seven children. The eldest son, Thomas of course, took over at Hornshill as a timber merchant, while his father remained at the family home, Red House, in Rudgwick; the youngest child, William, born in July 1832, was my great-grandfather.

The Rudgwick/Hornshill Elliotts seem to have been people of some substance. In the 1851 census the senior Thomas, then a man of 60, is described as "farmer of 144 acres, employing 7 men and 1 boy; appraiser, corn and seed merchant". An early visiting card reads "Thomas Elliott and Son - Land and Timber Surveyors". Two letters from him to William, dated 1867 and 1868, survive; he was still running the Hornshill farm, walking there from Rudgwick, and waxing lyrical about the excellence of the hay harvest in 1867. He was supplying his son William, who by this time had moved to Brighton and opened a fruit shop, with the necessary produce - his 1868 letter acknowledges receipt of a Post Office Order for £3-12s-6d "which make the fruit account quite right". In the 1867 letter Thomas writes movingly of the recent loss of his (second) wife, and goes on "she is very much missed by the Poor ... she gave away a great deal to the Poor in their sickness or infirmity which I often hear them talk of since her

Death but I knew it before as she seldom kept me in the dark in anything she did as she had plenty to do it with". His health was robust, although he had a scare in 1868; "... could not lay down did not go to bed at all for five Nights sit in my Chair one Night & went to sleep Owen Ireland [brother-in-law?] said for about half an hour and when I awoke he thought I must have suffocated I was as black in the face as your Hat until I could spit something up ... one other time Owen thought I had been agoing I was by the Fire in the Parlour & my Feet and Legs became so benum'd all at once Mrs Neale held my Legs in front of the Fire and continued rubbing them ... they say I have deceiv'd the Doctor." He survived into his eighties, dying in 1872.

William married Urith (or Yourath) Shelley, from Sudbury in Suffolk. Their three sons were all born in Brighton. My grandfather, Thomas Herbert, was the eldest, born on 29 August 1867; William Samuel Shelley (later known as Shell) followed in 1868, and John Scotchford or Scotsford (whom I remember as my mad great-uncle Jack) in 1870. Thomas Herbert was apparently Tommy to his friends, but in later life (perhaps as a mark of greater respect) became known as just TH.

TH decided at the age of fifteen, against the wishes of his parents who presumably planned a commercial future for their eldest son, to become a teacher. He was also an aspiring amateur actor, playing light comedy parts with a Sussex group to such effect that at the end of his period as pupil teacher he decided to move over to acting as a career. But this time parental authority prevailed, and he remained in teaching for the rest of his professional life, albeit with a continuing spare-time interest in the stage. Graduating from Homerton Training College in East London ("one of the finest teachers we have ever had", according to the Principal) he taught at a succession of London schools, becoming a headmaster first in 1905 at Bow Creek and then moving in 1910 to take charge of the Marlborough School, Chelsea, an elementary school which with 988 pupils was the largest "provided school" in London. He moved on to the Peterborough School in 1917, and held office in several teachers' organisations. He retired in 1932 and moved to Ealing.

TH married twice. His first wife seems from one note in my father's handwriting to have been Gertrude Hayllar, although I never heard the name mentioned; they had one son, Cecil, born in 1890, who inherited his father's taste for and skill at light acting, but like him chose another career - in the Civil Service. Cecil married Audrey Barnes, and they had one daughter Rosemary, born in 1931 and later married to John Harper; they and their children Caroline and David are my only close relations on the Elliott side. After the death of his first wife (apparently after many years of illness) TH married Ada Rowcliffe, known as Judy, in 1909. Interestingly, his father William is now described as "Gentleman" on the marriage certificate.

Judy was sensitive about the exact nature of her family business in Tiverton in Devon. I was brought up to believe that they were in farming, whereas in fact it is clear from the records that her father William Charles

Rowcliffe was a master butcher with a shop in central Tiverton. But William was a pillar of the community, for many years a member of the town council. A newspaper report of his death describes "his thorough independence and outspokenness, and his love of fair play". These qualities, according to the report, also distinguished his grandfather, also William Rowcliffe and also a butcher. William Turner Rowcliffe, born in 1802, was a prominent Chartist, a Liberal, who "actuated by a sincere wish for the advancement of the masses of his fellow citizens, devoted himself to the cause of freedom of voting and extended political rights". He was famous for his heckling of Lord Palmerston at the election hustings; "without Rowcliffe", Palmerston apparently said, "an election at Tiverton would not seem to be an election at all". His pluck in standing up to a debater of Palmerston's prowess was universally recognised, and on his death in 1874 nearly all the London papers contained articles on his career.

Judy was born on 4 October 1882, the second of nine children (three sons and six daughters); her mother, Sarah née Strong, was the daughter of an agricultural labourer. I met only two or three of my great-aunts, and knew well only the eldest, Kit, and her husband Billy Copp in Leamington. The others, in order, were Will, Rose, Fred, Dora, Victor, Winifred and May; Winifred's daughter Kathleen Davies has kept in touch with our side of the family and is a mine of information on Rowcliffe family history. (Rose and Win were still alive in 1972, when Rose had just had a stroke at the age of 86; Fred died soon after the 1914-18 war, having joined the army - HAC - and been commissioned from the ranks, winning an MC in 1916.) Judy was in her mid-twenties when she married TH. She too was a teacher, indeed later a headmistress (at a London school just north of Selfridges). Their only son William Rowcliffe Elliott, my father whom I always knew as Bill, was born on 10 April 1910.

At the time the family were living in Catford, in south-east London but enabling my father to be a lifelong supporter of Kent cricket club. They moved soon thereafter to Hart Grove in Ealing, and it must have been from there that Bill travelled to school at St. Paul's; later they moved to Ruislip, the family home which I remember. His parents always planned a brilliant career for Bill, which he fulfilled not without many heartsearchings. He was loaded with prizes at St. Paul's and won the predicted scholarship in Classics to Queen's College, Oxford; at Oxford from 1929-1933, he won Firsts in both Classical Mods and Greats, and picked up the Chancellor's Prize for Latin Verse on the way; he disappointed them only in failing to secure entry to the administrative grades of the Home Civil Service. Instead he opted to follow the parental tradition and join the teaching profession (at Repton, Felsted and Blundells) as a prelude to becoming one of HM Inspectors of Schools, which he did at the unusually young age of 26 in 1936. But his childhood was often lonely and subjected to a variety of pressures, and he described his father's masterplan for him as narrow and exacting.

However there were compensations - blessings, as he has described them. He greatly enjoyed the company of his stepbrother Cecil. There were

other relations on his mother's side who provided release. Above all, there were holidays - first to snow mountains, and then Mediterranean cruises. The most significant was in July 1928, a Mediterranean voyage on a Dutch ship (the *Indrapoera*); for it was on this cruise that he met a fourteen-year old girl called Karin Classen. The Classen family were apparently impressed by him as a suitable young man because he was at the time reading a History of China, in French.

* * * * *

My mother's family was more exotic - on both sides. Her father Ernest, known at least in later years as Budge, came from the Classen family of Schleswig, where the name is not uncommon. His father, Anthony Quirinus (why Quirinus?) Rudolf, was born around 1836, possibly in Schleswig (at that time part of Denmark) but maybe in Krefeld near Düsseldorf. He had two brothers and one sister. Successive numbers of a magazine published for the German army in 1868/9 contain his own account of his time in the European expeditionary force which supported the Emperor Maximilian of Mexico. Anthony, or Anton, was apparently in Brussels as a presumably footloose young man in 1864 when he met a member of the Belgian volunteer force which was being formed to go to Mexico - Maximilian's wife was daughter to the King of Belgium. Anton was attracted, he writes, by the uniform, and no doubt by other aspects of the way of life. He describes his recruitment (aided by his fluency in Spanish which secured him a position as interpreter to the Belgian Colonel, no great linguist), his journey to Mexico and arrival at Vera Cruz, and subsequent campaigning in the centre and north of the country. One episode is positively John Buchan: left wounded in a ditch after one fierce engagement with the rebel forces, Anton pulled himself together and by good fortune encountered the horse of his French colonel, who must have perished; thinking fast, he not only took possession of the horse but had the presence of mind to examine the saddlebags, which suitably for a Frenchman contained, as well as sugar for the horse, a bottle of red wine and a ham sandwich, sufficient to sustain Anton while he found his way back to his unit. He must have made himself pretty useful to the cause, because at one time he was called to spend a period on the personal staff of the Emperor Maximilian.

Anthony Classen returned to Europe in 1867 and joined the German army. Soon after that, however, he left the army and moved to Belfast, where he wrote his second series of articles in July 1869. He married Emma Ecklin Boyd, "the prettiest girl in Belfast", born in 1854 and one of several children of a local doctor. Emma's mother was born Jane Browne; and her sister Eleanor Browne married James Craig, father of the James Craig who became the first Viscount Craigavon, a great name in the political history of Northern Ireland. St. John Ervine's biography of Craigavon sets out the history of the family. My grandmother was very proud of the connection, and her copy of *Craigavon* is inscribed in her hand "To Three Generations: Budge - Karin - Mark: Xmas 1953"; the endpapers are adorned with extensive notes of family history in my mother's hand. The Classen family moved from Belfast first to Bradford and then in about 1879 to

Manchester, where Anthony became naturalised as a British Citizen (as revealed by his passport, a splendid document signed by the Marquess of Salisbury as Foreign Secretary). He joined the "important firm" of S L Behrens, and travelled for them nearly every year to Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria. Ernest's birth certificate (February 1881) describes his father as "manager of shipping warehouse", although interestingly the certificate of baptism, only eight months later, has him as "foreign correspondent". A note in my mother's writing describes him as "brilliant but erratic ... travelled much, made and lost fortunes".

Anthony and Emma had five children. *Ada* (christened Adeline) was born in 1874 and married a German architect and amateur violinist in Düsseldorf, Laurenz Lander; they had two children - Werner and Nora. A letter from Ada (known as Da) dated in 1953 reveals that Laurenz by then had died, and she was living in Üdem in the province of Kleve in northern Germany; Werner and his wife Gerda were in Ludwigshafen-Mannheim; Nora and her husband Reiner Schmidt had four daughters - Sylvia and Hanne (both due to study medicine at Heidelberg university); Ilsemarie, who played the violin and had won prizes for painting; and Traute. A late 1959 letter from Nora tells us that Hanne had by then married and had a son, another Reiner; Sylvia was still unmarried and intended to devote her life to medicine; Ilsemarie was studying literature and French at Fribourg university in Switzerland, and doing extremely well there; Traute was still at home, nearing the end of her schooling. Ada, now a great-grandmother, was in "remarkably good" health at 85, still running along the street "... forgetting her body is too old for the speed and then she is breathless". They represent the closest surviving collateral branch of the family on my mother's side, but there has been no contact for many years. My mother did however have occasional exchanges with Werner, both before and after the 1939-45 War.

Dolph (christened Harry Rudolf) was born in 1877, and married in 1903 to Blanche Leroy, who was of French origin; they both survived at least until 1953 to celebrate their golden wedding. He was a Manchester businessman, and followed his father into S L Behrens and the export business, which took him on extensive travels in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Canada and Portugal; eventually he became managing director. He was also a lover of cricket, and the Classen Gates at the Whalley Range ground commemorate him. Their only son Geoffrey died tragically in 1929 when an undergraduate at Pembroke College, Oxford. *Toby* (christened George) was born in 1878, joined the Army, and according to family legend was cashiered twice - a little difficult to imagine how this came about, but if true he must have been a remarkable man. As the black sheep of the family he appropriately ended up in Australia with his wife Mab, who survived him by many years and became librarian of Townsville in Queensland. They had no children. "Great-Aunt Mab" was a most diligent correspondent for many years, at least until the 1960s when I was in our Tokyo Embassy, and sent us food parcels during the war. *Ernest*, my grandfather, was born on 9 February 1881; and the youngest child was *Madge*, born in 1884, whose husband Harry worked for a bank and ended up as manager at the branch in Ansdell, near Lytham St.

Anne's in Lancashire. Madge and Harry too had no children, but I do remember them - a tall, rather severe lady, and a rather rounder husband with a twinkle; they both left me a small legacy, and I think that from Madge accounted for my first typewriter.

Emma died young, in about 1890, and Anthony's second marriage was to his Irish housekeeper, who apparently did not come from the professional classes, and survived him by some years, living with her youngest stepchild Madge in Ansdell. Anthony died in 1907 "with not a grey hair on his head". He seems to have been a dominant and uncompromising figure, at least in the recollection of his son Ernest, my grandfather, whom he refused to allow to pursue his evident academic bent. Ernest therefore left William Hulme's school in Manchester at the age of about 14, spent a year in Germany, worked in a button factory, and eventually joined a bank. His determination to make his way to university was strong, however, even though the result was that his father denied him all subsequent support. There must have been hard times. But he was able to secure a place at Manchester University, then Robert Owen's College, and finance his studies there by winning a succession of scholarships. The outcome was triumphant, and Ernest Classen became a distinguished philologist with a niche in the study of Anglo-Saxon, Old Norse and the Germanic languages generally. He taught briefly at a school in Portrush in Northern Ireland, but before long made his way to Uppsala University in Sweden as a lecturer in English; and it was there, in the early 1900s, that he encountered a young undergraduate called Lilly Westergren.

My mother's mother was christened Caroline but universally known as Lilly - and to me and indeed to my mother as Lillymor. The Westergren family seem to have come from Västmanland north of Stockholm. Lilly's father Carl Johan Westergren was born in 1840, and at the age of twelve was either thrown out of the family house by his stepmother ("wicked stepmothers" are the stuff of legend) or ran away from home. He made his way to the substantial town of Falun in Dalarna, and found work with a local wine-merchant called Lindstedt. He must have been a serious youth, and apparently took maths lessons so as to work his way up; he "loved mathematics and all learning", and became a connoisseur of wine. At all events he rose finally to the position of "cellar-master" and perhaps manager of the largest hotel in Falun, the Stadshotellet or Grand, and is said to have been one of the original few shareholders of the local copper mining industry, the Kopparberg.

Carl Johan married Gustava Carolina Nordberg, whose occupation is described as "cook" - perhaps at the same hotel. She was born in 1843, the youngest child of Gustav Nordberg, of Riddarhustorget in the very centre of the old city of Stockholm - the Gamla Stan. Gustav was apparently a court tailor, and his wife is said in the family to have been "a herring girl" - whatever that denotes. They had two other children. The eldest, another Gustav, became a baker, and had a daughter Maria with artistic leanings (an attractive painting by one of her artistic friends is still in our possession). The other child, Alexander, described as "rebellious", apparently went off to work on a merchant vessel. He may have been the

unidentified naval officer who in the 1960s sought information about Carolina Westergren from the Swedish pastor in London. (Carolina seems, from documents concerning the disposal of her property at her death, to have been married twice; Elsa Emelina Palm née Carlsson is described as her daughter, presumably by a first marriage to a Mr Carlsson, and comes in for a share of the estate. But I do not recall ever having heard her name.)

Lilly, the only child of Carl Johan and Carolina, was born on 26 April 1883. There are early photographs of her with the family dog Sampo, and with her mother's old nurse Alma, who lived to a great age and whose name was a byword in the family for kindness and sympathy. Lilly must have been something of a star. The 1939 edition of the Falun school magazine for old pupils mentions her as evidence that in 1902 (when she left the school) the school was already able to produce "graduates of the highest calibre in respect both of intelligence and of beauty". Her father died when she was 20, but there was still enough money for her to go to Uppsala as one of the first generation of female students, to study English - although the Westergren money apparently vanished soon afterwards. A friend (honorary uncle), known as "farbro Billingen", acted as her guardian; and it seems that her father's personal cellar of wine remained with the family, because there is a story that Ernest Classen much later came to visit Falun and was impressed by the quality of the Westergren wine. My mother has an early memory (1921) of having visited her grandmother Carolina - known to her and generally as "Mormor" - at her house in Falun, a traditional-style wooden house with a balcony and 47 trees in the garden, and having dressed herself up in Lilly's traditional Swedish student cap and ribbons and paraded down the main street until she was found and brought back.

Ernest Classen and Lilly Westergren met therefore at Uppsala as English lecturer and Swedish undergraduate, somewhere around 1904/5. They married in 1910, when Ernest was teaching at the university in Würzburg in Germany, and had a honeymoon in Berchtesgaden. Languages were Ernest's profession; Lilly seems to have picked them up with no difficulty, and to the end of her life was fluent almost equally in Swedish, English, German and French, all of them with a slight and rather charming foreign accent. Before marriage she had spent time in Paris and studied at the Sorbonne, taught at a school near Lake Constanz in Germany, and lived with a family in Doncaster (where she apparently went to horse-races and saw the St Leger); at one time she was employed to take foreign tourists round the copper mines in Falun because of her linguistic abilities. From Würzburg Ernest and Lilly moved to Manchester, living in Withington, with Ernest a lecturer in German language and literature at the University. Lilly occupied herself with local community work, and told stories of taking groups of children from poorer urban homes out into the country to have at least a glimpse of green fields and farm animals. Among their friends in University circles were the Weizmanns - Chaim active, in the margins of his career as a lecturer, in the campaign for the creation of the state of Israel. Ernest and Lilly must have been active socially, and one family story is of Lilly's rushing out to buy cut flowers before one dinner party,

not for a vase but to stick them individually in the soil outside the house to give the impression of a well-tended garden.

Karin, my mother, was born in Manchester on 6 March 1914, and christened Karin Tess because of her father's affection for the works of Thomas Hardy. The family moved soon after to Chiswick in the west of London (there is a story that Budge and Lilly made a journey of reconnaissance from Manchester to London on their motorbike). The flat in Esmond Gardens which they found was to be the family home for fifty years. Ernest - Budge - continued his academic work as lecturer in English language at the East London College of the University of London. He published a number of works (a German grammar, an edition of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and an attractive small essay on English style and composition which is still very relevant, come to mind). But in 1919 he left formal academic work and became Secretary to the Swedish Chamber of Commerce, where he stayed until 1943. Presumably for his work in that capacity he was honoured in August 1927 by being appointed Chevalier First Class of the Swedish Order of Vasa (Riddare av Kungl. Vasaorden, första klassen). An obituary in the Anglo-Swedish Review pays warm tribute to his work at the Chamber on matters such as double taxation, as well as to his "great charm of manner". Among his leisure pursuits were golf - winner of occasional trophies - and sailing. We have a splendid medal commemorating his voyages on board the *Abraham Rydberg* from Gothenburg to Funchal "as instructor 1933, as deserter 1934".

Budge and Lilly were active members of the Swedish community in London, and in 1930 Lilly saw the publication of her translation into Swedish of Shaw's *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, with Ebba Low. Karin was brought up in a thoroughly international atmosphere with English and Swedish predominating. The need to speak Swedish however was forced upon her only when her Swedish grandmother, Carolina Westergren (Mormor), came to England by way of Scotland shortly before the end of the war in 1918, and occupied a room in the flat. Mormor spoke no English, and Karin recalled having discovered that the foreign language for which as a very small child she had had little enthusiasm suddenly became much less of a problem. One early memory is of Mormor's sitting by the window in Esmond Gardens looking out at a coffee-stall in the road where the carters would stop to refresh themselves; if they also offered refreshment to their horses, Mormor would always send a maid out to give them a small reward.

Mormor died in February 1929, and Karin recalled having been sent away at the time to stay with family friends - the Mortensens, also then in Chiswick, but friends of Lilly since Uppsala days, and with daughters of Karin's age. By this time her horizons had widened. She went to school first at the Froebel Institute, and then at the Francis Holland school in Kensington. The Francis Holland was a very upper-class establishment, the daughter of the King's Private Secretary being one of Karin's year there, and Karin felt like a fish out of water - "but they were very kind". She made friends there, and among the staff remembered the Latin

teacher in particular as having effectively secured her entry to St. Hugh's College, Oxford.

The international dimension to Karin's upbringing included a fair measure of foreign travel. The Mediterranean cruise in 1928, when she first met Bill, of course stands out. But there were other journeys. Luchon and Superbagnières on the French side of the Pyrenees held warm memories of holidays with her parents. Her French seems to have been good - there is a splendid certificate from the "grand concours annuel" of French teachers in England, dated 1929, recording her proficiency. She went to northern Germany to stay with a family near Bremen, and acquired fluent German (with a pure accent which provoked some sideways glances in Austria many years later on holiday with me, when she was taken at first as a member of the unloved Northern conquerors). And she needed her German in Freiburg between school and Oxford, when sent for a term or so to the university there to improve her Greek and no doubt to acquire a little more European cosmopolitanism. That was 1932, when a politician called Adolf Hitler was beginning to make something of a mark; Karin had clear memories of some of the sound and fury of those days. Indeed Freiburg was chosen as being reasonably close to the French border if there were to be a sudden need to move out of the country.

So then it was up to St. Hugh's in Michaelmas 1932, overlapping Bill's final year at Oxford. For Karin, four years of Classical Mods followed by Modern Greats, as they liked to describe what is now PPE, and an affection for current affairs in both their political and economic aspects which lasted all her life (she remained a conscientious reader of the *Economist* to the end, and in the last week of her life was still engaging in serious political argument). The strands of her life and Bill's were increasingly intertwined, and the Elliott family took Karin to their hearts. Photographs of joint holidays, including in particular a P & O cruise to Athens, the Greek islands and Algiers in 1934, fill the albums. It must have been 1934 when Karin and her mother survived a plane crash, on 14 July in Amsterdam - two British passengers and four crew members died, but the remaining thirteen passengers were able to escape (the crash came shortly after take-off). Karin and Bill were married on 20 March 1937 at St. Olave's, Hart Street in the City of London, with the reception at the Swedish Chamber of Commerce in Trinity Square.

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Bill was now assigned to Leeds within the Inspectorate, and Karin joined him there, moving into a flat in Headingley. It is worth recording for reasons which will become obvious that they opted in 1938 for a holiday in Norway, having been thwarted in their original intention of sailing on board a German ship calling at the Baltic ports. They spent much of their time at Balestrand in the Sognefjord, staying at Kviknes Hotel in the month of August. I was born in Leeds on 16 May 1939; and having counted carefully on my fingers, I took the opportunity of a speech at Kviknes Hotel in 1997, as British Ambassador to Norway, to mention to the assembled local worthies that it was probably in one sense not my

first visit to the hotel; I might well have been conceived there. My presumed Norwegian ancestry was certainly no handicap to my mission as ambassador there between 1994 and 1998, and did much to outweigh the slight Swedish accent in spoken Norwegian which I found it impossible to eradicate.

That aside, the spell in Leeds was rewarding in many ways, and they found Yorkshire people warm and welcoming. In the summer of 1939, soon after my birth, we were on holiday at Marrick in Swaledale when it became clear that war with Germany was inevitable. Thereafter our moves were directed by external forces. Bill was summoned to London to join the Ministry of Information; Karin and I, with my Swedish nurse Mary Anderson, moved first to Reeth in Swaledale and then after a few weeks to a rented house in Charlbury near Oxford. In early 1940, on Bill's return to the Inspectorate and assignment to Leicestershire, we moved to Quorn between Leicester and Loughborough; and it is there that my first memories begin.

II - CHILDHOOD

Inevitably the early memories are patchy. The framework is clear enough - we lived in what must have been a two-storey house in Chaveney Road, Quorn, with a long downstairs through room with French windows at the garden end and Bill's desk at the other end. Bill was now travelling around Leicestershire and Rutland on Inspectorate duties, and spending some nights on Home Guard duty at an AA battery - I remember him in uniform, though I have no recollection of any other impact of wartime on our life in Quorn. There were other people about the house. Although Mary Anderson seems to have left pretty soon to get married, there was somebody called Renée of whom I was fond and who must have taken her place. At some stage there were Wrens billeted with us, and I remember one called Jimmy (confusing as a female name) and another called Heather. And the grandparents certainly came to visit, and my uncle Cecil with Audrey and their daughter Rosemary, eight years older than me so nothing like a child in my eyes. I remember Cecil painstakingly explaining to me the difference between ordinary and capital letters, as I played on the floor; and hiding from company at the other end of the room under Bill's desk, and the excitement one year when 1 January happened to be a Monday so that all the three elements of the calendar on that desk changed at the same time. (I still have a calendar of that type on my desk, bought oddly enough in Rye in Sussex during a brief - and atypical - bicycling holiday with Karin in April 1953.) Other visitors included some of Bill's colleagues, the ones who stand out being one Jack Royle, who drove a yellow car (and whose Christmas cards excitingly came from the Royle Family); and the tall striding Mollie Power, who drove a maroon car. And on at least one famous occasion there was the elderly local doctor, summoned to stitch me up after I had run full tilt round a corner upstairs and inflicted a deep gash on my left eyebrow against the corner of a chair; his shaking hand, hovering perilously close to my eye, caused Karin and Bill grave anxiety.

We didn't travel far outside the house, though Bill must have had a car for official duties, I think an elderly Austin 10 christened Athelstan. There was a wonderful spot called Woodhouse Eaves some miles away, where I could scramble on some very satisfying rocks - huge in memory, but probably only a few feet high. Otherwise it was mostly country lanes, with hips and haws as brilliant colouring in autumn; and the garden, no doubt, and at least one kind and prosperous neighbour with a bigger house equipped among other things with some sort of food lift into which I would scramble with glee and call to be raised or lowered between floors. We must have gone up to London too to call on the two sets of grandparents in Ruislip and Chiswick. Memories of Christmases there over the years, moving on Christmas Day from the Scandinavian atmosphere of Julafton at the Chiswick flat to the welcoming smells of roasting turkey in English Ruislip, are hard to pin down to particular years. But I have one very clear memory of searchlights in the sky over London, the only real wartime experience, and of mimicking the scream of bombs falling, which for some reason did not go down well with my elders. I was often told also about a famous trip down to Penzance in Cornwall at the age of about

two to stay with Bill's parents when they were briefly there, when I screamed throughout the rather long train journey - no personal recollection of that at all.

In 1944 Bill was transferred to Liverpool, and Karin and I joined him in the flat in Aigburth Drive almost immediately after the end of the European war in 1945; we were certainly there for VJ day, because I remember travelling into town by the Overhead Railway from Dingle and seeing the celebratory bonfires lit at the end of every street. Our first arrival from the station in Aigburth Drive was in some state, in a Studebaker car, a splendid American monster with fins, driven by John Cullingworth who owned a wool-mill in Halifax (we went there once, and I dived into a huge pile of fresh wool) and whose wife Nena was an old friend of Karin's. The flat looked out over Sefton Park, which we soon utilised for character-forming games of French Cricket with a tennis racket; and there was an exit at the rear of the communal garden onto Aigburth Road, where very occasionally we bought fish and chips. Liverpool was still very much a port, with the docks fully in use, and ferry journeys across the Mersey to the delights of the Wirral giving a splendid perspective on Pier Head and the busy river-front. City life had its attractions, with the first experience of cinema (inevitably Disney's *Fantasia*), and grand shops like Marks and Spencer, which I remember chiefly as having wonderful ice-cream sundaes. Travelling by tram and trolley-bus was fun too, and the Overhead Railway was a constant delight. We had excursions to various beaches - Crosby, Formby, West Kirby, Thurston - where my main recreation was scrambling on the sandstone rocks or rolling down the sand-dunes.

It was during this Liverpool period that family holidays started. On three occasions in 1945, 1946 and 1947 we went to Dent in the Yorkshire Dales, a complicated train journey changing at Hellifield Junction and arriving at the spectacular Dent station high up on the Settle-to-Carlisle line (the station being awkwardly four miles from the village). It was a gentle but stimulating introduction to hill-walking. Each visit included a significant climb - Wharfedale, Ingleborough and Pen-y-Ghent in that order; there were other walks, some quite long (one over to Hawes, I remember); and I revelled in the experience of abundant air and open views and reaching summits, as well as the valley delights of rushing streams and flat slabs to play on and dams to build. Exploring under the head-high (to me) leaves of butterbur plants held a particular kind of slightly apprehensive fascination for me. On one memorable day Bill set off early from Dent with a colleague, one Joan Whalley, and arrived back at my bedtime having accomplished the Three Peaks walk, which mightily impressed me at the time. For some reason I also remember clambering swiftly with Bill up one of the steep sides of Barbondale, on a quite inappropriate day, and squatting just below cloud-level in the vain hope that the ceiling would lift; it didn't, and we descended rather ignominiously on our bottoms; but the memory of sitting there with clouds eddying around is especially vivid.

All the holidays were chronicled in journals, written up each day by Bill or Karin with occasional contributions by me. Most are still preserved, and

there are albums-full of photographs. The 1947 Dent holiday included a brief stay in Malham with Joan Whalley, and photographs show her escorting me up Gordale Scar. Our first venture as a family to the Lake District was in summer 1947 to Stool End Farm at the top of Great Langdale, where for the first time I sampled the farm delights of fresh eggs and cream - and where Bill arrived separately, very early one morning, having had to attend some sort of UNESCO conference at Sevres near Paris. Alas, the journal for the 1947 visit is missing, perhaps lent to somebody many years later because it was a particularly vivid portrayal of a vanished time - going down to the cobbler soon after arrival to have nails put in our heavy walking-shoes, for example. We went back to Langdale in 1951, this time to Elterwater, setting the seal on the love for mountain country in general and the Lake District in particular which has lasted all my life. Between those visits we had two splendid and rather more ambitious holidays on the island of Arran, which I remember as having been noticeably wetter than the Lake District especially in Glens Rosa and Sannox, and where prevailing cloud caused us to abort one or two expeditions which seemed to the cautious Bill to have an excessive element of risk - fair enough, I now think (heredity will out).

My introduction to schooling was late and gradual. I must have been already six years old, or all but, when I first crossed the threshold of Miss Fraenkel's kindergarten (as I suppose it was) in Lark Lane not far from Aigburth Drive. The youngest child there was two, and I was obviously one of the biggest. I seem to remember that with a couple of the others of similar age - were they John Layton and Nicky Tinne? - we spent much of our time up a very climbable sycamore tree in the yard. (Nicky Tinne turned up as a charity worker of some kind in Addis Ababa when I was visiting the Embassy there many years later, and remembered me, as I did him.) But we must have learned something, although all that I can remember achieving was a knitted kettle-holder and a bowl created out of bent and slit cardboard with coloured raffia woven around it. Before long I moved on to Calderstones Park Preparatory School, directly across Sefton Park from the flat, where again all that I can remember was a dislocated little finger in a fairground brawl, and winning a copy of Bambi, my first ever school prize, for some scholastic achievement or other.

Serious education started for me in 1947 at Liverpool College, where the headmaster of the main school was Ronald Lunt, one of Bill's contemporaries at Queen's College, Oxford. I went in at the bottom of the school, a reception year known as David House, but after a week was judged to be misplaced and moved to the first year of the Junior School proper. There I was among boys a year older than myself, but found no difficulty with that either in class or outside it - being relatively large for my age. In class I moved fairly rapidly towards the top, puzzling the teachers only in requiring them each term to find a new adjective for the report to describe my ability in spelling - "phenomenal" was the one I recalled with most pleasure. Outside class I enjoyed the usual playground activities, including wrestling with another large child called John Kerr, whose abilities roughly matched mine. Probably I was a fairly normal precocious child of that generation. The only letter from me to survive

from that first year, addressed to Bill c/o GHQ Middle East Land Forces when he was inspecting schools in Iraq in March 1948, starts "Thanks awfully for the stamps" and ends "vale, pater".

It was in the summer of 1948 that Bill was transferred to the London headquarters of the Inspectorate in the Ministry of Education. Family legend relates that I was offered the choice between accompanying my parents to London and changing schools, or remaining as a boarder in Liverpool; on which I unhesitatingly opted for staying as a boarder. I don't recall this, and maybe it came across to me with something of a nudge towards staying where I was, under Ronald Lunt's benevolent though distant supervision. For the summer term of 1948 I moved into the single boarding house of the Junior School, Mossley Vale House, with a powerful character called Mr Lickes as its housemaster and head of the Junior School. He appeared to me as something of a Hitler-figure, small moustache, strong on discipline and quick to reach for the cane to enforce it. In my time I think I had "six of the best" some six times, usually for the crime of talking in the dormitory after lights-out. But I suspect that underneath all that he was a wise and benevolent autocrat, with our best interests at heart. Certainly he did not bear grudges, and would always reappoint me to be head of the dormitory after a cooling-off period of demotion for the latest crime. Maybe there was nobody else. At any rate the regime worked. The food was ample if heavy; I enjoyed the occasional excitement of rabbit stew, where one might get a chunk which was actually solid meat; turnip - swede, for southerners - was pretty nasty, but other vegetables went down well enough; and there were the alternating delights of tapioca, sago, and semolina with jam. I don't know how they coped with rationing restrictions, and it was certainly a temporary disaster when I lost my ration book at the beginning of one term on the London-to-Liverpool train.

Letters home were a weekly affair, written on Sundays and bracketed in my mind with the weekly statement of accounts - always starting "sixpence pocket-money, a penny collection [for chapel]". But few survive. Much of the matter is classroom statistics or sport. One letter describes a violent thunderstorm; "the roof was leaking ... Mr Lickes didn't go to sleep all that night; he was on the roof part of the time and saw a meteorite come down." Benevolent despot. Otherwise it's variations on the theme "in history we are doing the industrial revolution which I quite like; in Latin we are doing *possum* and *volo* and we are about to do *nolo* and *malo*; otherwise nothing much has happened." But there was a good deal going on outside class, and some memories linger. Various friends with homes closer at hand invited me home for a weekend - Terry Harrison from somewhere south of Warrington, with whom I ran riot around the disused lunatic asylum which was part of his father's business, and incidentally learned to ride a bicycle; Christopher Potter, from "the Rectory, Wigan, Lancs", my constant companion, who shared in various literary exploits including the adaptation and staging of a mini-version of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and the production of an occasional handwritten magazine with ghastly jokes culled from a schoolboy book; the Windsor brothers, from Maghull; Ian McCaig, from Wallasey. The

school playing-fields were separated from the main London-Liverpool railway by a thin strip of woodland, with a narrow path running along its length, and some of us used to run helter-skelter along this path battling through the undergrowth, and make dens and hides at one end, thinking ourselves no end of explorers. In the dormitories, despite the controls imposed by Mr Lickes or by the prefects in the School House of the Upper School to which I moved for my last year, there was a good deal of talking and story-telling after lights-out; I was in demand to read aloud, and recall injecting great feeling into my performance of *Boule de Suif* by Maupassant (in English). There were very few excursions outside the school grounds, and I recall only the annual visit to Liverpool Cathedral (Anglican), a huge building still only half complete, for the Founder's Day service and the singing of *I Vow to Thee, My Country* - splendid Holst tune which still awakens primitive emotions; and the enlightened opportunity granted to recipients of school prizes to choose their own books at Philip Son and Nephew in the city centre, where on one occasion I opted for the collected works of Oscar Wilde, thereby subsequently provoking raised eyebrows (which I couldn't understand) in Karin and Bill.

One excursion falls outside the school category but is precisely datable. Very soon after the move to London in 1948, and presumably in the summer holidays, Karin took me to Wembley for a day at the Olympic Games - first and only time. We saw many famous athletes, no doubt, but the only one I can remember clearly is the Dutch prodigy Fanny Blankers-Koen, who won a number of gold medals and we must have seen one of her triumphs. An image of a sea of tiered seats leading the eye down to an arena apparently miles away, in hot sunshine, lingers on the retina - though I'm not sure I fully appreciated the magnitude of the occasion. Another brush with the history of the nation took place in another field: "comics" had never entered the house (though I was an addict of *Wizard*, *Hotspur* and other such publications at school), but one day in late 1949 or thereabouts Bill brought home the pilot edition of a new magazine for ten-year-olds and up, to be vetted by one of the species. Clearly the publishers wanted to strike the right educational note. I enjoyed reading about the exploits of Dan Dare and the inept detective Harris Tweed, so with my approval the official launch of *Eagle* went ahead in 1950.

A constant focus of my life for the childhood years was the two grand-parental homes at Ruislip and Chiswick. The Red House in North Drive, Ruislip, where Bill's parents lived, was a very traditional English suburban home; redolent with good cooking, the garage full of apples set out in rows and jars of bottled fruit, the collection of porcelain plates on a high plate-rack all round the "studio" or rear living-room which was rarely used except for listening to 78rpm records (and occasionally sing-alongs) on the fine wind-up gramophone. The front room was where everything normally happened - meals at the square mahogany table which we still use, covered always with a fringed blue velvet-y cloth; games of solo whist in the evening (I was not a participant but had a chair beside Karin's, with my eyes roughly at table-level, and could squint sideways at Granny's hand to my right) at the same table; Granfer's chair to the right

of the fireplace, from which he would deliver wise words about school and set me little mathematical and verbal test-papers written out in his perfect copperplate hand. The room was full of furniture, a large heavy dresser behind Granny's chair at the table, a sideboard, another table in the bay window. Behind the house there were steps down to a long thin garden, with orchard at the far end and then school playing-fields; somewhere over there was where Granfer went to play lawn bowls, at which he was a considerable expert. Granny was very small - even as a boy it was easier for me to kiss the top of her head - and seems to my memory always to have been dressed in a tidy dark-coloured long-sleeved dress with a narrow waist.

The flat in South Parade, Chiswick, where Lillymor and Grandad lived was very different. The enormous living-room was mostly dark, lit only by the front bay window at one end, and lined floor-to-ceiling with books, mostly paperback Continental editions in German, French and Scandinavian languages, with more hidden away in the cupboards below the shelves. Lillymor, who had been crippled as a young woman by a skiing accident and walked with great difficulty on two sticks, spent the day in a deep leather armchair on the right-hand side of the room; Grandad, a tall man with craggy features, in an immense fabric-covered chair on the left-hand side by the fire. There was a large separate dining-room also facing to the front of the block, with a large elliptical dining-table where occasional formal dinner-parties were held and *skål* toasts drunk with proper ceremony. The piano, which Lillymor and even Karin had played, was in the dining-room; and in later years a single bed was moved in there for me to sleep, a little uneasily with the constant noise of passing Underground trains across Turnham Green outside. But once again the living-room was the focus, with its deep leather sofa and chairs, and Lillymor as the still point around whom life revolved, always smiling and cheerful despite the pain of her arthritis, full of stories about her lively past and enormous acquaintance in the London Swedish community, and a dominant character. Occasionally the rest of us would escape to the kitchen at the back of the flat, where the Swedish au-pair had a tiny bedroom, and cooking was done on antiquated equipment - the fridge was gas-powered and always seemed to be half-full of encrusted ice round the freezer compartment. My memories of Grandad, as of Granfer, contain a large element of the pedagogical - he used to give me little lessons on philology, the second sound shift and so on, and I loved his insights into the relationship between words in different languages. He also gave me lessons in arm-wrestling, with his immensely strong sinewy hands, and taught me how to break a hold with rapid movement.

Meanwhile, back at school, others were thinking about my next step. Ronald Lunt suggested to Bill that I ought to think about trying for a scholarship at his own old school, Eton. Shrewsbury had earlier been the front runner, because of other personal connections; but it was agreed that we should consider Eton. Perhaps with this in mind I was moved up another year at Liverpool College for normal classes, to join a group two years older than me (where I was rapidly holding my own at or near the head of the class); and given extra tuition in writing Latin Verse, one of

the essentials for the Eton exam, with a small group of much older boys from the Sixth Form. After one practice run at a similar set of scholarship papers a few months earlier, which proved not too disastrous, I was sent off to sit the three days' worth of exams at Eton, accompanied by Karin and staying at a hotel in Windsor, in May 1951 when I was just 12 - the minimum age. Lots of clever-looking small boys from serious preparatory schools ("private schools") were there, grappling with apparent confidence with a horrifying battery of tests. The mathematics papers were especially brutal, and word went round that to complete even one question in the harder of the two was considered pretty good. The Latin and Greek papers weren't too bad by comparison. When the results came out a week or two later I had just scraped on to the bottom of the list, placed 17 out of 19 (from a total number of candidates presumably at around 100) - no real chance of getting in, but worth trying again a year later when I would still be well within the age range of 12-14.

To stand any chance in 1952, I needed to improve, particularly in mathematics. Extra tuition was arranged for me, about which I can remember little except that I didn't like the teacher assigned to me and found the whole process unpleasant - the seeds of natural laziness beginning to come out. My home as a boarder became the School House, among much bigger boys and not quite so relaxing as Mr Lickes' establishment. Life somehow was a bit more earnest, and few specific recollections remain to me. One, easily datable to 6 February 1952, was standing on a windswept patch of concrete outside the main school building for some sort of extraordinary assembly, at which Ronald Lunt as headmaster announced the death of King George VI; I can still picture his trouser-legs flapping around his shins as he was speaking. Another is the constant refrain of drum-beats inside School House as a couple of the prefects practised their side-drum skills for the Corps band - any surface would do, apparently. It was all beginning to seem a little unreal. Mercifully the waiting time was abbreviated, with the sudden arrival of a message from Eton that an unexpectedly large number of boys from College, the scholars' house, was leaving at the end of the Spring term; that not all those above me on the 1951 list wished to take up their places in College; and that therefore there would be a place for Mark Elliott at Eton from the summer term of 1952. Gleefully I abandoned the extra maths, said goodbye to my friends in Liverpool College (to some of whom I may have been beginning to seem something of a freak anyway), and disengaged from that world at Easter.

* * * * *

Eton was indeed a new world. Unconsciously I had grown accustomed to the cadences of Liverpool speech, though at home it had always been standard Southern English. Even in College, where relative normality prevailed, it seemed to me at first that people spoke funny. Oppidans, the great mass of fee-paying Etonians, were a tribe apart. It soon became evident that few of them had much interest in the academic side of schooling, and that after Eton most would go straight into Daddy's firm - a shorthand for a variety of careers, no doubt, including the armed services

and farming, but enough to set them apart from the humdrum middle-class scholars whose sights were set on Oxbridge and the meritocratic route to suburban comfort. Of course there were exceptions. Nobody could call Charlie Douglas-Home, one of my College election, a humdrum middle-class anything. (One cynical beak, professing to forget his name when he stood up in class to explain one of his frequent absences caused this time, I think, by taking tea with the Queen, said "oh yes, what's-your-name; Windsor-Castle, was it?"). Aristocracy was never synonymous with stupidity, and one of the brightest Oppidans of our time was the Master of Reay, later Lord Reay. And there were a few scholarship-boys from much poorer homes, benefiting from various special schemes, in Oppidan houses. But broadly there were the 70 "poor scholars" and 1100 or so moneyed layabouts outside. This did cause the occasional tension. [I should perhaps note here that Eton has changed radically since my day. By the period 1979-1986, when our two sons were there, academic standards were uniformly high, and academic seriousness was not a passport to ostracism in Oppidan houses.]

Little of this emerged at the beginning. My early letters home show a whirl of new activity and new vocabulary. The very first ends "I am going to learn the clarinet". There was Secular Singing, an occasional gathering in the rooms of our housemaster (the Master in College) where we all belted out versions of the popular light classics or music-hall numbers, sometimes translated into Greek. There was Latin Grace in College Hall on Sundays, intoned by the Captain of the School with a small choir singing the responses. There were outings on the river with one or two friends in small rowing boats called "gigs" or "dodgers", sometimes rowing the four miles upstream to Queen's Eyot where one could buy cider or (later) beer. On 29 June my old headmaster from Liverpool College, Ronald Lunt, visited me "and socked me a Strawberry Mess" - bought me strawberries-and-ice-cream from the school tuck-shop. There was the Fourth of June, effectively an annual old-boys-and-parents day, where one strolled round the cricket field paying minimal regard to what was going on in the centre, or visited various exhibitions of youthful achievement, culminating in the Procession of Boats and the grand fireworks display after dark. And interspersed with all this there was the relatively more familiar world of classwork, including new delights such as the first science lesson.

There was a hiccup at the end of the first term, or "half"; a boy caught polio from swimming in the Thames, as one did (there was no school swimming-pool), and died. Others may have been affected. The whole school was sent home early, amid considerable concern. But otherwise life proceeded in much the same benevolent but frenetic way over the next years. Patterns began to emerge. I enjoyed games, especially the more intimate kind - fives, tennis, squash, recreational rowing; but also team games such as cricket, where for a time I seem to have bowled with some success, rugby where my size and speed gave me an advantage, the Field Game, and above all the Wall Game, a peculiar Etonian diversion closely parallel to wrestling in mud. But I was never much of an athlete. Music was more important, and references to participation in choirs and

chamber-music groups occur with increasing frequency. My closest friends had similar tastes, and three of them - Julian Hall, Michael Yudkin, Ben de la Mare - have been friends for life. In our year ("election") in College there was something of a division between the boring, diligent, classical-music-loving, games-playing types on the one hand, and the brilliant, socialising, anti-authoritarian, noisy types on the other. The first lot suited me. But it was the others who tended to come first in class and carry off the prizes.

The outside world impinged little on our consciousness, but some events show through in my letters. 1 March 1953 - "the Queen Mother and Princess Margaret came to evening Chapel and everybody has had his hair cut". 3 May - "everybody in College is going home for Coronation leave - do you mind dreadfully if I come home too? I'll try not to be a nuisance". (I did go home, and remember watching part of the occasion on a neighbour's tiny home-made television set, the first such experience.) In June there was a river carnival to mark the Queen's official entry into Windsor, and she inspected a Corps Guard of Honour on Agar's Plough, the main playing-field, and heard loyal addresses from the Provost and the Captain of the School (John Jolliffe, described by the press as "brilliant classical scholar" which we cynics knew to be something of an exaggeration). On 16 June it was the Queen again, arriving by royal barge escorted by the first, second and third Eton eights, to see a special fireworks display. Other lesser visitors included Sir Adrian Boult with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, a splendid French theatre group doing *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, a member of the Everest-conquering team in 1953 talking about the climb, Benno Moiseiwitsch the pianist, Haile Selassie of Ethiopia (when still Emperor, in October 1954), Viscount Alanbrooke to talk about birds to the Scientific Society, the Vienna Boys' Choir on a regular winter visit, Gerald Moore to talk about the accompanist's art; the list goes on. Of equal importance to small boys were events such as the visit to Winchester to watch the Eton-Winchester cricket match every other year ("the buildings not particularly impressive, the Chapel quite an interesting place, but their School Yard is a quarter the size of ours"); or the purely domestic ("there is now a goldfish in Chamber called Mephistopheles. We are struggling to keep him alive. Harrod won him in the fair [at Henley, for the regatta]").

Meanwhile life for the Elliott nuclear family was changing. Since 1948 home had been 47 Granville Road, High Barnet, at the end of the London Underground Northern Line and on the edge of some rather uninspiring Hertfordshire countryside. From there Bill was able to reach his office in Curzon Street, or the various further education establishments around the country which fell within his responsibility, with reasonable ease; he was often very late home (further education is like that), but that caused no difficulty. Karin meanwhile had a variety of ploys - social survey, citizens' advice bureau - which she too could manage from Barnet. The house had a long narrow garden with fruit trees, and one wonderful crab-apple tree which I loved to climb. Inside, there was a "front room" full of bookshelves - as a teenager I was told that I ought to start reading some of them instead of the old-fashioned children's books and adventure

stories I had been enjoying from my own shelves, and after much thought lit upon Wilkie Collins as the most approachable; and a "studio" at the back, extended towards the garden to provide a well-lit area for desk-work where Karin did her translations from Scandinavian languages, but also having a cosier area with fireplace and before long record-player - this was where we mostly sat. My bedroom was above the studio, and the flat roof of the extension made a wonderful surface for me to clamber out on and stargaze. I was very contented there, and became devoted to my "crystal-set" radio, with earphone, on which I could get the Home Service at least and listen to late-night ghost stories.

But by 1954 it was becoming clear that Bill was too senior and successful within the Inspectorate ever to have another out-of-London job, and that if we were ever to create a permanent home in some more attractive area, now was the time. Bill and Karin drew a pencil circle around London on their conceptual map, at the maximum distance of conceivable daily commuting, and identified the Banbury-Brackley area of north Oxfordshire and southern Northamptonshire as the best location - trains then ran from both Banbury and Brackley and took around an hour. Before too long they found Astwick House in the small village of Farthinghoe, and after some initial shock that they were expected to want at least six bedrooms, and considerable heart-searching over the enormous sum of some £2400 that they would have to pay (the last £100 had to be scraped together, and I recall vividly the agonised refrain of our 1954 summer holiday "shall we get Astwick House?"), the deal was done. By February 1955 we were country-dwellers, and both Karin and Bill were rapidly immersed in village life, parochial church council and parish council, and so on. The garden seemed huge, with a wonderful soft lawn; my bedroom had windows on two walls (Bill later appropriated it as a study after I left home); there were loose-boxes (not that we ever contemplated keeping horses), and a coach-house and a coal-shed, and a chicken-run which we turned into a mini-fives court. And the whole area was lovely grey Cotswold stone. We were very content.

Holidays from Eton therefore, after the initial Barnet years, were largely devoted to house and garden and to exploring the Cotswolds by car. But there were family trips too. One domestic one, with Bill's mother Judy ("Granny" to me - TH, "Granfer", had died in 1953 at the age of 86 having lived long enough to enjoy the thrill of seeing me in Eton uniform), was to Dunster in Somerset at Easter 1954. Bill and I distinguished ourselves by getting lost in fog on Exmoor, coming down to the wrong valley, and having to walk miles to get back to the car where Karin and Granny were patiently waiting. But mostly now it was foreign travel. On four unforgettable occasions we went to Austria - the summers of 1952 (my first venture overseas), 53, 54 and 56. We stayed at a variety of centres, by lakes or higher up mountain valleys. Karin did all the talking in her fluent High German (on one occasion meeting stony faces until she turned to us and lapsed into English, whereupon the Austrians in the shop suddenly broke into smiles and said "oh, but you are English not German! that is good"). We walked a lot, Karin sometimes staying behind to laze in the high meadows and watch the scything. We drank beer and viertels of

wine, listened to local bands, to occasional zither concerts and singing of local songs. There was a trip to Venice, a few days in Vienna in 1956 (excess of new wine did for me on one memorable evening) following a brief cruise on the Danube, a couple of operas in Salzburg and a performance of *Everyman*. Usually we travelled out by train, but one year, concealing the fact from Karin's mother who would never have forgiven us, we flew - from Blackbushe airport in Surrey. It was a wonderful time, and many years later we embarked on a second series of Austrian holidays from 1981, when it was all just as good.

My interest in languages was of course encouraged by these travels. As a small child I had resisted the careful attempts by Karin and Bill to make me learn Swedish as well as English, even the very beautiful hand-made picture book of simple Swedish words and phrases constructed by Bill. With Karin's parents I inevitably encountered a good deal of Swedish, with a new Swedish girl every year coming *au pair* to look after Lillymor, and occasional but regular visitors from the Swedish community - but I was never required to utter more than the most formal greetings. French at school was never one of my best subjects, neither accent nor grammar being anything to write home about (in any sense). But Austrian holidays introduced me to the much more easily-pronounced German language, and gave me some confidence with the basic tourist exchanges. And I happily took up the Russian option at Eton when it was offered in January 1954 after O-level, and was rapidly moved into a slightly more advanced group (together with Luke Hodgkin of my election, brilliant son of a Nobel prize-winner and much better at Russian too) as having mastered the essentials with unusual speed. The opportunity 18 months later to meet real live Russians, in a group visiting Eton which included the Metropolitan of Minsk, whetted my appetite. Karin and Bill provided further encouragement by nobly abstaining from foreign travel in 1955 and sending me to live for some weeks with a French family in Chamonix (plus one week in Grenoble); with a 13-year-old nephew of the family, I had a marvellous walking holiday, sat diligently through a few structured lessons mostly on natural history, and became much more fluent if little more accurate in French. My Etonian manners caused one of my hosts to write back to England describing me as "un vrai ambassadeur de son pays", which may have been a sign of something other than a thoroughly English accent.

Back at Eton, the focus was sharpening. With O-level out of the way our year were required to "specialise". Classics (Latin, Greek, ancient history) was what would now be called the default option, for those with no obvious talent in other directions as well as the manifestly gifted. Our election of 16 in College was divided into 8 classics, 8 others (history, maths, languages, the lot). Most unusually we had two scientists - Michael Yudkin, son of a famous nutritionist, obviously; and Julian Hall, another close friend. I had a moment's uncertainty about whether to go for Maths, having had an unexpectedly successful summer term in the top maths set in summer 1953 and scored very well in the harder O-level paper; but Bill's record as a classical scholar (though he put no pressure on me) helped me to decide on the conventional track. (Interestingly, a

generation later when our elder son Justin was in exactly the same position as an Eton scholar, he with exactly half of his 16-strong year went for Maths, then the natural default option for bright children.) Classics did me very well, including later on as a basis for harder foreign languages. But I was never more than second-rate, as my reports show - nearly but not quite able to compete with the top three of the class (including one a year younger even than me) who were in a different league. Even so there were moments when I appeared better than I was; and by good fortune one of them came during the scholarship examinations for New College, Oxford, in December 1955, when the dons decided to take a gamble on precocity (I was still only 16 and a half) and awarded me the bottom one of five full classics scholarships; "but come back when you have grown up, say in 1959 after National Service".

Music continued as a consuming interest. Singing, from Haydn's Creation to a Windsor & Eton Choral Society concert in November 1955 doing a new work by Vaughan Williams, *Hodie* - "VW was there .. he seemed pleased"; the clarinet, duets with Ben de la Mare (to whom I always played second - he was infinitely ahead of me), a quintet at School Concert, the Chamber Music Society's soirees in the Headmaster's House (I remember our performance of Haydn's Farewell symphony, each player blowing his candle out as he departed, with great pleasure; and L Mozart's Toy symphony at the same concert, where I played a quail); even, briefly, a jazz group organised by the Whittome brothers on trumpet and trombone, with me on clarinet and Ben on tenor sax. A memorable visit one half-term to Ben's home at Much Hadham, where a group of us played chamber music. Being drafted at the last minute into the Madrigal Club for a School Concert where they needed another bass. Concerts - Ian Wallace, the London Mozart Players, four Covent Garden opera-singers doing solos and ensembles. And just listening to the gramophone in one's own room, a privilege reserved to only a few at the top of the school. Letter of 12 February 1956: "listening to the sweet strains of Leonora no 3, and trying not to hear Anderson playing hot jazz next door ... my room is warmer than it was; trying to counteract the draught with judicious use of Yudkin's toaster".

Other elements remained, though. Rather less time for sport, though I reached the final of the junior 440 yards, and helped to organise junior rugby; thereafter it was a little competitive tennis, the Wall Game where I was prominent, and occasional rowing, co-opted into a bumping four with Ben de la Mare ("isn't it extraordinary" said the coach "how it takes years to tell wet-bobs what to do, and two dry-bobs come along and do it perfectly"). The Corps took a little time ("the Field Day battle with Winchester was rather amusing"), and I seem to have led a College shooting team. There were excursions - Greek plays at Bradfield and Cambridge, Scientific Society expeditions to Farnborough and Fords of Dagenham (I was the "non-scientific" member of the committee). There were visitors - the Queen and Prince Philip again, to evensong on 22 July 1956 ("spontaneous cheering was enforced"); Dorothy Sayers and Cecil Day Lewis at the Literary Society; the Bishop of Lincoln, as Visitor "the only person besides the reigning Sovereign who displaces the Provost

from his stall in Chapel". And there were privileges and duties - beer for Sunday lunch at Sixth-Form table (the top ten boys); acting as "praepostor" and standing at the Headmaster's elbow while he administered discipline ("one flogging - not a pleasant sight").

Most of my year in College left Eton at the end of the 1956 summer term after the normal five-year career. But Julian Hall and I, the two youngest of the group, had by then been at Eton for little over four years (I was barely 17 in July 1956), and it was agreed that we should stay on, with one other (Alan Seymour-Davies, to be Keeper of College Wall). As the senior of these three I automatically became Captain of the School in September, a grand-sounding position meaning no more than senior scholar. I was also one of the editors of the weekly school magazine, the Chronicle, not because of any literary pretensions but because the Headmaster wanted what would now be called "a safe pair of hands" in the job, rather than the obvious candidate from College who was considered unreliable. (He was Francis Hope, undeniably brilliant, later a Fellow of All Souls at Oxford, tragically killed in the Paris air crash some years after that, with a very sharp pen and no lover of authority.) As Captain of the School I had to be elected to the Eton Society (Pop), a group of twenty or so of the school's leading personalities and athletes mostly there because of their social skills - but despite this mostly a pleasant bunch, I discovered. Henry Blofeld, captain of the cricket XI, was elected at the same time as me - since become a famous name. - So my final two terms at Eton were desperately busy, with the mix of activities as before plus a fair measure of administration. One odd fact illustrates the work-load: in the winter terms at Eton only five boys were then allowed to use bicycles because of their extra-curricular duties - the Captain of the School, the Captain of Oppidans, the College and Oppidan editors of the Chronicle, and the Captain of Boats. I was two of them.

Autumn 1956 was the time of Hungary and Suez, and both affected us. A distinguished Old Colleger called Andrew Sinclair was to have brought a scratch team down to play College Wall, but the fixture was cancelled because he with other undergraduates volunteered to help take penicillin into Hungary; "nobody knows how he is going to get back". Suez was hotly debated within College, all but one of Sixth Form being strongly against Eden, and the provision of a newspaper for the junior Collegers who did not have access to Reading Room (apparently instituted by me) shifted to the Manchester Guardian. At least two Suez rebels, Anthony Nutting and Edward Boyle, came to address the Political Society and were enthusiastically applauded. But the flow of less political visitors also continued - Compton Mackenzie, John Betjeman, Lord David Cecil.

My time at Eton was drawing to a close. I surrendered the editorship of the Chronicle at Christmas, to Ferdinand Mount, whose literary prowess is now more widely known. I acquired, oddly, the job of Captain of Games in College, which always goes with the Keepership of the Wall (Alan Seymour Davies had by now left, and I was the next in line). But essentially it was a reflective final spell. There were pleasant discussions on philosophical matters round the splendid coal fire in my grand room in

College - Middle Tower, with Lower Tower (Julian Hall), have fires, and our fags would lay and even light them for us, as well as bringing us hot shaving-water in the mornings. Derek Parfit was mine, another subsequent Fellow of All Souls. There were walks in Windsor Great Park, enjoying the winter sunshine, and visits to Luxmoore's Garden (reserved for senior boys) to view the progress of spring bulbs. The sad news of the death of Karin's father from throat cancer interrupted the mood, but I was not invited to the funeral - or indeed that of any of my four grandparents. The final challenge was the Newcastle Scholarship examination, an annual event for classical specialists also including papers on church history and on one of the four Gospels. Traditionally won by the top classic of each year, which for our election would have been a close race between Peter Carson and Colin Sydenham, it had been won in March 1956 by the extraordinary Edward Hussey of the year below us (yet another future Fellow of All Souls); so in 1957 the field was open. Soon after the beginning of the examinations, which lasted several days, I was stricken down with mumps, and had to complete the papers, and indeed the last days of my Eton career, from a sick-bed in College. The relaxed atmosphere may even have helped me, and I won the Newcastle and saw my name duly inscribed on the honours boards; an unmerited triumph, for a distinctly second-rate scholar.

Despite the rather *piano* ending, it had been a good time. I made a few very good friends, developed a love for music and a taste for countryside, discovered how to enjoy using my muscles, began to enjoy manipulating my own and other languages. All those delights have lasted. I was ready to move on to the next stage - National Service in the Army, and then Oxford. I saw no horizon beyond that.

III - ARMY AND OXFORD

New College had made it plain that I would not be welcome there until 1959. In 1957 it still seemed reasonable enough to expect to complete the two-year spell of National Service at some stage, although there was already talk of its abolition before long. Even without the New College constraint, getting it out of the way before university had advantages both in providing something of a break between school and university disciplines, and in removing the threat of an unproductive two-year stint after graduation when, presumably, a career would beckon. Moreover there was a positive attraction in one National Service option, that of the Russian course which many Etonians (including Peter Carson of my year in College) had joined, and which reportedly gave one a year or more of high-level Russian at London or Cambridge Universities. Those I knew of had joined the Navy to do this course; and in my last month or two at Eton I went along to the appropriate recruiting office to set this in hand. It proved to be not quite so simple. The Navy, I was told, was not taking anybody more. The Army Intelligence Corps was the route to follow - go downstairs and take an intelligence test. I did that, and emerged reasonably confident in having passed (I was unable to do one half-question, and tried it on the assembled intellectual might of a few Collegers on my return - it took even Edward Hussey twenty minutes to decide on an answer). They then explained that before actually joining the Intelligence Corps, I would have to complete ten weeks' basic training in an infantry regiment - which one would I like? I wrote down Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire as the two closest, and went off to await developments.

So it was that I was summoned to report a week or so after my eighteenth birthday neither to Oxford nor to Northampton, but to the depot of the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment at Kempston Barracks in Bedford. The Beds and Herts was not the most distinguished regiment of the British Army, and indeed it was soon amalgamated with the Essex Regiment into the East Anglian Brigade. But it seemed a reasonable enough home for what I thought would be a short stay, and when I arrived there were a few kindred spirits; out of the intake of 36 six of us, from a variety of public and grammar schools, were designated "potential officers" by virtue of having passed GCE O-level and having served in a school cadet corps. Although this inevitably meant that we were singled out for the pointed humour of the NCOs, basic training was not too unpleasant an ordeal, and the standards of "bull" - impeccably manicured uniform and equipment - were well below those of the Guards regiments for which most Etonians were destined. In an early letter home I wrote "we run everywhere we don't march", but the physical exercise does not seem to have done me any harm. By the end of the ten weeks we were all able to cope with a forty-eight hour field exercise involving digging and sleeping in slit trenches and a final dawn attack with full equipment, and then marching back the 15 miles to Bedford carrying said equipment - steel helmets, rifles, full packs and all. (We did it in 3¾ hours, apparently a record.) I had gained ten pounds in weight and an inch in height, and was the proud possessor of a little bronze medal

inscribed "23393532 Pte Elliott M: Best Rifle Shot, 47th Intake". (A historical footnote - the rifle in question was of course the old Lee-Enfield 303 as used in the Second World War, now long since superseded.)

That, however, was not the end of my sojourn at Kempston Barracks. During the latter part of the ten weeks potential officers were summoned to the War Office Selection Board (WOSB) at Andover. The day's tests mostly involved working in small groups, either as member or in command, performing various tasks involving mental ingenuity and physical dexterity - bridging streams and so on. I was in a good group, and somehow five of us passed, including me. The bureaucracy then proceeded to tie itself in knots over my case. Having passed WOSB I should immediately go on an officer course; but National Service Russian training was not for officers, although those who passed the longer 18-month course were given officer rank at the end of their time. I was told to stay at Bedford - doing minor chores in the education section - while they made their minds up what to do with me. After two months, on 10 October, I was summoned to the War Office at Lansdowne House in Berkeley Square, and interviewed; perhaps to their incredulity (I can't remember), I said that I was much more interested in learning Russian than in becoming an officer. This was evidently accepted (although at a later stage, when the longer Russian course was axed, I was again asked whether I wanted to abandon Russian and become an infantry officer instead, and gave the same answer).

In November 1957 therefore I took myself and my Army kitbags by train from Bedford to Crail in Fife, near the tip of the triangle of land which juts out between the Forth and the Tay. The Joint Services School for Linguists (JSSL) occupied a former RAF station on a bleak patch of land where the winds, we were assured, came direct from Siberia with no intervening high land to slow them down. Earlier the JSSL had been sited on Bodmin Moor in Cornwall, so remoteness and bleakness were clearly considered essential; rumour had it that this was because the native Russian teachers had to keep well out of the way. Russian teaching accounted for at least 90% of the school, though a few (I think only RAF) were learning Czech or Polish. The others on my intake were a mixed bunch in all respects: tri-Service, though each service was accommodated and largely trained separately and we saw little of Navy or RAF; a variety of Army corps and regiments, many from the Royal Signals; graduates and school-leavers from all areas of the UK and with a variety of local accents; five or six with earlier knowledge of Russian (degree course, A-level or O-level - I reckoned that my Eton classes brought me up to something like O level). A very different assortment from the Beds and Herts, where most had left school at 15 or 16, at least one was illiterate, and one or two had even done time for petty offences.

The teaching was sensibly arranged and highly effective. One learned most in the small groups of five or six, and before long those of us with previous knowledge were collected together into a single faster-moving group, under a Ukrainian whom we called Yevgeniy Mihailitch. (Later he was replaced by a Pole, and my accent in Russian apparently acquired a

slight Polish flavour.) Much of the focus in these groups was on oral confidence, with each member being required to perform solo in Russian for quite extended periods - one of my regular tasks was to summarise some of the interesting items from that day's *Times*. There were also classes of 24 or so, generally with English native teachers teaching grammar and so on, and here too the fast-stream from all three Services was eventually assembled together in a special class. Each service also had classes in appropriate military vocabulary and in making sense of Russian broadcasts through radio interference. There were occasional lectures, one period a week for activities such as Russian singing or dancing, and four periods split between drill, weapons training and physical training - I can't remember anything of what we did in these. And there was "sport" on Wednesday afternoons, which seems to have been mostly cross-country runs. The whole system was more like school than army, with terms divided by significant periods of leave - 17 days at Christmas and again at Easter, with an additional 5-day break at Whitsun when I joined Karin and Bill for a delightful holiday at Reeth in Swaledale.

Extra-curricular activity was unlike any other military unit I can imagine. Conversations tended to take place in other languages - French, Spanish, Russian; the Royal Signals people often conversed with each other in Morse Code (*da-di*), just to keep their hands in. As the course wore on we began to find that it was easier, say in the local pub after work, to understand one's contemporaries (eg from Birmingham, Glasgow or Newcastle) if we all spoke Russian not English. There was a classical music circle listening to gramophone records, and I wrote home happily about attending one where the person opposite was lazily doing the *Times* crossword during a Brahms symphony, and "a tall bespectacled sailor strolled in halfway through, lay down on the carpet nonchalantly, and went to sleep". There was an active engagement in chess, in which I participated with rather more success than in College at Eton where the standard had been distressingly high. There were bridge matches, including one against St Andrew's University; I partnered somebody from Dulwich who was also in the fast stream, and who taught me the Acol convention. In one letter I described a typical Sunday morning in the barrack-room: students mostly still in bed at 9.30 am; senior NCO (a "Corporal of the Horse", officially addressed as "Horse" and the equivalent of a staff-sergeant) wanders in smoking a pipe and dressed in civilian clothes, and remarks that somebody is selling Sunday papers outside; one or two volunteer to struggle out of bed, go out and buy copies of the *Observer* and *Sunday Times* - that was "reveillé" in the JSSL.

The local environment provided other delights. Between November 1957 and July 1958 I ran the gamut of the seasons. Arriving, I found the landscape a blend of grey, green and black tones; black rocks by the grey sea, black ships in the distance against the grey coast of East Lothian across the Forth; tussocky, wiry grass running down to pale sand. Visiting St Andrews, I watched the breakers playing over rocks, foaming back over the sand leaving a shot-silk pattern, surging up against the buttresses of the ruined castle. By January we were parading muffled in greatcoats against the snow, and on one occasion, with a power-cut in camp

paralysing all normal activity, two of us decided to brave the storm and fight our way into Crail village in search of light and company, the gales fortunately carrying us with relative ease over the hard-packed snow. Even in May there were brief sudden snow-blizzards interspersed with patches of glorious sunshine, and the sun-bathed Lothian coast would shine out as a white line through the blackness. We could swim off the rocks in a cold April North Sea, albeit very briefly; the short turf inland of the rocks was dappled with early flowers. Further afield, there were trips into Edinburgh, and hitch-hiking ventures towards the Highlands, when on at least one occasion I accomplished in 48 hours the full round across to Fort William, up to Inverness and back down the A9 to Perth. (The delights of hitch-hiking are now almost historical. The 350 mile trip cost me 30 shillings including all food and the joining fee for the Youth Hostels Association; beer and sandwiches in a lonely hotel on Rannoch Moor, snow on Ben Nevis and the Cairngorms, the Gaelic-only staff on the Ballachulish ferry; lifts from an African from Baratseland (?), a businessman and ex-private-school head from Christ's Hospital, a female architect with a classical bias, a lively spinster with dog and Vauxhall who believed in walking and hunting and gave me all the inside stories and Gaelic names from Killin through Glencoe to Ballachulish, and a pair of Lowland businessmen who took me 100 miles from Inverness to near Perth and bought me a pint of beer for which I signed - it being Sunday - as a bona-fide traveller.)

It was a good time. But the gremlins of Army bureaucracy were still lurking. It became known that the full 18-month course including a spell at Cambridge or London Universities had been abolished. But there were constant rumours about a compromise proposal, to extend the short course by a few weeks or even months for the better students. Contradictorily, a few of us in the top group were moved up an intake, thereby losing a few weeks of the Crail experience, because of the Army's need for translators quickly; I was spared this promotion, despite generally having the highest score in our regular intake tests, because I had no previous paper qualifications in Russian. In the end there was no additional training for anyone and the rest of us graduated in early July as originally forecast. With the top dozen or so that remained I was sent to Cheltenham for the next stage at GCHQ. At this point lightning struck again. After five days in Cheltenham I was rudely summoned back to the Intelligence Corps Depot at Maresfield in Sussex, because somebody somewhere had decided to reopen the whole question of my being commissioned as an officer in the Intelligence Corps.

It seems best to pass fairly quickly over this further period of frustrated waiting. Maresfield is pleasant enough - gentle Sussex country, barrack-blocks set among trees, a good pub just down the road serving potent cider. My temporary work was not totally unrewarding, in a unit which enabled me to improve my typing skills somewhat, learn a bit about the military intelligence network, even participate in a humble way in occasional interrogation exercises where the two highly-experienced staff-sergeants demonstrated memorably the effect of the "hard-man, soft-man" approach. I did an extraordinary number of night guard duties, but

the tedium was relieved by the discovery of how to get into a locked hut which contained a powerful short-wave radio. Interesting people passed through on occasion, often Intelligence Corps National Servicemen returning from postings in trouble-spots such as Cyprus, eloquent about the tenseness of the situation and about the delights of flying back into green England. But on the whole the months between July and November 1958 were largely of little profit to me or anybody else.

Once again, though, reason of a kind in the end triumphed. In November I moved to the Mons Officer Cadet School (OCS) in Aldershot, to embark on the full four-month officer training course. There were some sympathetic others on the course, the ones I took to coming mostly from the more intellectual corps such as Education or Intelligence, but with a percentage of relaxed and easy public-school types mostly in one of the Guards regiments. Life seems to have been a mix of drill-parades, classroom work on subjects such as map-reading, weapons-training, route marches and cross-country runs, and field exercises. Every now and then one had to take a turn in commanding the platoon of cadets, for example organising the briefing for and leading a night patrol. (I wrote home smugly about one where I led my platoon to the objective in good time, unlike all the others which got lost.) There were tests and assessments, in which those of us with intellectual pretensions tended to be given marks rather above the average - I think our company commander had a concealed respect for brains over brawn. There were intervals of freedom - time for country walks, for visits to London for an exhibition or a concert, on one occasion even an overnight party at a London nurses' home to which I think I was invited solely because I was the only credible dancing-partner who happened to be available to match up to a six-foot female. There was "Marathon", a 48-hour exercise involving digging ourselves into trenches and fighting a mock battle - mercifully Aldershot thawed just in time to make the digging possible. And there was the final Battle Camp, two weeks at Sennybridge near Brecon in Wales, where all our knowledge was put to the test. On almost the final day, charging over an area of Welsh hillside (where my familiarity with hill-walking had generally stood me in good stead), I landed awkwardly and fractured a small bone in an ankle, necessitating plaster and compulsory absence from all further participation in physical activity - even the passing-out parade on commissioning. Despite this, the authorities considered that I had done enough to be commissioned with all the others, and on 12 March 1959 I left Mons as a Second Lieutenant in the Intelligence Corps.

There was now no more than a couple of months of my National Service left to run. The whole period had been spent either in training or in waiting; the country was not going to get any return on its investment in me. Certainly not in the remaining eight weeks or so, which I spent back at Maresfield in the comparative comfort of the Intelligence Centre Officers' Mess. Apart from an interesting course in psychological warfare where the lecturers included the notorious Chapman Pincher ("black propaganda" in the Second World War), I recall few events and none of any interest, and left full-time Army service with a slight sense of anticlimax in the middle of May. There were a couple of episodes of

uniform-wearing still to come, both Russian-language training for officers on the reserve list, one back at Crail and one at the Beaconsfield depot which was gradually taking over Crail's functions as National Service came to its end. Although my paper qualifications in Russian were only at translator level, the high-speed group to which I had belonged had in fact taken me a good deal farther; and at the second of the two reservist courses I was allowed to join in at the higher level and do a certain amount of genuine interpreter training, which I much enjoyed. The highlight of the first course in Scotland was the foothold it gave me for a splendid fortnight's hitch-hiking around the northern half of the country, reaching Durness on the north coast and coming down the western side through Lochinver, Ullapool and such delights - wonderful, strange scenery. But my sights were beginning to be set on Oxford and the return to the academic mainstream.

The Army had given me much useful knowledge, maybe a little more maturity, certainly a greater awareness of the world outside. Above all the Russian course had given me a real love for the process of manipulating a foreign language. Long one-to-one conversations (this was one of the bonuses) with Yevgeniy Mihailitch, the ease with which the necessary vocabulary came even when handling serious topical issues, the delight in the mental agility of consecutive interpretation in the last reservist course when one could start translating a sentence even while the speaker was still finishing it - this sort of confidence was a revelation to me. Language on paper was one thing - I had come to enjoy the process of turning a piece of Latin or Greek into readable English long before, although this too was developed by addressing that skill to a modern language. Writing in the foreign language was always a little artificial though the intellectual challenge was an exciting one. But oral skills were new to me, and the beginnings of mastery of them were something of a pointer, even if I hardly realised it, to the possibilities in years ahead.

With hindsight, the Russian course had given me something deeper, beyond the practical skills of manipulating the language. Rather as an incidental to the main business of passing military exams and becoming orally fluent, we had spent a little time doing the minimum necessary preparation to acquire a GCE A-level in Russian. There was clearly no problem about the oral element of this - I seem to remember having been considerably more fluent than my examiner. But although we all chose the options which involved least study of the literature, there was at least some. It must have been at this time - surely at Eton I was not advanced enough - that I read Lermontov's Hero of Our Time, Pushkin's Queen of Spades, some Belkin stories, a certain amount of Pushkin's poetry which for a while I could quote by heart. The language, in its literary manifestation so different from the Pravda and Izvestiya articles which were our staple political diet (and for which only minimal vocabulary was required), fascinated me - its rhythms, its cadences. A sense of Russia as a great European country began dimly to awaken in me. Decades later, visiting our elder son in Moscow when he was working for Unilever there, and following his recommendation to go to the great art collection at the

Pushkin Museum, I had the same sense of Russia-in-Europe, the culture which had introduced so many French words into the Russian language and brought so much wonderful music to European concert-halls. It was all part of the more general thrill of getting under the skin of another country's culture, of feeling oneself not merely English or British but a citizen of a wider world, which has been a powerful influence on me.

But that is leaping ahead. For the moment, the important thing was that I had done my time in the Army and acquired certain skills which might or might not prove useful later, but should put all that behind me for now. The time had come to move to the next stage.

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As an celebration of my return home and a re-introduction to the classical world which was again to be my focus, Karin and Bill had arranged a particularly splendid family holiday for August/September 1959. We took the Simplon-Orient Express train to Venice, proceeded by Yugoslav steamer down the Adriatic and through the Corinth Canal to Athens, and returned by the same route a fortnight later. For me it was a first experience of classical sites, of Mediterranean life and climate, of retsina and *dolmades* in their proper setting. The family journal has carefully-written entries by me recording particular delights. Lying on a low wall in the Roman theatre at Verona, looking up at gently-waving treetops and hot blue sky, with Roman votive tablets scattered nearby. Exploring off the beaten track in Venice - here a dry, dusty park, with people asleep on any shaded bench; there a lively street-scene, market stalls, mint and coconut drinks in glass urns, melon-barges. My first retsina - "a fascinating drink which one can go on sipping apparently for ever ... whose clean taste acts like a charm on dry mouths and sweating foreheads." Coming out of the heat into the shade of Kaisariani monastery, stupefied by the wave of coolness, the suddenness and charm of it all. The power and atmosphere of Delphi. Wine-dark sea off Cape Sounion. Climbing Mount Pentelicon, past gipsy encampments marked out with white and blue stones, resin-collecting tins tied to trees, herds of goats, marble quarries. Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* in the Herodes Atticus theatre, with a magnificent Clytemnestra whose face was the epitome of Greek tragedy in itself. A wine festival at Daphni, where I was enchanted by the loose and nonchalant technique of a klezmer-type clarinettist. The city walls of Dubrovnik, looking out over the Adriatic. It was a wonderful holiday.

Arriving in the cloistered calm of New College in October was in some ways like coming home after the strange world of the Army, and in others a little unreal. In those days, with National Service coming to its end, the first-year undergraduate population was divided into the twenty-plus-year-olds who had done their time, and the eighteen-year-olds who now never would. Later it would become evident from the feminine undergraduate element - then a small minority - that the fractionally older males had a distinct advantage in one area at least. But to begin with I was conscious of having to work rather harder to recover the skills of manipulating Latin

and Greek than those who were straight from school. Most of the others reading "Mods and Greats" - Greek and Latin language and literature for the first five terms, ancient history and philosophy for the last seven, of a four-year course - were straight from school. I was actually the Senior Scholar of the year, a meaningless position based only on the date when I had taken the scholarship examination (the one perk was that I had first choice of rooms for the second year), but many of my fellow-classics were and remained well ahead. Whatever the reason, although I enjoyed my studies and devoted a fair amount of time to them, they never dominated my life - there was too much else to enjoy.

New College proved a wonderful base for the next four years. Tucked away in the centre of the university city, but not abutting on any major road, it has some of the best early buildings of any college, one of the finest chapels with a magnificent reredos, and a substantial length of the original Oxford city wall of which few other traces survive anywhere. The cloisters are especially calming and attractive, the garden - flanked on two sides by the city wall - has a magnificent herbaceous border and ample lawns for lounging on in the summer. The Victorian "New Buildings" on Holywell, outside the city wall but still part of the college, were architecturally less distinguished, but provided extra accommodation enabling (in my day) almost all those in their first two years to live in; after that one sought lodgings outside. Almost everybody in those days ate in the College Hall, where the food was a reasonably good version of the institutional variety and certainly ample. Many people attended Chapel services, as did I, and the superb choir (there was a choir-school attached to the college which provided the trebles) was an extra attraction. It was a comparatively rich college, and among the better ones academically, with a distinguished list of fellows and a generous endowment of scholarships; the historical link with Winchester swelled the number of scholars and non-scholars (commoners), and Wykehamists occasionally formed something of a clique, but there was a good mix of others both from independent and state schools.

For my first year I shared rooms with Louis Sherwood, a fine classical scholar from Westminster where he too had been Captain of the School (the New College authorities must have been pleased by the symmetry). He and another from Westminster (even younger at 17½ and even cleverer) had taken the first two classical scholarships the previous year, and through them - Louis was much more extrovert than me - I met many others of that generation, mostly classics. Our shared sitting-room (we had separate tiny bedrooms) was large and in the beautiful Garden Quad, handy for Hall, Junior Common Room, garden, and importantly the Long Room - the communal bath-house/lavatory block. The story went that the rather pinched look about the faces of distinguished former New College men - Hugh Gaitskell was one of those often mentioned - resulted from their early years of having to contain themselves while making the long trek to the Long Room. (New College has changed now - most rooms have *en suite* facilities.) Our room was a good place for people to drop in to, and the lack of privacy didn't matter too much to me that year. I even gave a small party there to celebrate my 21st birthday in May 1960, and

was tenderly brought round by the elderly "scout" the next morning with his renowned hangover remedy (in an effort to be tidy and economical, I had gone round the room after it was all over finishing up the dregs of all the bottles of Moselle).

But most of my leisure time was spent with others. For a while there were Eton contemporaries, although some (like Julian Hall) were ahead of me, having not done National Service. There were Army friends from the Russian course - one, Steven Dorner, came once to stay at Farthinghoe, and was a good friend. There was the group of oarsmen, because I had taken up rowing early in the first term, and remained faithful to the New College second boat for three years - the first boat was for relative professionals. (My initial sporting foray was on the Rugger field, but it emerged after a brief run up and down the pitch that my claim to be a rather speedy wing three-quarter was not supported by my performance.) And there was music. I joined the Bach Choir, whose director was Sidney Watson, formerly Precentor at Eton and willing to admit me without the formality of an audition - probably just as well. I infiltrated myself into one or two instrumental groupings as a clarinetist, though I was nowhere near good enough to match the competition for the better university orchestras. Later on I even became president of the New College Music Society, largely as an administrator, a task made easier because the secretary provided almost all the undergraduate performances - his name was James Bowman; and for a time edited a sort of newsletter giving details of university musical events at the Holywell Music Rooms, then recently restored.

There was plenty of time in the first year to savour all these delights, with no pressure of examinations. The Bach Choir did Brahms's Requiem and Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, both magnificent works. Rowing in an eight was an unexpected pleasure, especially when we began to get it right and move with some speed through the water; we even rowed the boat down to Reading to compete in a Head of the River race. In the summer there were occasional games of tennis, and mastery of the skills of punting. There was the Union, with distinguished outside speakers - I wrote home the day we had both Orson Welles and Stephen Potter - and some strong and witty speakers among the undergraduate generation, of whom Peter Jay and Paul Foot stood out. There was the outstanding university Rugger team, full of famous names including the unrivalled Richard Sharp; and cricket in the Parks, where the Nawab of Pataudi was always the man to watch. There were occasional visits back to Eton, as part of a scratch team to play the Wall Game (by the nature of things all competitive matches in Eton's peculiar and unique sports have to be against old boys), and for the Fourth of June. And there were solitary pleasures: striding out into the Oxfordshire countryside, or along the towpath to the Trout Inn at Godstow; wandering around New College garden at midnight, with the trees no more than silhouettes against the night sky, and lighted windows in Garden Quad.

By the second year I felt comfortably established. I had chosen a rather quirky room above the Warden's Lodgings at the front of the old part of

the college, with a sitting-room divided into two parts on slightly different levels, and a separate bedroom, and access (probably illegal) to the College roof. Feminine company was becoming important. There was a girl called Rosalind at Cambridge, of a family known to Karin's mother, and some weekends were occupied with visits in either direction. There were one or two others in Oxford; and in particular one at St Hugh's, whom I tended to visit after rowing and who used to give me tea and home-made gingerbread - we shall hear more of her. Of course in those days there was no hint or expectation of impropriety, men's college doors closed firmly at (was it?) ten pm, and on most days women had to be back in their colleges and all men out by seven pm.

Some activities however remained communal. I was still enjoying my rowing, even the preparatory runs round Christ Church Meadows, and becoming relatively fit; our eight was good enough to score four "bumps" in the summer races, and we were each rewarded with an oar in New College colours with our names and the names of the colleges which were our victims inscribed thereon. The Bach Choir did Monteverdi's Vespers in the Lent term, a thrilling experience. At the end of the summer term, by way of a reliving of Eton days, I joined Ben de la Mare and Julian Hall in one item for a concert in Trinity College Garden, playing an arrangement of *Waltzing Matilda* for two clarinets and flute. - My studies were something of a counterpoint to all this rather than the main theme, although I must have worked reasonably hard before the Classical Mods exam in March; not quite hard enough though, because I just failed to achieve the first-class which my tutors seemed to think I should get. The composition papers - Greek and Latin prose and verse - were just not quite good enough. The only area of relative success was translation, from set books and unseen. It was easy, by way of retrospective excuse, to claim that two years of military service, and concentration on the less stern intellectual disciplines of a modern language, had dulled the edge of my classical learning.

Vacations were an important part of the university years. For the three long summer vacations in 1960, 1961 and 1962 I travelled successively around Scandinavia, overland to Turkey and to central Italy. Detailed journals survive, bewildering in their mix of subjective impressions and self-congratulation on linguistic expertise. (At one time or another I had to deploy to maximum effect whatever knowledge I had - often very little - in Swedish, French, Russian, Italian, Serbo-Croat, Greek and German.) The Turkey trip was in a group of six, all five others being from Cambridge, travelling in an ancient Humber which broke down in every country we went through, thereby severely taxing my linguistic skills. It was a splendid adventure, driving down by way of France, Switzerland, Italy, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, and returning through Greece, Yugoslavia again, Austria, Germany, Luxembourg and Belgium. But travelling in company imposed certain strains, not least that most of the party seemed to suffer from various ailments quite often, and to hanker rather after English food and climate; and most of them made no attempt at any local language. My most lyrical descriptions seem almost always to have been

of solitary moments, and the Scandinavian and Italian trips were solo ventures which suited me much better.

There were so many highlights, and selection is almost impossible. Lights and colour and sound in the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, "where even the English girls seem beautiful and the Danish ones are ravishing"; the sudden sight of Lake Vättern in Sweden, a mysterious milky-grey, immensely long, with tall pines and red-painted wooden cottages; a dramatic rainbow springing out of the dark channel as the ferry approached the Lofoten Islands, the sinister black peaks showing in stark contrast; on the way to Bergen, driving through Flå, Gol, Ål and Hol - "a wonderfully monosyllabic and liquid country" - before reaching the ice-cauldron Hardanger glacier and the immense Vøringsfoss waterfall. On the Turkey trip, I found Trieste enchanting; was moved by the romance of the view across the Danube in Belgrade looking over plains traversed by invasion after invasion from the East; thrilled by the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, its enormous blue canopy within and cool cloistered court outside - "through the grilles to the East one could look out over the Bosphorus to Asia"; dreamed there of desert adventures, arriving in some Arab serai speaking fluent Arabic and disappearing again on the morning breeze; was woken at camp outside Bursa by a troupe of strolling players with bears who danced to strange thin music; swam ecstatically from the perfect beach at Tolon in the Peloponnese, and slept out on the sloping hillside of the Taygetus mountains near Mistra, with a canopy of olive trees and stars, and the valley spread out misty in the moonlight just beyond the toe of one's sleeping bag, before exploring Mistra's churches the next day and being utterly captivated by the simplicity and perfection of Byzantine wall-paintings. In Italy, I was overwhelmed by the Sistine Chapel, even more powerful than one had expected; saw an impressive Aida at the Baths of Caracalla, where even the camels looked small; found the delicate marble and brilliant mosaics of Ostia at once more peaceful and more exciting than anything in Rome itself; was intensely moved by the Filippo Lippi frescoes in the Duomo in Spoleto - "I have never been so conscious of beauty"; then discovered that the Giotto's in the lower basilica at Assisi were even more breathtaking, a golden sunset with long shadows across the green-and-gold patchwork of the valley reinforcing the magic; slept in great comfort in a delightful primitive room at a monastery at Camaldoli north of Arezzo, where they sold medicines and liqueurs of their own making from a panelled *farmacia* full of medieval recipes and instruments; slept out in a delightful patch of forest near Vallombrosa, with squirrels darting overhead, after being entertained to dinner by two elderly teachers from Bergamo who were thrilled to meet an English philosophy student; and plunged finally into an ecstatic few days of art in Florence.

Those were good times, communing with beauty and drinking in the sense of continuity with the past. But strictly they were interludes, though valuable ones, in the serious business of Oxford. The summer term of 1961 had been something of a holiday, with final examinations a full two years distant, but the start of the 1961/62 academic year in October meant knuckling down to philosophy and ancient history in a much more

professional way. I had secured lodgings for my final two years at 16 Manor Place, in a favoured and secluded area quite close to New College, with a redoubtable landlady. Clarrie Rowlands boasted that she only accepted those who were destined either for a first or (preferably) a Blue, or of course both. Various previous names were mentioned when I called on her early in the previous year, many of them indeed distinguished in later life; the two current inhabitants in 1960/61 were both Australian, one a rowing blue and one golf. As it happened, though, she had not made her mind up about the following year, and the rowing blue was leaving; what was my sport? where did I go to school? Somehow I charmed my way through the interrogation, and was accepted. It turned out to be an excellent berth, ample breakfasts, Sunday lunch, easy to find and visit, and very quiet. Much of my reading was of course done in college and university libraries, but the atmosphere of 16 Manor Place proved highly conducive for essay-writing and contemplation.

For Greek history (the first of these two final years) I concentrated on the later of the two recommended periods, essentially Thucydides, Demosthenes and the writers on Alexander the Great; for Roman history (the final year), on the Empire from Augustus to Trajan. Both periods had the attraction of being well but not too well supplied with source material, so that there was plenty of scope for flights of imaginative fancy but no need to pore over inscriptions. My tutors, Geoffrey de Ste Croix of New College for Greek, and Tom Stevens of Magdalen for Roman history, were stimulating and sufficiently complimentary to arouse and maintain my interest. On occasion I was even able to add a small scrap to their knowledge, for example by combing through articles in Russian-language journals for *recherché* facts or opinions. The process of assimilating and selecting evidence was satisfying. But I am not sure that my conclusions were ever especially profound or that I ever produced any very penetrating insights. By the end of my time I was perhaps flagging a little on the history side - indeed this experience is apparently not uncommon among those reading Greats, apart from the really dedicated.

Philosophy on the other hand was totally perplexing at the beginning, but became more and more fascinating as time went on. Ayer's "logical positivism" still dominated Oxford philosophy, and Professor Ayer indeed was a fellow of New College although he did not take undergraduate pupils and rarely appeared. David Wiggins, since become very distinguished himself, and Tony Quinton did most of the tutoring, and directed our reading towards the linguistic philosophers of the last two or three decades - they had no truck with the earlier generations, Locke, Hume, Berkeley. We were supposed to focus also on Plato and Aristotle, but I can't remember spending much time on them, and very little of that on the Greek original texts (which were easy enough to translate, but slower to skim through than the translations or commentaries). In a mechanical sort of way at first, and then with growing confidence, we learned to pick out the meaning behind words, analyse thought for its basis in logic. We never ventured on to the mathematical and symbolic side of logic, but the diet we were offered seemed entirely coherent and complete. Occasional ventures into the area of ethics, or "morals", introduced a slightly random

element which did not seem to be susceptible to exactly the same kind of linguistic analysis. But I found it easier to relate moral philosophy to my personal life, and to my attitudes as a regular church-goer with some genuine interest in theology. Indeed on one occasion I had even spent a few days at a Christian centre in North Devon, where there were meditations and lectures - including one on the historicity of the Gospels by one Stella Aldwinckle which influenced me profoundly - which brought philosophy and religion rather satisfyingly together. By the end of the Greats course I was even speculating on the attractions of exploring one of the various fascinating intellectual byways which philosophy offered - although there was no real question of my ever going in for research.

As in my first two years, there was plenty to do outside work. I continued to row, even graduating to the New College first boat for the Lent term of 1962. Music was still a major preoccupation; and the familiar pleasures of walks around Oxford and into the country nearby, enjoying the variation of the seasons (including the great freeze of January/February 1963, when one could walk on the frozen Cherwell from New College playing fields to LMH). And there was feminine company. Slowly I came to realise that my most relaxed and happy times were those spent with Julian Richardson at St Hugh's - and not just because of the tea and homemade gingerbread which were mentioned in an earlier paragraph. We were walking together amicably on the towpath during Eights Week (the college boat races) in June 1962 when there came a hail from the opposite bank, where in some confusion I recognised Karin and Bill similarly engaged; and the result was the first encounter between my parents and their future daughter-in-law. Alas, Julian was programmed to spend the following academic year of 1962/3 in France, as part of her course, so I was deprived of her company for my final year at Oxford. But we both survived, fortified by a constant correspondence, and the reunion after my finals in the summer of 1963 was joyous.

The ordeal of finals was maybe a little less severe for me because by that time I had already established what my next move was to be. Some of my energies in the final year were directed towards the Civil Service and more particularly Foreign Service examinations and interviews, and by April I knew that I had been accepted for the Foreign Service, subject only to securing a second-class degree - arrogantly, perhaps, I wasn't too worried about that. Nevertheless I worked steadily in the final weeks. As two years earlier, however, my best was not quite good enough to secure the first-class which might have been just within reach. I was seriously disappointed, partly through a sense of having let the family down - Bill had of course got firsts in both Mods and Greats; but not actually all that surprised, if I analysed my capabilities objectively. The last two years had been enormously rewarding. Philosophy had given me a facility for intellectual analysis, and for enjoying exercising that facility, which would clearly be valuable in the career I had chosen. My particular tastes - for music, for travel, for scenery and atmosphere and countryside - had been developed and established. I had made a number of good friends, many of whom remain friends nearly fifty years later. The prospects for the future, both professional and personal, were cheerful.

IV - FIRST STEPS IN THE FO

The overlap between the final Oxford year and the process of securing entry into the Foreign Office was a little unsettling. There had already been a sense of unreality at returning to academic life after the Army, and this new sensation was perhaps the reverse - being forced suddenly to confront the inevitability of a nine-to-five world outside. In the autumn of 1961, I think it must have been, the FO had opened its doors for a week to interested undergraduates, and responding to this call I had found myself attached to Far Eastern Department (curious coincidence, in view of subsequent events), bemusedly watching the bureaucratic gyrations of the China desk officer. A year later I was still convinced that the prospects of working with Abroad were exciting enough to be worth a try. The great advantage was that the results would be known well before the end of the final year, so that there would be time after failure to explore other avenues (not that I had any in mind). The first stage, for the administrative stream of the FO and Home Civil Service alike, was a written examination taken in one's own university; graduates were exempted. I remember précis-writing and analysis of statistics as among the tests included, and presumably an essay, and maybe even some sort of intelligence test. But this first-stage examination was no more than a sieve, to reduce to manageable proportions the numbers called for the second and third stages; these were the battery of interviews and group tests at the Civil Service Selection Board (CSSB), followed by the Final Selection Board (FSB). All this was the so-called Method II, known in popular mythology as the "country-house" system where the personal qualities rather than the mental attainments of candidates are assessed. (Method I, almost entirely written examination, was less popular among candidates and very few came in by this route.)

Method II suited me down to the ground. By good fortune, or maybe the possession of bureaucratic genes, I had no problem with the first-stage written papers, and (as I discovered some time later - all they told one at first was "pass" or "fail") scored a surprisingly high mark, to carry forward to the CSSB stage and compensate for any deficiencies there. The CSSB, actually in a suite of offices in Savile Row in London and not in any sort of country house (and there was no test of one's dexterity with knife-and-fork or any other form of etiquette), was actually a rather enjoyable couple of days. There were three observers, one of whom was terrifyingly described as a psychologist. All three watched as the candidates, divided into groups of a dozen or so, coped with a series of discussion topics taking it in turns to chair the group. Naturally everybody wanted to show him- or her-self (there were very few females) in the best light, but not to the extent of obviously sabotaging anybody else. There were also realistic little paper exercises, setting a bureaucratic poser to be solved in minimum time; and more intelligence tests, even I think a mathematical one. And there were the one-to-one interviews, with each of the three observers. For some of these one had to nominate a topical issue in advance. I think it was with the chairman, or senior observer, that I elected to discuss British defence policy with special reference to nuclear

weapons. It was the CND period when nuclear disarmament was a hot issue, and most students of the day would naturally attack Conservative Government policy. The chairman, no doubt bored by yet another candidate opting to talk on this obvious issue, suggested that I should put myself in the position of a British representative to a foreign government required to defend the official line. As an essentially apolitical sort of person and having no very strong convictions either way, I found this relatively easy to do. Anyhow, a couple of weeks later, I was told at Oxford that I had qualified to go before the Final Selection Board.

The FSB interview, by contrast, was neither impressive nor enjoyable. Entering a room where there are seven elderly gentlemen (in the eyes of a 23-year-old) seated on the far side of tables arranged in a semicircle, and seven pairs of eyes focused on the victim in the central chair, is a little daunting - and maybe sheer terror caused me to forget most of what went on. But I cannot recall any serious interrogation. One questioner sought to verify my Etonian credentials (presumably he was one too) by checking on various details of my career in insider Eton-speak - easy questions to answer, but scarcely necessary. Another asked why I had not opted to join the Commonwealth Office, and seemed perfectly content with the rather superficial answer that I wanted to work in foreign languages. There must surely have been more to it than that. The Method II process as a whole did seem to cover a large amount of the necessary ground pretty comprehensively, and few duds got through though some good people may well have been missed. I don't personally think that there was too much bias generally in favour of public-school or Oxbridge candidates, then or now - the fact was that many otherwise excellent potential candidates lacking those paper advantages were scared off even attempting entry at this level. But my own FSB experience did not inspire much confidence in that part of the system.

Without too much nervous delay, I was informed that I had reached the required standard for entry to the Foreign Office, and indeed the Home Civil Service - it was considered tactful to include a willingness to accept appointment there too. In due course, when the final lists were published, it emerged that I was actually equal third on the list of about twenty successful FO candidates. Robin Renwick, top of the list, had an outstanding subsequent career, ending as ambassador in Washington after a remarkable tour of duty as head of mission in South Africa at its most critical time. Christopher Makins was second; brilliant son of a distinguished father and also at New College, he delayed entry to the FO to collect his inevitable fellowship at All Souls, and then left British government service after only a few years to join the Brookings Institution in Washington. There were some distinguished names lower down the list too, including Charles Powell, of Thatcher fame, yet another New College man. But the Elliott skill at bluffing examiners had triumphed again.

There was a curious sub-theme to this episode. During the process described above I had also gone through a parallel process for admission to Government Communications HQ (GCHQ) at Cheltenham, which offered an intriguingly specialised career to those with linguistic interests. There

were only two stages that I recall, a written test and a final interview. The written test was pure fun. The test I recall most vividly gave one a piece for translation from some language that nobody could be expected to know - rumour had it that it was Kurdish; supplied one or two minimal pointers to the grammatical structure, and a very few key words; and left you to get on with it. Other tests exercised the crossword-solving or code-breaking part of one's brain, and again there must have been some sort of mathematical intelligence test. Having passed that stage, I was summoned for final interview just after I heard that I had been successful for the FO. Although I told my interviewers this at once, they said that they might as well go on with the interview; for my part I performed with a complete absence of nerves as nothing rested on the outcome. Curiously, a couple of weeks later, they offered me that job too. It would in many ways have been intellectually exciting, but I suppose ambition for more public achievement still lurked in me, and I turned GCHQ down.

It was 19 August 1963 when I first entered the hallowed portals of the Foreign Office as a member (on probation) of Her Majesty's Diplomatic Service. Actually I can't remember which hallowed portals they were on that occasion, but almost certainly not the genuine ones in Downing Street or King Charles Street. The Office was, and still to a lesser extent is, dispersed through a range of buildings in the Whitehall hinterland, and it must have been to one of them that new recruits reported for their three-week introductory course. Apart from the inevitable lectures on how an embassy works and on office procedure - almost everybody subsequently recalled the stern injunction that the red tape with which bundles of related files were held together should always be knotted UNDERNEATH the bundle - "bows beneath" - there were some jollier occasions. We spent an afternoon in the US Embassy, and were given our first diplomatic drinks there; we were treated to racy anecdotal talks by retired ambassadors, and an impressive lecture on Whitehall by the legendary Sir Burke Trend of the Cabinet Office; I was even given a couple of tickets to a Promenade Concert by one former ambassador, perhaps just as a fellow Old Etonian. The main interest was in meeting one's fellows. One of them turned up in a bowler hat on the first day (and never subsequently - he left after some years to join the European Commission). Another, clearly of powerful intellect and dominating personality even at that age, is much in the public eye now 45 years later and in the House of Lords; she was one of the very few women. Just one or two of the men were married. Some I cannot recall at all; others have been friends ever since. But the course as a whole did little apart from easing the transition from private life.

More significant were the contacts with Personnel Department about the course of one's immediate future. One interview concerned language skills. In those days there was no internal test of linguistic ability. (There is now; and a favourite story we tell is of one hapless diplomat to whom the examiners are reported to have said, after his performance had been assessed, "frankly, Mr X, we are amazed that you can speak English".) The Office reckoned that it could teach its members whatever they needed in the way of language. But entrants were required to nominate one

foreign language, at whatever level they had attained - it could be O-level French - and arrange for themselves to be tested for example at university to determine whether their ability in that language was commensurate with what would be expected at that level. I naturally chose Russian, and had a relaxed conversation with an Oxford Russian tutor which gave neither of us any problems. So I naturally expected Personnel Department to be thinking in terms of sending me to Moscow. Not a bit of it. It was made clear to me that having demonstrated that I could pick up an easy language like Russian, I should acquire something a bit harder. There were three so-called hard languages on offer - Arabic, Chinese, Japanese; which would I like? I asked about the draw-backs, and was told that for Arabic, I would have to leave the UK straight away to start the course; for the other two I could wait. With the near prospect of marriage (although I was not at that stage engaged, it was pretty clear to me that I soon would be), I said "not Arabic" and explained. That was where it rested, for the next year and more.

The other significant decision came by letter. Just before I arrived for the introductory course, I was told that I should prepare myself to leave directly after the course to join the British delegation which every year reinforces our permanent mission to the UN in New York for the General Assembly - a three-month posting, after which I would in all probability join United Nations Department in the Office. One other new recruit had the same message, Malcolm Pill, who achieved distinction a year or so later as a junior member of UN Dept on a delegation to some meeting on population control; given recent advances in that subject at the time, it seemed highly appropriate that the British intervention in the debate should be prefaced by the words "Pill (UK) said ...". (He left the FO before long for the law, his first love, and has risen to become a Lord Justice of Appeal.) This assignment is a traditional plum for two members of each intake, who act as additional reporting officers for the Assembly when the permanent mission to the UN is under severe pressure, and gain useful insights into one fascinating area of international diplomacy. We were much envied.

On 12 September therefore Malcolm and I, with a number of others on the delegation - lobbying officers, additional legal adviser, secretarial staff and so on - boarded the Queen Mary at Southampton for the five-day voyage to New York. Those were spacious days. We were in cabin (in practice second) class, quite luxurious enough to rate five-course lunches and dinners, though no porthole for our cabin. The Queen Mary seemed huge; I wrote home about the odd sensation of sleeping in "this great vibrating mass of iron", and mentioned that "I haven't yet discovered where tourist class is" on about day 3. But soon enough we were berthing alongside Manhattan, being whisked through Customs and settled in to the San Carlos Hotel ("view of skyscrapers; not a long view, as the 14th floor is quite low down, just a windowful of lights towering up into the dusk"). The first experience of New York, at a time when London had nothing approaching skyscraper level, was amazing. Malcolm and I treated ourselves to one small cocktail on the top of the Rockefeller Center, 850 feet above street-level, as the cheapest and pleasantest way of getting an

overview of Manhattan. After a time one grew used to it, and before long I was writing home that "the Empire State Building seems as appropriately sized as Big Ben". But it was still exotic, with steam rising from every manhole cover, and subway trains rumbling past close to the surface under open gratings, and eating-places from what felt like every nation on earth.

We were at once introduced to the UN building - wide plush-carpeted corridors, silent elevators, deep chairs arranged in diplomatic little groups, phones on low tables, well-stocked bars. And of course the Assembly Chamber and the various committee rooms, with their booths for the simultaneous interpreters (some of whom we got to know quite well, and all of whom seemed to have at least three languages in which they were totally fluent). For the first few weeks it was the General Debate, in which each member state set out its view of the world. My first day of report-writing included Gromyko, long-standing Soviet Foreign Minister, and Lester Pearson of Canada, one of the historic architects of the United Nations in 1945. Malcolm got John F Kennedy, with delegates standing in the aisles because so many wanted to be there. It always seemed very convenient that for alphabetical reasons the UK and the US were next to each other (we were separated from the USSR only by the United Arab Republic), but it did mean that there were no spare seats nearby; some of the less well-endowed states never filled their ten seats in the Assembly, though of course the number of members then, at around 110, was little more than half the number now in 2008.

Gradually we became more familiar with the routine, and maybe a little blasé about the world figures who paraded before us: fierce altercations between India and Pakistan (Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, then Foreign Minister, headed the Pakistani delegation); an emotional presentation from the Israelis (was it Golda Meir?), and special permission for a PLO representative to speak for the Palestinians, though probably not in the plenary session; anti-colonial sentiment vigorously expressed by a range of Afro-Asian delegations, with the ANC representatives from South Africa also being heard, again as a special concession. The whole question of South Africa exercised us in particular in the UK delegation, and I listened with fascination to an internal discussion back in our mission about whether we could vote for one resolution, the key point being whether or not it could be deemed to contain "chapter VII language" - the UN Charter provision for threats to international peace and security. (One aspect which intrigued me was the relatively small influence which the politician in the delegation, a Minister of State from the FO in London, exercised; it was the great men of the permanent mission, with years of collective experience under their diplomatic belts, who really decided.)

There were leisure opportunities too. The UN hospitality committee was generous to visiting delegations, distributing tickets to ballet and theatre, inviting us to parties where we could meet others in similar case. I found a congenial Australian, and strolled around the nearer bits of Manhattan with him late one night after one of these occasions; there was a delegate from Niger with beautiful French and a charming manner, and a friendly

Jordanian, and a Thai - oddly these last two both became Prime Ministers in their respective countries many years later, an indication of the calibre of delegations to the UN General Assembly from many countries. A friend of Malcolm's invited us both to join him and his family on his 38-foot yacht on Long Island Sound one memorable day. I took a train up to Niagara Falls one weekend, and visited Washington another time, on both occasions with a friendly secretary from the delegation who had taken some trouble to teach me how to dictate properly - all very innocent, in those days. Niagara was tremendous, especially seen from below, a clear curving whiteness like an Alpine postcard against the blue sky; Washington I found "a quiet and likeable little town" after New York, and admired the purity of the White House and the serenity of its lawns. Julian's sister Clare and American husband Paul invited me to visit them at their house just across the Hudson river in New Jersey, for a spot of family life and country air; I wrote home ecstatically about the autumn colours "blending into a continuous mass of ridiculous intensity ... walking, one experiences a continual start of joy at some new freak of natural colour against the clear blue sky above". I was even invited to a splendidly traditional Thanksgiving dinner by Paul's mother, turkey and pumpkin pie. When there was nothing else on, I relaxed into learning more about New York City and its wonderful museums, in particular the Cloisters and the Museum of Modern Art, both with superb European collections.

The General Debate in plenary session began to peter out, and the delegation turned to committee work. I was assigned to the First Committee, dealing with disarmament issues, a highly technical matter full of acronyms - who outside the trade would know that GCD stood for General and Complete Disarmament? - but evidently of high importance in those cold-war days. It was difficult for the amateur to rustle up much enthusiasm for the eternal manoeuvring of the chess-playing specialists, though. Malcolm had a more interesting time in the Special Political Committee, which dealt with everything else not specifically allocated. The Second Committee covered economic issues, the Third social, the Fourth "trusteeship", essentially colonial matters, the Fifth administrative, the Sixth legal. All of these were handled by more experienced officials. Any matter of particular excitement in any committee would be reported quickly by telegram, again by those senior to us. But Malcolm and I did even so develop a sort of pride in being able to come back to the mission after a day's debate and produce a quick summary report for distribution around the world, that is to British posts in the countries whose delegates had spoken that day. We rapidly became encyclopaedic in our knowledge of the world's capital cities.

On Friday 22 November this welter of mildly purposeful activity was turned into scurrying chaos by a world-shaking event. I was in the UN building when the news of the Kennedy shooting started filtering through, and my subsequent letter is worth quoting. "...went along to the UN press desk ... and joined a silent huddled group of reporters and those few delegates who had heard and knew where to go; we stood listening to a transistor radio, a brash but obviously shaken reporter describing reactions in the Senate and going back over the details of the scene at

Dallas... His voice was faded out and a deep harsh voice said twice 'the President of the United States is dead'. There was a gasp, men suddenly looked ashen, and the group broke up without a word. Going back to our UN office I met a few of the delegation, who seemed hardly to have heard of the shooting, and they started back at the final news as if they were going to have a heart attack. Grim little conferences were assembling ... there was hardly a US delegate to be seen. At 3.00 Plenary met as scheduled ... tributes ... minute's silence ... a long, silent queue of ambassadors down the aisle, waiting quietly to shake a few American hands and pass on. Criticism is silenced ... Emotionalism evident in all the allusions to Abraham Lincoln, on whose bier Kennedy rested [next day] in the Capitol ... he was being called a martyr, and veiled references made to Good Friday and to 'Father forgive them ...', almost hinting at an Imperial Roman type of deification ... Broadway was dark all weekend ... an order has gone around that we are to wear black ties and subdued colours for a week ... nothing but biographies and requiem masses on the radio for 72 hours."

Normal business resumed thereafter, and President Johnson came to address the Assembly on its last day, inspiringly (I noted) and not at too great length; outside there were apparently almost more traffic policemen and security guards than spectators. The routine business was tidied expeditiously out of the way. In the First Committee, I wrote on 9 December, "we have finished Outer Space without too many polemics, a nice technical subject with lots of meteorological data and plenty of Russo-American boasting. Now we are dealing with Korea, about the only real cold-war issue on our agenda, as Germany and Berlin are too specific & touchy to discuss here". That last sentence in a way illustrates the relevance of the UN, or at least the General Assembly (only very occasionally was I able to look in on Security Council sessions). There was plenty of heated debate, delegates letting off steam at their traditional opponents be they neighbours or just the colonial powers. There was much useful corridor discussion, and no doubt a great deal of business done, particularly with the top echelon of many foreign ministries apparently having migrated to New York for three months. But there was little sign of real progress being made on any global issue, at that session at least. It was the lawyers who really controlled things, and the danger to be avoided at all costs was that of setting a precedent which one might later regret. Drafting (of resolutions) was all-important, and preserving one's freedom of action for the future. I had enjoyed the New York experience greatly, learned a great deal, and acquired a few technical skills. But I looked forward to getting home and finding out what the Foreign Office was really like.

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Before all that happened, though, there was Christmas - and a rather important item on my personal agenda. The period between Oxford and joining the FO in July and August 1963 had not been entirely devoted on my part to brooding on international affairs. There was the small matter of Julian's return from her year away in France, and a number of resultant

visits in both directions during those weeks, to her home in Osmotherley near Northallerton in North Yorkshire, and to mine in Farthinghoe in Northamptonshire. My departure to New York in September had come as something of an unwelcome interruption in this respect. But on my return we lost little time; and on 30 December, during a stay at Farthinghoe, we became formally engaged. The following day my account book faithfully records the spending of a part of my New York savings on an engagement ring at an Oxford jewellers. Julian clearly had to finish her final year at Oxford, but most of our weekends between January and September 1964 were spent together in Oxford, Farthinghoe or Osmotherley. I cannot pretend that during those months my mind was always entirely on the work of United Nations Department.

Nevertheless it was a fascinating period of introduction to the Office. I had an easy daily journey from the rooms I had taken at 149 George Street, near Marble Arch, in August before I knew about the New York posting (George Renwick, a New College contemporary who was starting his time at a top London solicitor, had the other room - in fact we each had a bed-sitter with cooking facilities and shared a bathroom). My responsibilities covered most of the UN Specialised Agencies, the major ones being ILO (labour), WHO (health), FAO (agriculture), and UNESCO (education/science). Other Whitehall departments were responsible for the technical aspects of our policy within these organisations, but the FO had a significant role in coordinating the UK position towards the Agencies in general and in ensuring that our delegations were not caught unawares by political initiatives taken by other states - seeking for example to exclude South African delegations, do the wrong thing about Israel or China or any of the other world issues, or generally to import political controversy into what should be purely technical organisations. This meant that there had to be an FO presence at any Whitehall meeting convened to prepare for any major meeting of these organisations - and quite often it was me, heavily outranked by the experts from the relevant Ministry, but needing nevertheless to be heard. Once the delegation had arrived in Geneva or wherever the HQ of the Agency concerned was located, our permanent mission there could cope. But most of the work had to be done in advance.

At the same time I needed instruction in the mysteries of Office structure and procedure. UN Department, like the multitude of other departments covering geographical areas or functional subjects like economic relations or personnel or visas, had a Head, a grand personage generally in his early forties and of "counsellor" rank, equivalent to Assistant Secretary in the Home Civil Service; one or more Assistants, senior First Secretaries and equivalent to senior Principals; an engine-room of more junior First, Second and Third Secretaries; and support staff for archiving and secretarial work (the secretarial staff being rather charmingly known as the Departmental Ladies in those sexist days). The engine-room was known as the Third Room, although in larger departments there might well be more than one actual room used for staff at Third Room level. The first stages of work on most issues were done in the Third Room by the occupant of the appropriate desk, consulting as necessary within the

department or elsewhere within the FO or indeed outside it, and then submitting for approval to the next level up. The trickier or more important the issue, the further up it needed to go. Above Head of Department there were shadowy and enormously grand individuals, Assistant Under-Secretaries, Deputy Under-Secretaries (for some arcane reason Deputy was a more powerful word than Assistant), and at the top of the pyramid the Permanent Under-Secretary himself. So every official was Under something, by implication the politicians - the Foreign Secretary and his team of Ministers of State and Parliamentary Under-Secretaries.

This much was relatively easy to understand in principle - and in practice at the start, since clearly there was no question of my deciding anything on my own and everything had to go up to the relevant Assistant. A little less obvious was the procedure for the handling of paper. Every document which arrived - a letter from a post abroad, from another Whitehall department, or from a private individual; a "minute" (internal memorandum) from some other FO official; a telegram from a post abroad sent by wireless and if appropriate deciphered by machine (there was a huge network of confidential communications); or any other - needed to be "entered" or recorded in an archive. At that stage it was solemnly put in a "jacket", or paper folder all to itself. Once this had been done, the desk officer was required to consider what should be done about the document and write his recommendation on the paper jacket, usually in manuscript, if appropriate attaching a draft letter of reply or of follow-up action. The next person up would either take a decision or append his own recommendation, possibly contradicting or qualifying that of his junior; and so on. Documents of high importance therefore would acquire a considerable dossier of elegantly-penned comments, the "jacket" if necessary being enlarged by extra sheets of paper. The rule was that if you felt you could decide the matter yourself, you initialled your comment; if you wish to "submit" to the next level, you signed in full. Identifying the final initial could be quite an art, the only sure rule being that only the Foreign Secretary was allowed to use red ink - so that a bold red H meant that the Earl of Home had pronounced on the matter. Once a decision had been taken the papers would come back down again for action at the appropriate level.

Somehow, the system worked. There were of course refinements - sideways movement, missing out levels and so on. Jackets could if appropriate include additional documents if they were mere qualifications or post-scripts to the original. But in general there was a huge mass of paper. Hence the need for tape - it could be either red or white, there seemed to be no practical difference - to tie bundles of jackets together into a full dossier on a complex issue; and for "flags", red stiff-paper tags marked A, B, C and so on, pinned neatly and in order from right to left, to enable senior officers to work quickly through the essential references. Soon after this time a simpler and more economical system of filing was introduced, and there were folders with numbered dividers to contain dossiers of many documents. But at that time it was all very laborious. And you had to get it right. On one traumatic occasion I was summoned

by the Assistant, shown the "jacket" which I had submitted to him and on which I had penned what I thought was a penetrating comment and recommendation, and told that my words were inane and inappropriate; on which the Assistant, something of a martinet, solemnly tore up the jacket in front of me (but not the document therein), told me to try again, and added to rub salt in the wound that I had "cost the Government eightpence!" for the wasted jacket. I was more careful with my words in future, and perhaps it was a good lesson.

It all seems a world away now, in the internet age. Already then it was possible to telephone posts abroad, though security was difficult and costs high. Telegrams were used for urgent communication, with a system of priorities. But a great deal came by paper through the diplomatic bags, carried by the Queen's Messengers - who survived for the whole of my career though subjected to constant reductions. And there was far greater formality. Questions of great moment would be the subject of formal despatches from ambassadors to the Foreign Secretary; this too survived for many decades. But there was a range of relatively trivial issues which nevertheless involved some matter of formal protocol and had to be encased in a despatch. You could often tell a despatch at some distance because it would be typed in unnaturally large ambassadorial type, on special paper. The reply to any such communication had also to be a despatch, with formal beginning and ending - I can't remember if we actually used the hallowed phrase "with great truth and respect" in those days - and signed "on behalf of" the Foreign Secretary. All of this slowed down the speed of communication quite considerably, days or weeks (for distant posts) rather than hours. At the time it didn't really seem to matter.

The Office was a rather different place to work in, too. Security was minimal compared with today. We came in from the Downing Street side (that gate has been closed now for decades), and the first office I worked in looked across at Number 10. There were coal fires in the rooms, uniformed male messengers often disabled war veterans, trolleys with boxes of papers, different containers with different keys for papers with higher levels of secrecy. Urgent papers or telegrams were sent by "tube", a network of pneumatic tubes like those in old department stores with access points all over the place; put document in metal cylinder, lock it and label it to a destination, put cylinder in nearest tube access point, and it goes whoosh to some central hub for onward transmission. The background noise of the whooshing remains in the memory, in curious counterpoint to the soft-shoed shuffle of the messengers, against the background of the rich ornamentation and painting and mosaics, the tiled corridors, of the Victorian Foreign Office.

Few details of the papers that crossed my desk remain in my mind. I remember spending some time on a World Health proposal to create an international cancer institute or centre, and helping to draft a charter for it. There were constant meetings on how to control the runaway expenditure of some of the Agencies, particularly I think UNESCO at that time, where the majority of states wanted more done but the major

contributors like us needed to insist on some form of budgetary restraint. FAO's World Food Programme was developing well at that time and had a charismatic director, while not all heads of Agencies were as enlightened or efficient. The readiness of Whitehall departments to accept FO advice on tactics was also variable. But I enjoyed beavering away and becoming a moderately useful cog in the machine, entirely in London - a planned trip for two weeks or so to reinforce our mission to the UN in Geneva never came off - for just over a year. And sandwich lunches in St James's Park, even once a sheepdog trial in Hyde Park to watch, made for a pleasant enough way of life.

Meanwhile plans on the domestic front were maturing. We set the wedding date for 12 September, a suitable interval after Julian's Oxford finals in June. The next priority was a decision on where to live until the inevitable overseas posting came through. I started gentle enquiries on how to go about finding rented accommodation somewhere in North London, which from Barnet days was the area of which I knew a little, and was told that the transport services to Whitehall were much more convenient from the south-west - say Wimbledon. By coincidence Julian heard at about the same time of a flat in Wimbledon, recommended as being in the same house as an Oxford acquaintance's daughter, and at reasonable cost. It all worked out; and at the end of June I left George Street and moved into 1 Kingsley Court, the garden flat of 35 Lingfield Road in Wimbledon Village. For a couple of months this was of course as a bachelor, but we spent a little time together getting the place into order and acquiring the minimum of necessary furniture whether by inheritance or purchase. It was surprisingly sunny and pleasant for a half-basement flat, with the south-west-facing garden at the rear sloping down to the living-room window, and some of it indeed our very own patch of garden. Thus began an association with Wimbledon which has lasted ever since.

The wedding was a traditional affair, with the service in Osmotherley church and a reception at Mount Grace Priory nearby, a fine house attached to a magnificent Carthusian ruin; Kathleen Cooper-Abbs, a powerful lady, lived there and was a friend of the family. Inevitably most of the guests were on Julian's side, given my own tiny family, but I was supported by some loyal Oxford friends including George Renwick as best man. We were driven away afterwards by another, Charles Perrin, in his magnificent family Daimler; just round the corner of the drive we transferred into a much more humble Morris Traveller, driven I think by one of Julian's various unmarried sisters, and set off for the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District. Independently, since childhood, we had come to love these areas and the walking there, and that passion too has remained with us.

After the honeymoon domestic life in Wimbledon began in earnest. Julian had omitted to tell me that she had never cooked a meal, although as fifth of six children she was well acquainted with some of the more menial and less creative aspects of housekeeping. Her story is that she went along to our local butcher after I had left for work on the first day back, and asked what she should cook for her new husband. He sold her something; and

the next day she went back and said "he liked that; now what should I do?" It all worked out very well. Looking back, the economics of our first establishment are fascinating. My monthly income, after tax, was just over £60 at the start. Of this, £28 went on rent and £25 to Julian for housekeeping; she reckoned that if she assumed £5 a week and assumed further that there were five weeks in a month, then every other month at least there would be some over for luxuries. In those first months we did not have many other needs, and we were able to entertain parents, other relations and a few old friends - some of Julian's friends had married even before us, but most of mine were still single.

We knew, though, that an overseas posting was imminent. The news came through a little before Christmas, and I was summoned by my Head of Department. "Bad news, I'm afraid. Personnel Department say that you have opted to learn Japanese, so they are sending you to Tokyo. If I were you I wouldn't go." I said that I hadn't actually chosen Japanese (I had simply ruled out Arabic because of the time constraints), but I did want to learn a hard language and was quite happy with the idea of Tokyo; why was that bad news? He explained that he had spent far too long as a prisoner-of-war in Singapore up to 1945 to have much affection for the Japanese, but it was up to me of course. I have never had any reason to regret the choice - not that there was ever any real possibility of my refusing (one can for very good reason ask not to be sent on a particular posting, and the Personnel people do try to accommodate one's wishes, but not everybody can be satisfied; and rumour had it that you could afford to dig your heels in once but only once). No firm date was given - it depended to some extent on the United Nations timetable and other movements in the department; but eventually it became clear that I should arrive in Tokyo in April 1965. The clock had started ticking.

There was a lot to do. The Office is quite generous and understanding about the needs, practical and financial, of its staff going abroad. There is a "post report", quite a thick document, which tells you all about local conditions and gives advice on what you need to think about and acquire beforehand. There are allowances of various kinds, dependent on grade, for the purchase of appropriately diplomatic-looking clothing both for oneself and one's spouse, and for buying equipment with which to set up house on a diplomatic scale - not furniture, which is provided in post. There is a car loan, interest-free and repayable over two years, and most car manufacturers in those days were prepared to offer a "diplomatic discount" and to ship the car out to post for you. The whole business of arranging travel, and the packing and despatch of one's effects (up to a given weight or volume, again dependent on grade), are arranged by experts in the Office. There is even a provision for the travel of servants - a concept totally strange to me, but in the end we found ourselves taking advantage of it as a kindness to somebody already out in Tokyo, whose Japanese maid had been for a while in the UK and needed a passage back. I began to realise that even the humblest third secretary in a British Embassy needs to maintain a certain position; and was reminded of the advice from a senior member of the permanent mission in New York - "never forget that even though you are the most junior member of the

delegation, it is after all the British delegation, so other delegates will listen to you and pay you some respect". Although the world has changed since the 1960s, there is still some truth in this.

Mental adjustment to the idea of Tokyo was also required. A couple of the 1963 entrants on my initial course had been sent out there as language students, and by chance they were two of the very few - maybe even the only two - who were already married. I wrote to the one whom I had known better, John Field, explaining what was about to happen and asking for the low-down. He wrote straight back, and even better there was a letter from his American wife Renny to Julian, a splendid three-page typewritten document (we still have it) with no capital letters and very little punctuation. We began to feel quite encouraged. Others in the Office who knew Tokyo filled in some of the gaps. There was no need to do much reading up beforehand, and absolutely no point in making a start on the language, as the first two years of what would normally be a four-year posting would be entirely devoted to language study, with few if any Embassy responsibilities. It was a well-trodden path, as we had long had a large mission in Tokyo, and some knowledge of the language was essential for most jobs at all levels. But there was still a measure of apprehension about the first venture abroad together, the first full Embassy posting, the entry for Julian into a new world about which she was far from certain. For me, I knew, there would always be the office safety-net, and being surrounded by a group of people of the same nationality and presumably similar disposition. For her it meant setting up house in a new and very distant country, with a new husband, using a new and very hard language, and all manner of other strangenesses at which one could only guess.

At least there was to be a cushion between one life and the next. We discovered - to our surprise though it seemed quite natural to the old hands - that the approved FO route to Japan in the 1960s was by sea, taking five weeks by way of the Suez Canal; and that third secretaries, being diplomatic staff, would naturally travel first class (though at the very bottom of that class). It promised to be a wonderful trip, no matter what lay at the end of it.

V - JAPAN 1965-69

On 12 March, 1965, we set sail from Southampton in the P&O ship *Chusan*. The cabin was ordinary enough - no porthole, noisy with continuous air-conditioning - but it had the basic facilities. The public rooms by contrast were spacious and impressive, with white-coated stewards standing stiffly by every table in the restaurant, and a lounge with deep sofas and wide windows. First class embraced a variety of sorts and conditions of men, from the humblest (us) right up to the newly-appointed High Commissioner to India, John Freeman of television fame, who seemed to spend the voyage surrounded by important-looking people. In those days the majority of passengers were there to travel from A to B, and not just for the cruise experience. Our table for meals was controlled by a voluble American lady in her 50s who was constantly puzzled by the English capacity for laughter ("we Americans think you English have no sense of humour because you never laugh at our jokes"). But the balance was restored by a taciturn Scot with a twinkle who enjoyed teasing the American lady, and his tiny Dyak wife - his choice of steak when it was on the menu was entirely determined, as he told us, by his pleasure each time in receiving a plate adorned with a small flag reading "WELL DONE". There was also a charming Singapore Chinese family, the parents Oxford-educated and long resident in the US; a military couple on the way to Aden; a lively Scandinavian party (Danes and Swedes), of whom we saw a lot; and many other congenial spirits, even to a shy English couple.

There was little to see from the ship until we turned East from the Atlantic and passed Gibraltar. Thereafter there were a few landmarks - the snow-topped Sierra Nevada peaks to the north, and then the Atlas Mountains to our south; a rocky headland or two in Tunisia; and then, after nearly a week of motion, coming to anchor in a mixed fleet of tankers and cargo-ships awaiting the convoy through the Suez Canal. Port Said was colourful with vendors of leather slippers, poufs and handbags. The Canal was memorable for the strange sensation of steaming through the sand-dunes, and mooring for eight hours while the northbound convoy passed, one group led by the enormous bulk of the *Canberra*, at 45,000 tons the largest vessel able to pass through. Later, there was an eerie path of moonlight across the desert after Ismailia, and the deck and rails dripping wet with the humidity. Further down the Red Sea the humidity lessened, and beaches and mountainous rocks came into sight on the Arabian side - then suddenly the chimneys and tall buildings of modern industry as we came in to Aden.

Our first venture on to dry land since England was relatively brief. Three British soldiers had been killed the previous day in a border clash (Aden was still under colonial rule), and security was tight. A glimpse of goats and camels, Arabs in loose robes; some modern shops, then a wilderness of stalls and shacks climbing in increasing poverty up into the barren volcanic rocks of the hinterland; turbaned boat-crews colourful in the harbour; and back on board, for a long cool beer and a deck-chair looking out over the town. Bombay, four days later, was more rewarding. The

streets were a medley of the well-fed and well-dressed on one hand, beggars and ragged children on the other. Brilliant colours ravished the eye in the Hanging Gardens on Malabar Hill, and topiary, and Indian nursemaids with Western children, but next to that there was an encampment of grass huts with naked, distended children begging in soft voices. The pillared, pinkish-stone arcades of the Mahalakshmi temple, and a tiny shrine with fantastic coloured carvings; then Crawford Market, a jostling mass of fruit-sellers and straw and baskets, with light filtering through gaps in the roof; Morris Minor cars everywhere, and taxi fares ridiculously cheap. After Bombay we sailed to Colombo, stiflingly hot, also full of Morris cars and decrepit red London buses. Here we took a coach-trip out of town and felt more tropical among temples and palm-forest, an idyllic travel-agent beach spoiled only by a ramshackle wooden cinema with garish posters outside, catamarans idle on the river (it was Sunday), a single bronzed figure in turban and loincloth fishing from the edge.

Between these snapshots of the former British Empire there were of course interludes at sea. Often there was leisure just to look out at the slow swell of the Indian Ocean, the green flash as the setting sun sank beneath the waves, the brilliance of the stars seeming to reach right down to the southern horizon. But we found some of the social activities pleasant enough. There were table-tennis tournaments, in which we performed with some credit - I recall the pleasure of one magnificent smash, a winner simply because the ship's motion conveniently brought the table up to meet my descending ball at exactly the right moment. There was deck-quoits, and shuffleboard. There were general knowledge quizzes - our table won the first (and became friends with the Scandinavians as a result), but we never did so well again. We even won second prizes severally in the men's and women's Mad Hatter parade one day; looking back, I am surprised at myself even now for having strutted around with one of Julian's bras arranged fetchingly over my ears and captioned "in his cups".

The sub-continent behind us, we were moving closer to the more disciplined world of the Far East which was to be our home. Penang was the first taste of South-East Asia and the Chinese zone of influence, and very different - lighter skin-colours, smooth hair, women in colourful narrow trousers, Chinese-character signs everywhere; bicycles, tiny bridges over deep monsoon drains, houses balanced on stilts over the harbour, boats with great ribbed brown sails. We took a funicular railway up 2300 feet to a viewpoint, through forest full of bright shrubs and butterflies, looking out over town and island in amazing clarity. Returning, we strolled around the temple at Ayer Itam, with sprouting bamboo and turtles in a pond. At Singapore, a day's journey on, we were entertained to a delicious and informal Chinese meal by the Oxford-educated friends we had made on board (the Hsias), and had our first serious lesson in chopstick-use. The city had its smellier areas in those days, but also well-stocked and opulent shopping arcades with festoons of silk and electrical goods of all kinds. An excursion to an orchid plantation, full of weird and fascinating blooms tended by blue-overalled coolies in appropriate hats, gave us a chance also to see a rubber-tree being tapped, and admire the

rich green lawns and sparkling-white mosque of the Sultan's palace at Johore - and his elephant. There was even our first brush with Foreign Service life in Asia, as a former secretary in UN department now with the Political Adviser's office had suggested that we meet for a drink at the Tanglin Club - "the last refuge of the colonialist British". It was palatial but a little dingy, with enormous dining-rooms, verandas, swimming-pool. My acquaintance spoke a little dismally about life as a single girl when all the personable young men are whisked off to Borneo or onto an aircraft-carrier (we still had a Far East fleet then) at a moment's notice.

From Singapore across the South China Sea to Manila was hot, the sea a marvellous blue, with rainbows in the curling edge of the bow-wave, and clear parallel tracks showing where the flying-fish were speeding away from the ship's side. We begged lunch from Nicholas Bayne and his wife in the Manila Embassy - he had been a year ahead of me in College at Eton, and very kindly gave us asylum from the dust and heat of the city. Hong Kong was our final port of call before Japan, and there we had old friends in the shape of Di and Šandor Hervey (Di was one of the close group of Julian's friends at St Hugh's, and Šandor, whose family left Hungary in 1956, had been reading Chinese also at New College, Oxford). They entertained us royally during our four-day stay. We were driven past paddy-fields and water-buffalo in the New Territories to walled villages with dragons painted on the roof-beams. In the city, we were given some insight into local conditions by seeing the pitiful shacks and water-settlements of the refugees, and the impressive new blocks of low-cost housing to which they were destined to move. We even acquired, for amazingly little money, a couple of excellent men's suits and two or three superb lengths of silk for Julian.

But duty was beginning to call. From Hong Kong it was only a couple of days to the first sighting of Japan. The *Chusan* put in at Kobe, and then moved north to our final destination, Yokohama. It was Maundy Thursday, 15 April 1965, a day less than five weeks since we set sail from Southampton.

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For us everything was new - every detail of how an Embassy worked, the whole process of settling into a foreign country, and overlying that the extraordinary complexity of a civilisation and culture so different as that of Japan. I think the first impression was of the competence of the procedure for welcoming a newcomer. We were met at Yokohama by a language-student couple six months ahead of us, Nick and Gill McCarthy, with an Embassy car and separate truck for our luggage. Impressive official documents speeded our passage through the formalities, Nick handled any small hitch in apparently fluent Japanese, and we were rapidly on our way past the rather grim industrial area of Yokohama and southern Tokyo to a hotel near the Embassy. There we were constantly answering telephone calls - from the Head of Chancery, regretting that sickness had prevented him from greeting us in person; from the Administration Officer; from numbers of others, with greetings or

invitations. After one night in a hotel we were installed in our own furnished house, with a "float" of Embassy-owned equipment (it would be many weeks before our own heavy baggage arrived), and instant help with local shopping from another language-student couple living nearby. We were even told that we were entitled to accommodation of a rather higher standard, so that if we began to find that house inadequate, we had only to say and the process of finding somewhere better could start. Strange as everything was, we were made to feel very welcome very quickly.

Another early impression was of the attractiveness and luxury of our surroundings. In retrospect that seems odd - Tokyo, as we soon came to discover, is an over-crowded city and not a beautiful one. Maybe we were affected by our journey through Asian ports. But we were struck by the views of cherry blossom and of the Imperial Palace moat and gardens from the San Bancho hotel; by the trees, shrubs and gardens of the Embassy compound with its substantial houses, tennis court and swimming pool; by the large houses and diplomatic offices (not ours) in the Azabu area where we were to live, and the charming public park complete with blossom, lake and tiny bridges. There were traditional Japanese touches as well. We enjoyed the clip-clop of *geta* - Japanese wooden clogs - and the street-cry from the goldfish-seller. We soon learned to order our meals of *tempura* or *sushi* from the local *demae* provider, the system of instant delivery of delicious hot or cold food by bicycle to any address. We watched with fascination as traditionally-clad builders erected a wooden house opposite, using wooden scaffolding-poles lashed together. Most Tokyo dwellings were then built of wood, more flexible in the event of earthquake - a constant threat - though also more at risk from fire.

But there was also work to be done. Foreign Office full-time language study courses vary in length depending on the difficulty of the language and the degree of proficiency required. Japanese is in the hardest group and among the most essential, and the course is a full two years, after which students are expected to cope with any of the normal demands of diplomatic work - reading the newspapers, conversation or negotiation on political or economic matters, comprehension of broadcasts and public speeches, translation or interpretation though not to professional standards (not therefore "simultaneous" interpretation as at the UN, which is a special skill), and some competence in writing the language even though locally-engaged staff would in practice be expected to cope with any serious composition in the language of the country. The Tokyo Embassy is large (there are also UK-based posts elsewhere in Japan, in 1965 in Osaka, Kobe and Yokohama), and a constant stream of qualified speakers is required. Until the early 1960s training one or two a year sufficed. But in 1963 there were four new students, including the two who had joined the FO with me, and thereafter this was to be the approximate level. Only two had started in the autumn of 1964, and my arrival therefore was in a sense six months late and designed to make up the numbers.

Japanese-language students were - in those days, as arguments of economy soon prevailed - fortunate in spending the whole two years in-country rather than at a school or college elsewhere; and in having individual private lessons at home rather than in classes or at a Tokyo language school. So the start of my study period was signalled by the arrival at our front door, on day 2 or 3, of an elegant Japanese lady in kimono aged probably in her mid-fifties. She apparently spoke no word of English, or at least was determined not to use any. But it was made very clear that she had come to teach Elliott-san; and could we please repair to a suitable study-type room? This was the famous Mrs Nishi (*nishi* means West; confusingly her father had been the even more famous General Minami, where *minami* means South). My other teachers were Mr Nakazato, generally considered the senior teacher, and Mr Abe. For the next two years, at a rate of about fifteen hours of intensive tuition a week divided between the three of them, it was their task to bully and cajole me into some degree of linguistic competence. Throughout these face-to-face lessons there was a strong emphasis on the oral side. The complexities of an ideographic language require a fair amount of private study to master, even though our syllabus - approximately equivalent to the level of a Japanese secondary school - was a mere 1850 characters or so (most of them have a variety of possible pronunciations and even meanings). With the teachers one had to read aloud and translate material which they had selected, naturally becoming more and more complex. I remember my pride when I was first shown a piece of real Japanese newspaper to read; it was a cutting of about one square inch in area, after several weeks of study. But the real joy of the lessons was the conversations which were stimulated by the reading material and by the inventive minds of the teachers. They were outstandingly good.

Fifteen hours a week does not sound like a very heavy load. But in a way the whole business of living in Japan was an education, quite apart from the extra hours of homework or simply learning the written characters. In a letter home, much later on, I tried to summarise what filled my days - "visiting Japanese gardens, Japanese plays, Japanese films; watching Japanese television, talking about international politics and economics to Japanese friends; consuming occasional Japanese meals, even endeavouring to explain the faults of Japanese plumbing to Japanese plumbers ...". It was a student's business to immerse himself in the country. The Embassy helped by including us in social events where we met people, and organisations like the junior group of the Japan-British Society were invaluable. Casual conversations while shopping or travelling all contributed, and *gaijin* (foreigners) were rare enough to be a subject of interest and something of a target for the more outgoing younger Japanese. One friendship at least developed from a chance encounter in a Tokyo park, near a university campus (I think there were 80 universities in Tokyo alone), when a Japanese student engaged me in serious discussion while I was sitting peacefully puzzling my way through a newspaper; he made no concessions to my foreign-ness, and I was grateful.

Our first house in the Azabu area was adequate, but no more. It had a splendid *biwa* (loquat) tree with abundant fruit, but otherwise a very

cramped plot with the neighbours extremely close, and all their telephones seemed to be ringing all the time. The furnishings and decoration were not brilliant. So we decided quite soon to take up the Embassy's offer of assistance with a move. It took a while, but by mid-June we were moving in to a pleasant wooden house on a slope, with a garden and a VIEW - through our own *kaki* (persimmon) tree to Mount Fuji in the far distance, on the very few days in the year when the Tokyo pollution cleared enough to make this possible. The house had proper paper screens (*shoji*) instead of curtains, though the Ministry of Works insisted on providing curtains (which we never used) because they were clearly essential for any British way of life. It was about half an hour's drive to the Embassy, outside the inner circle of railway line, and seemed a little closer to normal Japanese life, with traditional small shops selling cheap but attractive blue-and-white pottery, beautifully fresh fish, meat sliced very thin, delicious vegetables. There was even a vegetable-man who came to the door, and from whom Julian rapidly picked up a Japanese vocabulary totally different from and often much more useful than mine. At night in winter we could hear the curfew-man, beating out a rhythmic pattern with his wooden clappers as he toured the streets; extinguishing your house fire, the literal meaning of curfew, is a necessity if you live in a wooden house. We even sent home a recording of the curfew and of the various street-cries - the hot-potato (*yakimo*) man had one of the most attractive.

Before long we were venturing outside central Tokyo. One of the earliest trips was to Kamakura south of Tokyo, a seat of government in the 12th century and home of the Great Buddha (*Daibutsu*) and much distinguished sculpture. Temples, set in lovely wooded valleys of dramatic steepness, and walls green with damp moss and ferns and ivy, made for a mood of calm which was a world away from the Tokyo bustle. On another visit the following year we had drier weather and were entranced by a sudden sight of apricot blossom and a sea of narcissi, and views out to sea where the volcanic island of Oshima was smoking away; but by then the peace was being destroyed in one area at least by teams of bulldozers creating a massive housing estate for Tokyo commuters. On one summer's day the beaches of Kanagawa prefecture (roughly a British county, adjacent to Tokyo on the southern side) were packed with two million city residents, and in the whole of Japan that day 77 swimmers died. It is hard to escape the crowds. One can do it; inland to the west, one day, we walked in foothills, chatted occasionally to soft-spoken patriarchs on their way to their tiny fields, enjoyed the green-ness and the quiet; in Chiba prefecture to the east we visited John and Renny Field in their weekend cottage by the Pacific coast, driving for mile after mile on potholed dirt roads, and met the traffic only when returning on the metalled highway. The secret was to learn what all Japanese would traditionally be doing at a particular season, and then do something different.

Sometimes, of course, you want to be traditional. The ascent of Mount Fuji, the highest mountain in Japan, is a summer tradition. At the end of July in our first summer we were invited to join a party staying in the country retreat of another language-student couple by Yamanaka lake

near the foot of Fuji - in total four British, six Australians, three Japanese, all sleeping communally on the *tatami* (rice-straw mat) floors. The walkers (not the whole group) set off in two cars at about 10.30 on the Saturday evening, our destination being the car-park half-way up the mountain at around 7,000 feet. We passed some thirty tourist coaches laden full with climbers, and the car park was bursting with cars at nearly midnight. Hot dogs, Coca Cola, flags, staves with little bells on, were selling well. The path was a steady procession of torch-lights and ringing bells and eager conversation. A zigzag of lights wound ahead up into the sky at an unbelievable angle - difficult to know whether the top lights were torches or stars. Sometimes one had to wait with one foot in the air for a particular foothold to be vacated by the person ahead ... The aim was to reach the summit at 12,370 feet before sunrise at 4.30 or thereabouts. We failed - the queue just did not move fast enough. But we did get wonderful views of a golden sunrise, spreading over the sea of clouds below us, from about 11,000 feet; and the summit crater when we reached it in the perceptibly thinner air (not all of us made it) was a dramatic sight. There must have been some tens of thousands of Japanese on the mountain that night, and for once we had joined in and done the correct Japanese thing.

There were other essential sights to see, crowds notwithstanding. One was the small town of Nikko in the hills north of Tokyo - an autumn trip for the unbelievably bright colours of the maples set among dark conifer green. The wooden shrines at Nikko are carved with a riot of figures, animals real and mythical, birds, plants and blossom, gilded and painted in tiny detail. Very different, and much more in the austere Japanese tradition, are the temples and gardens of Kyoto, the ancient capital. We went by bullet-train, then comparatively new - accelerating from zero to 200 kph in less than two minutes (I watched the speedometer), silent and airless, so punctual that arrival late by a few minutes reportedly earned you a small refund on your fare. Kyoto had so much - the most famous Zen stone garden, oddly impressive and calm even seen from the middle of a crowd; a gold-lacquered pavilion reflected in a still pond; the moss garden of another temple; simple architecture, all straight lines and soft wood-colours and perfect proportion. Back in Tokyo, we were invited to a tea-garden to witness the curious hushed ritual of the tea ceremony, and handle the earthenware, lacquer and bamboo utensils beautiful in their rustic simplicity. Another day, the last day of winter according to the lunar calendar (early February), was "bean-throwing" at a Tokyo temple: ancient priests in procession under large pink umbrellas, children with brilliant-green paper headdresses, a band of strange reed instruments sounding like emasculated bagpipes; a political harangue from the chief priest about the evils of foreign influences in modern Japan and the advantages of socialism, while sumo-wrestlers, geisha-girls and other celebrities stood unselfconsciously on the temple steps; then, at last, the throwing of the beans representing the casting-out of (foreign?) devils.

One very special occasion was the New Year, and in particular the Emperor's reception of the Diplomatic Corps at the Imperial Palace. Ambassadors take a selection of their staff, and in 1966 we were included.

Julian wrote that "... the waiting-room looked like nothing more than an international gathering before the battle of Waterloo ... there were Russians, with Russian necks and dowdy wives, Americans with American skulls and haircuts, plump dark Indian ladies hitching at their saris, Latins with luxuriant waxed mustachios exuberantly hand-kissing, their fronts encrusted with gold embroidery so that they could hardly bend, Africans darkly magnificent in flowing tribal robes, the scarlet-coated Danish ambassador, and the English contingent sheepish and deprecating ... Then the names were called and everybody moved off, gowns swishing, swords well under control, medals and spurs clanking, to curtsy or bow before their Imperial Highnesses standing before their thrones, with princes of the blood to their right and princesses to their left, gentlemen sashed in scarlet, ladies in golden yellow." Julian's curtsy was much admired by other Embassy wives present - practice in genuflecting from her convent education, she said.

Meanwhile my studies were proceeding. Slowly a feeling for Japanese began to develop, often almost a non-verbal sense of underlying meaning. Familiarity with any language probably develops in this direction, so that one might for example have a pretty good idea of the gist of a TV news item without being able to translate many of the words. In Japanese, where so much is unspoken and conveyed by implication or through the inclusion of almost-meaningless particles, this instinctive familiarity seems even more vital. It is a commonplace that Japanese has different levels of politeness, honorific expressions that you would use to a superior and cruder, shorter phrases to use with an inferior; one set of words for your own house, wife, or child, and another set for those of your interlocutor. Getting them wrong is fatal. More than one *gaijin* with some grasp of the language has said, in effect, "thank you for your insignificant present, or tasteless meal, or invitation to your hovel; may I in return invite you to accept this truly magnificent gift, or banquet, or invitation to my own palace". But there is more to it than that. Even the written language of an objective piece like a newspaper editorial, with its complex structure of subordinate clauses all placed before the substantive to which they apply, may be comprehensible only through a sort of instinct. Mastery of the characters is a pre-requisite, so that one can approach the degree of instant comprehension when viewing a whole sentence which is so much easier with an alphabetic script. True mastery, though, includes the ability to set the characters in the context of the piece, so as to select which of the possibly conflicting alternative readings is appropriate.

Naturally this came only gradually. The Embassy would from time to time call on the extra work-force which the language-students constituted, but initially for simple tasks like adjudicating in a university English-language Speech Contest, or giving a talk to Japanese Foreign Ministry new entrants (invariably fluent in English) about British universities or our own diplomatic service. There was a regular need to meet visitors arriving at the airport - on one occasion at least two London officials never turned up, coming from the US, because they had forgotten to allow for the International Date Line - and shepherd them through the formalities. There were formal parties or dinners to attend, and sometimes this

involved Japanese conversation. Later this came to include actual interpretation for visitors meeting their Japanese counterparts. One special manifestation of this was naval visits, where language-students were assigned to a particular vessel visiting a Japanese port, to help in whatever way the captain required - this was great fun though it happened relatively rarely. Towards the end of my study years I had a splendid spell with HMS *Fearless*, visiting Hiroshima; "... I seem to have been standing between Captains and Admirals, or Captains and Governors, interpreting their formal pleasantries for most of the last 48 hours. The scale/level does change; around midnight last night it was more on the lieutenant/bar-hostess level, but the essence of the problem is the same." Within the Embassy, I was called in more and more often to do written translations of material which for one reason or another could not be given to a locally-engaged translator, and found this very satisfying as well as good practice.

One special feature of the language course was the so-called "month in the country", a period of immersion away from Tokyo once in each year, usually living with a family and talking only Japanese. As my course had started only in April of 1965, the summer of that year was too early for me to profit from this arrangement, and other times of year are less easy to organise. But in July 1966 I went off to the southern island of Kyushu for a month with a family in Yufuin, a hot-spring resort near Beppu in Oita prefecture. It was a most enjoyable experience. The house was relatively spacious, set in an inland valley, with a natural hot-water supply - ideal for the Japanese habit of daily bathing (by this time I was well used to the required sequence of soaping and rinsing while standing outside the bath, then immersing oneself in almost-scalding water only when clean so as not to pollute the water for the next user). The man of the house was a keen local historian and archaeologist who talked fascinatingly about local custom and legend, would point out any peculiarity of farm architecture or stone-Buddha carving, and was ready to explain details of national, cultural or religious history at a moment's notice. He enlightened me about the polytheistic nature of Buddhism, and the consequent ease with which Japanese can be both Buddhist and Shintoist (Shinto is a kind of animist faith) depending on the occasion. He had a particular interest in identifying the grave-stones of the "hidden Christians" who were forbidden to practise their religion by the Shogunate in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. There was good local walking, in which the family including two teenage children sometimes accompanied me. I had one ecstatic day, climbing through thick forest and cloud to the suddenly sunlit summit of a 4000-foot extinct volcano with a dramatic summit ridge. For a few days I moved to another branch of the family in the larger coastal town (and famous hot-spring resort) of Beppu, in a magnificent 80-year-old wooden house entirely in traditional style, with one of the old-style baths like a large iron cauldron under which you light a wood fire to heat the water; "bathing feels rather like getting into a cannibal's pot".

The only drawback of this July excursion was that it meant leaving Julian in the Tokyo heat at an uncomfortable time for her. She was expecting our first child in mid-September, and had been coping valiantly with the

demands of diplomatic life despite a tiring pregnancy. We had contrived occasional escapes to the country, and in August were able to get away for a little longer to the rural area of Ibaraki prefecture north of Tokyo, to stay with the family of a girl who had been coming regularly to teach Julian *ikebana* (flower-arranging) in return, supposedly, for tuition in conversational English. It was a good visit - another cauldron bath, splendid food and a relaxing atmosphere (once we had got used to being treated as honoured guests with whom the women of the family were of course not allowed to eat). The O-Bon festival which fell at this season gave us an insight into some traditional rural practices - the plaiting of a straw boat to contain first-fruits, and its launching into the foaming breakers of the Pacific coast, all white sands set against dark-green pines; the kindling of bonfires to welcome the departed spirits of ancestors back to the homestead. But it was still pretty hot even here, and the drive back to Tokyo was demanding. When we came on to a metalled highway some 70 miles north of Tokyo and joined a traffic-jam, I remarked jokingly that the jam probably extended all the way back to the city. I was right.

From September our letters home inevitably lost some of their focus on the Japanese scene. The baby was due on 19 September. As an Elliott, he made it clear to his mother that he expected to be punctual - the first indications came a few minutes after midnight, and Justin Mark was born at around breakfast-time, in a Tokyo maternity hospital run by Italian and Japanese nuns (which caused me some linguistic problems - my knowledge of obstetrical terms improved no end). The gods greeted his arrival at home on 24 September with a violent typhoon, 60-70 mph winds (200 mph on the top of Mount Fuji, a Japanese record), and lightning striking a lamp-post outside the house. Apart from a feed in the small hours, Justin slept through it all. There was another good omen in the birth of a son that year. 1966, in the complicated Japanese calendar, was the Year of the Horse and of Fire; this conjunction, once every 60 years, signals bad luck for any family producing a girl child, as she is fated to kill her husband. The birth-rate therefore falls dramatically. As it happened, there were no fewer than five births to British Embassy parents that year - all boys. We must have done something right.

Despite these distractions, work continued. In October I was detailed to provide linguistic help for an International Cancer Congress being held in Tokyo, essentially sorting out the problems of delegates at a kind of information desk. We had a constructive encounter with our US counterparts in their Embassy language school, a much more structured institution, but lacking some of the literary and day-to-day fun of our own scheme (they did not even learn to decipher the cursive script which is one of the most challenging disciplines in Japanese). There were more translations to do, some of them urgent. There was a general election which generated a call for extra support to the Embassy's political reporting, listening to campaign speeches and so on. Before my spell of naval interpreting in Hiroshima I took a week away from lessons to go youth-hostelling around Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's four main islands, with a Japanese student friend by way of extra conversational practice - cherry and camellia blossom everywhere (late March), hostels

where visitors were crammed in like sardines sleeping on the *tatami* floors to the point where one night there were 120 in a place built for 80. As I wrote - "conversation, inevitably, flourishes". At home, we resumed our duties entertaining in a small way, and helping with newly-arrived language-students and with the problems of others, having moved into a slightly more senior position in the hierarchy of the Embassy (I became a Second Secretary in May 1966 purely by virtue of reaching my 27th birthday, and more importantly emerged from my three-year probationary period in August).

At the end of April the two years of full-time study reached their end with the final examination. There had been earlier tests, after six and twelve months. Neither had been much of a problem. The final exam of course involved rather more searching tests, including interpretation; but nobody is expected to fail, though there are occasional exceptions. There had been pressure on me at various points to accelerate the process and take the final exam after eighteen months, but some of my seniors argued against what would have meant a reduction in the amount of useful Japanese I was able to take on board. Justin's arrival strengthened my case for staying on until the spring. So in early May we were sent off on "mid-tour leave", with a further two-year spell in the Embassy proper to look forward to - this is the normal pattern for diplomatic posts other than those in countries defined as "hardship" by reason of climate or politics. We had nearly three months off the hook, and a busy programme introducing Justin to his family.

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The weeks of leave flew by. We flew eastwards via the United States, and broke our journey on the East Coast to stay with Julian's sister Clare, now in Connecticut. Back with Karin and Bill in Farthinghoe, we had Justin's christening, a happy occasion in spring sunshine, and presented him to his great-grandmother Lillymor, who was visibly delighted. We spent time with Julian's mother in Osmotherley, and rediscovered the delights of walking on the North York Moors. All too soon it was time to return, this time by air through Asia, with touch-downs at Teheran and Bangkok, and a couple of days in Hong Kong. Then Tokyo at the hottest time of the year in August, with a new job to learn.

I was assigned to Chancery, in effect the political section of the Embassy, where "political" means broadly everything which is not explicitly covered by the commercial/economic, defence, information, consular or administration sections whose role is self-explanatory. The Head of Chancery has an additional role, a kind of chief-of-staff for the Ambassador with overall responsibility for the running of the mission and for staff questions. Other Chancery officers share out the detailed desk work of reporting on the internal politics of the country, often including labour and agriculture as well as social questions, and on foreign affairs including the country's relations with the UK. For the first year I was to have the rather specialised role of the Ambassador's Private Secretary, a task only necessary in large and important posts where the Ambassador's

work-load is especially heavy and he needs the assistance of a diplomatic-grade officer as well as a "personal assistant" or secretarial officer. The Private Secretary job in Tokyo however can be combined with other Chancery work, and in the first year I did various other odd jobs of a more genuinely political kind, on the internal-political side and on Japan's relations with China. But for the first two months I was in effect Private-Secretary-in-waiting. Sir Francis Rundall had left Tokyo on retirement during the summer, and his successor, Sir John Pilcher, was not due until October.

A change of Ambassador almost inevitably brings a change in style. John Pilcher, unlike his predecessor, was a Japan expert of long standing; he had studied his Japanese in Kyoto before the 1939-45 war, and was known as a great lover of the arts in general (he had been Ambassador in Vienna) and of the Japanese arts in particular. In Tokyo at that time the Ambassador worked from his home, the Residence (known as No 1 House) in the Embassy compound, and his Private Secretary and PA had an adjacent office in the same building. Callers were received therefore in rather greater state than the normal office permits, ushered in by one of the three Residence butlers resplendent in the traditional male Japanese dress for formal occasions, the *haori-hakama*, a kind of loosely-cut flowing jacket and skirted robe, all in black apart from the family crest. John Pilcher's personal style matched this atmosphere perfectly. His spoken Japanese had a kind of vintage quality, enhanced by his occasional excursions into the sonorous periods of *kabuki*-theatre vocabulary, a language not used in normal life by anyone in 1960s Japan. His appreciation of the cultural roots of Japanese society was profound, and this coloured the interpretations of Japan which he sent back to the uninitiated in London. Later in my tour in Chancery I found myself increasingly acting as his mouthpiece, drafting formal despatches on various aspects of the Japanese scene for him to sign - a stylistic exercise for which my earlier attempts to reproduce the style of classical Greek and Latin authors had perhaps fitted me.

At first, though, the new Ambassador had other preoccupations. There were the initial formal calls. But there was other business. A UN Security Council debate required urgent high-level representations. The Foreign Secretary, George Brown, was due to pay an official visit, inevitably necessitating much advance preparation. Then suddenly in November 1967 there was the sterling devaluation, with a consequent need of urgent notification to Japan as a major economic power, and cancellation of the George Brown visit. The visit was reinstated, somewhat hurriedly, for January 1968, and proved eventful as all such visits do - especially, perhaps, those by George Brown. He was not an easy guest in the Residence, but the Japanese were impressed; I wrote afterwards "he showed himself to be penetrating and swift to understand, eloquent and frank to a degree which aroused surprised pleasure in this country where neither virtue is common, and apparently untiring after two or three weeks of exhaustions and uncertainties which would sap anybody's vitality".

My role as Private Secretary (PS) was not always so political. I became involved with the administration of the Residence, and dealings with the considerable and mostly very experienced Residence staff, all of course Japanese - an education in itself. I spent a couple of days when the Pilchers were away checking the inventory; "I have learned more about Sheraton, Hepplewhite and Chippendale in 36 hours than in years before, and have stroked some really lovely bits of mahogany". During the preparations for the aborted George Brown visit in November I was included in a grand geisha-house dinner given by a senior Japanese official, with kimono-clad ladies who would occasionally burst into song or go off and do a dance. The guests were required also to oblige, in any language. Two senior members of our Embassy rivalled each other with Greek and Turkish songs, and I joined forces with another Russian-speaker on the Japanese side in singing *Moscow Nights*, a hit-song of the time, in Russian. One non-PS job which I had acquired within Chancery was responsibility for administering language studies, and soon after the Pilchers' arrival we gave a party at our home to introduce the new Ambassador to the language teachers and language students - a slightly terrifying undertaking, but it worked.

There were grand visitors. Harold Macmillan arrived with his grandson Alexander at the end of February 1968, and as a former Prime Minister rated a grand dinner at the Residence, in which we were included; but more interestingly also in a small lunch, just the Pilchers and the Macmillans and Julian and me, where there was some rather more revealing conversation about the past and the present. I cannot remember whether I reminded Harold Macmillan of the letter I had written, as Captain of the School at Eton eleven years earlier, congratulating him as an Old Etonian and former Colleger on his becoming PM - I still keep his personal reply to me as a souvenir. Tony Benn, of a rather different political persuasion, was due to pay a longish official visit in April and I was assigned to him as travelling interpreter around Japan, but that visit was cancelled, alas. - And there were Ambassadorial trips. I did not usually accompany, but was called in at short notice for one to Kanazawa, on the Japan Sea in Western Japan. The occasion was a Japan-British Society tour, made memorable by the inclusion of a Japanese aristocrat named Maeda - in 1968 Mr, but before the war the Marquis Maeda, feudal lord of one of the largest and oldest domains in Japan and for centuries second only to the Tokugawa family who held the Shogunate. It was perhaps a little pathetic, I wrote, to see his simple pleasure at being admitted free to the castle museum at Kanazawa, which naturally was filled with the possessions of his own family.

Almost the final event of my stint as PS was the Queen's Birthday Party in June. An annual event in diplomatic posts around the world, this was an occasion for inviting the great and the good of one's host country, and also in those days almost everybody significant in the local British community. It was a huge affair. John Pilcher decided to celebrate in style, and arranged with the Naval Attaché for HMS *Intrepid*, a commando-carrier and sister-ship to HMS *Fearless*, to make a visit to Tokyo coinciding with the party; and for the Far East Air Force Band to fly up from Singapore.

The plans then snowballed. There would be 48 Marines on board *Intrepid*; why not have them do a "Ceremonial Sunset"? At this point things started to go wrong. The Ambassador, thinking of the state of his lawn, decreed that no more than ten or so Marines should be told off for this occasion; alternatively, twenty or so could do their marching on the tarmac outside, and the guests could filter out of the garden to watch and then filter back again. This thought, on examination, proved impracticable; experts of higher and higher rank were brought in; and we ended up with all 48 parading in the garden, a flag being lowered down a pole borrowed hurriedly from the Americans, and everybody satisfied except the Ambassador. By a mercy, the weather even proved fine, though worries on this score had at one stage generated more and more unrealistic proposals for alternative arrangements in the event of rain ... My letter home ended "Somehow it was all curiously exhausting. I have rarely flopped so completely as I did afterwards."

There were moments of relaxation, though. Some of the best were in the country house in Chiba prefecture which we took over from John and Renny Field on their departure in March 1968, complete with orange-tree, stove, fridge, Japanese bath and two bicycles. It was a lovely peaceful spot, in a small valley close to the Pacific coast with a pretty patchwork of forest and farming land. The path up to the house was lined with azaleas; honeysuckle and orange-blossom made the field paths fragrant, and butterflies and dragon-flies were specks of darting colour. We watched the various stages of rice cultivation through from its first sowing, and were lulled to sleep by the frogs' chorus from the paddy-fields. In August one could view the rice being reaped, dried, baled and carted all in a small compass, and admire the economical swing of a double twist of rice-ears over a long drying-rack, the regular groping behind one's back for a straw to tie a bale. Once, as we were watching, a siege of herons suddenly lifted from the paddy-field, startlingly white against the dark pines, until they drooped their trailing legs down onto a large bare-branched tree at the edge of the valley and stayed, white specks in a gold-and-green landscape. In the house, it was good to soak in steamingly hot water in the pine-fragrant Japanese bath, totally submerged up to the shoulders with knees around one's ears, and emerge for a diplomatic whisky before dinner.

Released from Private Secretary duties, I was able to concentrate on the Japanese internal political scene. For decades the Japanese Diet (parliament) had been dominated by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), a solidly conservative party with massive support from industry and the agricultural community. Within the LDP there were various factions vying for supremacy, and LDP governments were in effect a coalition of factions. The Japan Socialist Party (JSP) and the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) were what they sounded like; the Japan Communist Party (JCP) was a pleasantly old-fashioned assemblage of Marxist-Stalinist intellectuals; all of them needed cultivating, on the traditional principle that an embassy should know the likely members of any future government and the chances of their gaining power. But in Japan the likelihood was slight. Unfortunately Japan is also a country where respect for age and seniority

is deeply ingrained, and there are few opportunities for a particularly young-looking Second Secretary to have a meaningful dialogue with a Japanese politician of any significance. My role therefore contained a high proportion of simply attending meetings, listening to speeches and studying the quality Japanese press, and more interestingly talking to political commentators. On this basis I constructed the required stream of letters back to Far Eastern Department in London, where their audience must have been limited - political analysis of the intricacies even of a European country does not have a wide readership in London, unless violent change is imminent. I also produced the rather more reflective despatches commissioned by John Pilcher as Ambassador, on subjects such as wages and prices or living conditions and leisure (to name two on which I was apparently working at one time) which could in those days be given a broad social perspective rather than an economic one. These were more widely circulated, and if my (considerable) share in their authorship was explicitly acknowledged - as did happen occasionally - they did my reputation no harm.

One political phenomenon was peculiar to Japan and did arouse a little general interest. This was the Soka Gakkai, a grass-roots Buddhist movement with a charismatic leader and an easily-digestible religious message, and its political manifestation the Komeito or Clean Government Party. The under-privileged of all varieties, especially urban, responded in huge numbers to the appeal of a movement which provided opportunities for meeting others in similar case, social activities and a measure of community support. In hierarchical Japan, where the much-trumpeted "life employment" system actually applied to no more than about a third of the work-force, and those who were less successful in securing entry to the right educational establishment or major employer could find life very hard, the need for a support system was very plain. Government was not thought to be doing enough, and the Komeito began to attract significant numbers of voters. New religious movements with mass support and an idiosyncratic agenda have since become more of a commonplace, but in 1968 this was relatively new. I visited the Soka Gakkai HQ in a country location outside Tokyo, with another Embassy member. The atmosphere was a little reminiscent of Huxley's *Brave New World*, with constant emphasis on the Great Leader and his quasi-miraculous achievements, and glisteningly spacious premises set among manicured lawns and thronged with sleek and satisfied disciples. It was difficult to fault the message of support for the underprivileged and community care for all who signed on to membership. But a slight nervousness remained - perhaps this was unjustified, as Soka Gakkai has not swept to world domination since, and the present Komeito is still a factor in Japanese politics but not a determining one.

The administration of language studies remained in my Chancery portfolio. In May 1968 I passed the Advanced examination, a voluntary extra taken by the more ambitious students with preparation done in one's spare time, and with the incidental benefit of a rather higher language allowance. This made me the obvious candidate to take on additional language responsibilities. The doyen of Japanese language expertise in the

Embassy had for many years been John Figgess, at one time Defence Attaché and then Information Counsellor. He was an acknowledged expert on many aspects of Japanese culture, and could swap quotations in impeccable literary Japanese with the best. But he was to leave for other responsibilities, leaving a huge gap in the Embassy; one small part of which was the need for somebody to set and mark the language examinations, a task nominally done in London but in practice and historically managed from Tokyo, with the draft papers approved and the marked papers validated in London. John Figgess nominated me to take this on. This involved selecting pieces for translation both ways at all levels, composing dialogues for interpretation both ways, and sitting in on the oral examinations as adviser to the locally-appointed examiner (who for many years had been the Emperor's interpreter). I naturally had to seek assistance with the selection of Japanese-language pieces and the marking of translations into Japanese, from a native speaker. But what remained was a significant chore. I admit, though, that it improved my morale to be regarded as the current language king within the Embassy (though I knew that there were better speakers at senior levels, including one just a couple of years older), and to act as custodian of the list of speakers of all grades now scattered around the world.

Meanwhile Julian had not been idle. Apart from the serious business of running a house and child, and fulfilling the social responsibilities of a diplomatic wife, she was expecting our second child in July. We had found a hospital in Yokohama with an English-speaking doctor in charge, willing to allow the father to be present at the birth. With the hottest part of the summer due to start in the middle of the month, and the due date estimated at 21 July, it was important that No 2 should be prompt. There was something of a race with other Embassy mothers in similar case; so when I appeared at the Embassy in the late afternoon of 10 July, met tender enquiries after Julian's state from one of them who clearly had not yet produced, and was able to report "born at midday today!", the reaction included an element of spitting fury. Giles Andrew had been extraordinarily sensitive to our requirements. We had a good night's sleep, realised just after breakfast at around 8.00 am that it would be wise to set off for Yokohama, managed to miss the rush-hour on the new motorway (a significant worry), and greeted our second son at one minute after noon. What is more, he was male - a great relief, as Julian's preference had always been strongly that way, and even driving down to the hospital we had been almost totally devoid of ideas about girls' names.

Soon after the birth we had another piece of good fortune. Diplomatic couples in Japan, even very junior ones, need some sort of help in the house. We had had a succession of live-in maids, interspersed with gaps when there was nobody; all had left for a whole variety of different and usually credible reasons, the common thread being that Japanese etiquette seemed to dictate giving almost no advance notice of departure because of the loss of face involved. The latest had told me of her plans to leave on the day after Giles's birth, and actually left a few days later - not good timing for us. But a powerful and diminutive 20-year-old called

Mii Shimada was on our doorstep just a few days after that - I cannot recall quite how it all happened. Mii-san became a member of the family almost at once, had a wonderful touch with the boys and got on well with Julian, stayed with us for the rest of our tour in Japan, and even followed us to England thereafter. In August 1969 we visited her family home in north-western Japan, on the borders of Niigata and Nagano prefectures. It was a real traditional country home boasting running water in the kitchen from an early date - the local stream, diverted along a stone channel. Giles slept in a huge wooden chest, the lid propped (safely) open. Wooded valleys, tiny villages with well-kept thatch and white wattle-and-daub between wooden beams, an antique man-drawn fire engine, range upon range of mountains blue in the misty distance. Justin loved the fire-engine, and sat perfectly happy for half an hour just watching a cow and a goat butting each other off a pile of fodder. We had been very lucky.

For much of this period the duration of our tour in Japan had been uncertain. At one time it seemed likely that I would be summoned back to London at the beginning of 1969, after a bare eighteen months in Chancery including the PS spell. Then the sudden resignation of a language student in the year below me left a vacancy, and the Ambassador put his foot down; Elliott was to stay in Tokyo until the end of British Week in the autumn of 1969, a major commercial (export promotion) event absorbing the energies of much of the rest of the Embassy. This pleased us. The boys would be that little bit older, and maybe easier to cope with through the disruption of changing countries. We were well settled in, enjoying both work and play especially the Chiba retreat, and able to save from our generous allowances (through Julian's economical house management) towards eventual purchase of a house in the UK. Occasionally we were conscious of the distance separating us from home and family. This burden fell hardest on Julian, with two babies and the constant problems of coping in a difficult language and with a different culture. But it would not be for too long now.

The last months were busy. There were calls for interpreting, including a demanding one accompanying a couple of British officials from the Ministry of Labour investigating the use of computers in Japanese labour exchanges. Friends from Oxford came to stay, Di and Šandor Hervey, whom we had stayed with in Hong Kong in 1965, arriving unexpectedly having been diverted when on a flight to Taiwan by a typhoon. In June 1969 I was able to sail on board HMS London, a British destroyer of the latest type, from Tokyo to Hakodate in northern Japan, and act as interpreter there for four days of calls by the Admiral and senior officers; and then, using this as a springboard, to add on a six-day Chancery tour in my own right, calling on prefectural governors, political figures, newspapers, business leaders and so on in the two northern Honshu prefectures of Aomori and Iwate. Embassies try to familiarise themselves with local conditions outside the capital, and often gain a usefully different perspective. In a large country this can provide exciting opportunities for travel, and we were all keen to grab them when we could. - In July we went again to our friend's family in Ibaraki prefecture; "the whole village

seems to have dandled Giles", I wrote. In August we took the train to Mii's family home in Niigata prefecture, as described above. And then British Week (actually two weeks) was upon us, with on top of everything else a visit by Princess Margaret as Patron of the Royal Ballet, in Tokyo as part of the festivities. One of our clearest recollections is of an occasion in No 1 House after the ballet performance, when all the distinguished guests and performers had dispersed apart from HRH and her staff. She was comfortably ensconced on a sofa and immersed in profound conversation with the Ambassador, showing no awareness of the passage of time. The Embassy staff present could not of course leave. Midnight passed. We ventured to suggest to Lady Pilcher and to HRH's senior Lady in Waiting that somebody might tell one of those on the sofa that it was getting rather late. Lady Pilcher, a statuesque and ebullient figure, said "Aren't we all going on to a night-club?" The Lady in Waiting, whose family home happened to be in the next village to my own home in Farthinghoe, was more sympathetic; and Princess Margaret was persuaded that the evening had come to an end. We all bolted for the door.

At the end of October 1969, after a sequence of farewells, we left Tokyo finally by air. It was a more substantial operation than our arrival four and a half years earlier - two children, and a considerable quantity of new acquisitions. There was one major *wasuremono* (thing forgotten - a number of Japanese words had entered our vocabulary), in the shape of Justin's "security blanket", which Mii discovered and brought to the airport just in time, most nobly. We were all tired. The long flight via Honolulu to San Francisco gave little opportunity for rest, but we all slept a full fourteen hours once settled into a hotel there, and were able to enjoy a couple of days' rather chilly sightseeing. Two weeks with Julian's sister Clare, now living in La Jolla by San Diego in southern California, restored us. Then it was sea travel again, by P&O *Iberia* through the Panama Canal (an extraordinary experience), calling at Barbados, Curaçao and Lisbon, arriving at Southampton on 10 December.

The Japanese experience had burned deeply into us. The restraint and simplicity of Japanese art and architecture, garden design and pottery, appealed strongly to our tastes. We never lost the early-acquired capacity for looking at an essentially ugly urban landscape and focussing on the one thing of beauty - a cherry-tree in blossom, the curve of a temple roof. The need to escape crowds became intense. Japan and the Japanese language developed in one an ability to look below the surface of people, to read what was implied as well as what was said. At the same time one could pride oneself on one's own different approach - clear and logical expression, relative freedom from the inhibitions of hierarchy and social difference. An Embassy's role is to understand and interpret its host country, not to act as advocate for it. There was no risk that any of us would be taken as Japanese. *Gaijin* are outside all the concentric circles which make up Japan - family, college peer-group, employment, nation. We were the ultimate outsiders. Even knowledge of the language built only tenuous bridges. But in an odd way Japan was a part of us, and we of Japan. We would be coming back.

VI - THE OFFICE 1970-74

My destination in the Foreign Office (which soon became the FCO, Foreign and Commonwealth Office), was to be the unwieldily-named Aviation, Marine and Telecommunications Department. Before long the marine element, the section to which I was assigned, was hived off to become Marine and Transport Department (MTD). Even so it sounded like something of a rag-bag. But I had been assured in Tokyo that this was a good posting and appropriate to my ambitions. It turned out to have many merits. Desk jobs in the more glamorous political, or geographical, departments looking after a defined area of the world, though sought-after ("desk officer for China" sounds good to one's friends), might not actually have all that much substance. Our relations with any important country would in practice be controlled by much more elevated personages in the Office, and conversely lesser countries would rarely attract the attention of the great. And unless you actually had experience of the country or area in question, your expertise would be pretty superficial and confined to interpreting and paraphrasing the reporting sent in by the relevant embassy. Functional departments like MTD however contained a body of expertise which was likely to be almost unique within the FCO, as the real responsibility lay elsewhere in Whitehall. Even as a desk-officer one would occasionally be listened to within the Office as a unique source of information on the attitudes of other Whitehall departments. One could even pose to quite senior people outside the Office as a foreign policy expert.

But none of this was at the forefront of my mind when we docked in Southampton in early December 1969. The first priority was home and family, and Christmas. The need to decide where to buy a house in the London area was also dominant in our minds. We had done some preparatory work - a sketch-map of the London rail system, showing the last train one could catch in the morning to get to the office by, say, 9.45 am (those were spacious days), was one of our tools. But it was plain that it would be several months before we could hope to be installed in our own property. So our immediate destination was Karin and Bill's home in Farthinghoe, and the happy duty of showing them their younger grandson for the first time.

It was a happy reunion. Justin had been in Farthinghoe during our summer leave in 1967, but now at the age of over three (though still barely talking, with very few recognisable syllables) he was much more of a person. Giles, of course, was known to his grandparents only through photographs, though he was already nearly one and a half. Before very long the family was complemented by the arrival in Farthinghoe of Mii Shimada - Mii-san - who had been so invaluable during our last year and more in Tokyo, and who had chosen to make the long overland train journey through Russia to join us for a year or so. (The existence of an eligible Englishman with whom she wished to become re-acquainted, David Ward, was another factor in her decision.) Karin and Bill took to Mii-san immediately, as did the inhabitants of Farthinghoe, though they could scarcely believe that she was really an adult because of her

diminutive size and youthful appearance. We celebrated Christmas in style, and had a real Christmas tree which was later planted in the garden of Astwick House, where it still stands forty years later and is of a commanding height. The only cause for sadness was that Karin's mother Lillymor had died earlier in the year, so that she never met her second great-grandson (although she had enjoyed the photographs), and we missed the authentic Swedish presence at our *Julafton* ceremonies on the 24th.

Farthinghoe continued to be our home for some months, although I was often absent. When I started work in the Office it was clear that I needed temporary lodgings in London. Bill was in his final years of working in the Department of Education and Science, where he had recently been promoted to the top job in HM Inspectorate of Schools - Senior Chief Inspector - and given an extension of some two years beyond the normal retirement age of 60 to provide for a reasonable length of incumbency. For him daily travel to London from Northamptonshire had become impracticable, and he had taken furnished lodgings in Elizabeth Street, SW1, to use on weekday evenings. His landlady was prevailed upon to offer me a basement room on similar terms. This worked well for the twelve weeks or so for which it was needed, and although father and son saw little of each other during the working week, it was a convenient and happy arrangement. The family back in Farthinghoe apparently took some pleasure in debating what culinary delights to offer their menfolk on return from the great city on Friday evenings.

Our quest for more permanent accommodation, however, started immediately. The home-made map of travel times to the Whitehall area showed clearly that Wimbledon, where we had started our married life, was hard to beat in terms of convenience. It was also far from the cheapest area even then, but we could afford to be a little extravagant because I had been left the proceeds of the sale of the Banbury bungalow bought by Bill's mother when she moved out of London in the 1950s, rented out after her death, and finally occupied by Lillymor. This amounted to £3000, a significant sum in those days. With our own savings, and on the basis of an expected annual salary also of around £3000 in my new FCO job as a First Secretary, we would have no difficulty in securing a mortgage for almost anything we could sensibly want, even in Wimbledon. We did together look at houses in Epsom and Esher, and considered other possibilities. But early in the search I had been taken round a small four-bedroomed semi-detached house in Ridgway Place in Wimbledon, little more than five minutes' walk from the station and with a small garden. Julian came to see it, and approved. The ceilings were reasonably high, and the rooms of decent size - it was built in the 1920s; some of the decoration was excellent, with a particularly pleasant front sitting-room with built-in pine bookshelves (the owners had the civilised approach of decorating rooms properly but piecemeal as the money became available); and there was good oil-fired central heating, a serious factor after our experience in the rather chilly atmosphere of Astwick House in Farthinghoe. We settled quickly, for a purchase price of something over £11,000. By good fortune we were just before the house-

price inflation of the mid-70s, and in the days when buying a house in a good London area was not out of reach for a young couple on a Civil Service salary. On 17 March 1970 - St Patrick's Day, as the vendors pointed out to us somewhat ruefully (the wife was Irish) - we moved in to 6 Ridgway Place, SW19.

While all this was going on, I was of course also settling in to the new job in Marine and Transport Department. We were housed not in the main Foreign Office but in the adjacent Treasury building across King Charles Street. (My office, which I shared with three or four others, was a rather elegantly curved room on the corner of the building, with a carpet not fitted wall-to-wall but cut carefully to match the shape of the room. Shortly after my arrival a couple of functionaries from whatever department it was which looked after our creature comforts arrived to break the news that we were no longer entitled to a carpet; at that stage my promotion to First Secretary had not formally happened - it is a matter almost purely of age - and there was therefore nobody in the room of what might be called carpet rank. We expostulated, but to no effect. By good fortune the promotion happened almost immediately, and our carpet - which would have fitted no other room in the building - was spared.) Our section was the "marine" element of the department, covering shipping, fisheries, the continental shelf and its development, the deep sea bed beyond the continental shelf, and all legal matters associated with all of this including the determination of the geographical and functional limits of national jurisdiction. As we liked to put it, we controlled that majority of the planet's surface which was covered by water - very considerably more than any of our colleagues in other departments, which looked after only small parcels of dry land.

At one time or another I was involved in pretty well all of this, including the very arcane subject of shipping, which involved close liaison with the shipping division of the Board of Trade and endeavouring to impress on them the desirability (for wider reasons) of prudence in their dealings with the United States. We seemed to be constantly at loggerheads with the US Federal Maritime Commission (FMC), whose protectionist and regulatory instincts (as we saw them) hampered us and most of the rest of the world in carrying on our large and profitable shipping business. Happily I was able before too long to abandon shipping and concentrate on the "Law of the Sea" portfolio, which I found more congenial. Essentially the importance of this bunch of issues derived from the failure of two UN conferences, held a decade or so earlier, to agree a comprehensive set of generally acceptable principles of international law to define the nature of national jurisdiction over the territorial sea (the bit closest to each nation's coast), any adjacent fisheries zone, and the continental shelf. National rights outside any national limit - the high seas and the deep sea bed - also required more careful codification, particularly as technology made possible the exploitation of minerals on the sea bed. This was naturally a wonderful playground for international lawyers, and the Office had its own posse of legal advisers who were the real experts. But there was also a need for diplomatic activity: handling our relations with other governments which agreed or disagreed with us; guiding the

activities of officials in other bits of Whitehall directly responsible for the British interest (for example the British fishing industry); and generally providing a focal point of coordination where all these potentially conflicting interests could be brought together and knitted into a pattern which best served the overall national interest. In a nutshell, that was my job.

The aim was to set up a third Law of the Sea Conference with a reasonable chance of general success. By the end of my three years in MTD we were a good deal closer to this, with a senior ex-Ambassador appointed as leader of the eventual delegation. But in the early years we were still trying to work out what our own line should be. There was a fair amount of quasi-legal drafting. Sometimes I was even allowed to try my own hand at it, on the basis of a superficial grasp of what, say, the fisheries experts in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) on the one hand, and our own legal advisers on the other, considered desirable for an international fisheries regime. There was a great deal of talk. The defence experts had a lot to say about the need for "innocent passage", in particular the freedom for the Royal Navy to pass unhindered through major international straits such as the Straits of Malacca, which were often narrow enough for the coastal state to have full jurisdiction. The oil and gas extraction companies had powerful views on what should and should not be allowed to happen on our continental shelf and that of other states. Even our own colleagues in the Office, with responsibility for our relations with particular states, got a bit edgy when we wanted to quarrel with the states in question about their excessive claims over huge areas of sea.

Sometimes our activities hit the headlines. The Cod War with Iceland was one such, and took up a good deal of time one way and another. The British fishing industry, significant parts of which relied heavily on distant waters for their best catches, came up against the determination of the Icelanders to reserve as much as possible of their own area for their own boats. Iceland unilaterally declared an exclusive fishing zone 50 miles broad, and there were clashes between Icelandic fishery protection vessels and British trawlers. The Foreign Office had no hesitation in supporting the British fishermen, as there was no international agreement for extending exclusive zones beyond 12 miles. Twice we visited Reykjavik to negotiate, but without achieving anything (although the trips were fun - white nights in July, little daylight in January, but plenty of alcoholic hospitality and a bit of tourism on both occasions; and lovely warm sweaters to buy). Our leader, a Minister of State in the Lords, drafted an impassioned speech after one of these visits, and was with difficulty restrained by her private secretary from saying "what we want is not a Cod War but a Cod Peace", which might have caused a titter among some of their lordships. But there was to be no peace, and the trend of international opinion was against us. By the time our case reached the International Court at the Hague - I had almost no hand in the drafting, emphatically a matter for highly-qualified legal advisers - wider and wider extension of national economic jurisdiction at sea was becoming inevitable.

More often our campaigns were waged behind the scenes, although some of them were potentially important. Continental shelf delimitation between neighbouring states was beginning to be significant in the early 1970s as the possibilities of offshore oil and gas extraction became real. We and the French had never defined exactly where the dividing line between us should run, and although there was no question of oil-wells in the narrow and crowded shipping lanes between, say, Dover and Calais, the waters further south and west were a different matter. Negotiations began. On one famous visit to Paris at the very beginning, I remember that we in our innocence tabled a straight-forward British compromise - a line equidistant from both coasts, that is straight down the middle. (It was a little more complex than that, as the exact location of the coast for purposes of calculation involved "baselines" linking protruding capes and suchlike, and our experts had very definite views on the precise drawing of these baselines.) The French response as I recall it was formally to note the opening British position; promise that they would return on the following day with their own proposal; and when they did, to suggest that their own wish was to have the dividing line running along the British coastal baselines, thus giving the entire Channel and South-Western Approaches to France. They then suggested that, in the interests of a quick decision, we might agree to split the difference between our two opening positions, leaving the United Kingdom with approximately one quarter of the area in question and France with three-quarters. No doubt reasons for this outrageous suggestion were advanced. The greater territorial mass of France as part of the European continent could have been one such - Germany had earlier benefited from arguments of this kind at the expense of the Netherlands and Denmark, in a seminal International Court ruling. And my recollection may be over-simplified. But it was something like that.

There was a whole range of issues which crossed my desk only from time to time. There was always a flurry of activity when the International Whaling Commission met, provoking floods of correspondence from the British public urging us to condemn more vigorously the activities of the few remaining nations which conducted commercial whaling. The plight of the Scottish river salmon fisheries, where catch levels were falling, led to a campaign to restrict the fishing of Atlantic salmon on the high seas before they had a chance to swim up Scottish rivers and propagate the species. The interests of the Channel Islands occasionally required us to go into battle against the French whose fishermen were constantly trespassing into Jersey's waters in particular. (This subject was so complex that only one person in each Foreign Ministry was expert enough to handle it at any one time, requiring as it did an encyclopaedic knowledge of a succession of bilateral agreements going back I think to 1839; and as any policy move needed clearance with the Channel Islands through one of the slower-moving divisions of the Home Office, the pace was glacial.)

Sometimes there were interruptions of a non-maritime character. My Japanese experience came back into focus in 1971, when the Emperor

paid a State Visit to the United Kingdom for the first time since the Second World War. At that time I was reckoned to be one of the best available Japanese linguists serving in London, indeed second only to Hugh Cortazzi, who had been Head of Chancery in Tokyo at the beginning of my tour in 1965 and whose Japanese linguistic experience went back to wartime. Many of us were called in as interpreters, and Hugh and I were allocated respectively to the Queen and to the Duke of Edinburgh to cover the arrival of the party at Victoria Station. My memories of the occasion are vivid: members of the family, including at least Prince Charles and Princess Anne, standing about waiting for the train and chatting informally; a line of dignitaries on the British side, from the Prime Minister down, drawn up on the platform to be introduced; accompanying the Empress and Prince Philip as the latter introduced each dignitary, and endeavouring to render each title into something comprehensible in Japanese; and trying to avoid breaking down when Prince Philip, realising that I was going to say something approximating to the correct title in Japanese whatever he said, indulged in flights of fancy such as describing the Chief of the Imperial General Staff as the Chief Constable of the Tower of London, and the Commissioner of Metropolitan Police as the Senior Master in Lunacy. I may have the details wrong, but that was the gist ... Later in the visit the official interpreters from the Japanese side took over the two top jobs, for the Imperial and Royal couples, and we all moved down two places. At the State Banquet in Buckingham Palace I was interpreting between the Speaker of the House of Commons, Selwyn Lloyd as was, and the senior Japanese courtier who happened to be the equivalent of a very grand Lady in Waiting. Selwyn Lloyd manfully made conversation about politics. Unfortunately his interlocutor had no idea how Japanese politics worked, so when she was (through me) asked a question, I had to tell her what the answer was and then translate it back into English. I suppose in one way that made it easier.

Rather different in character was the interruption caused by the outbreak of hostilities between India and Pakistan also in 1971. A variety of British interests were involved, not least because of the large number of British citizens resident in the areas most affected around what was then East Pakistan and became Bangladesh. An Emergency Unit was set up in the Office, to work day and night keeping communications open on the political and consular sides. I was one of the junior First Secretaries taken away from his desk to head one of the watches for the political unit (the consular unit was manned by people with consular experience). I cannot remember precisely what hours we worked, but there were certainly night-shifts, and each watch included another slightly more junior desk officer and support staff. Our job was to monitor and keep a running record of all the communications that came in, and to take any immediate decisions that were needed - for anything of real significance that meant calling in one of the more senior officers with responsibility for and knowledge of the area. There was constant liaison also with the Ministry of Defence, not least because the RAF was involved in the evacuation of British subjects, including our own diplomatic staff, for example from Dacca. Telegrams were coming in at such a pace that the highest priority - "Flash" - was not always sufficient, and a new category "Flash Evac" was

introduced to cope with messages on evacuation that required instant action. We would get a telegram from our mission in Dacca reading something like "I think I hear an RAF Hercules in the distance", followed a minute later by another message "Hercules in sight!". The details of military movements by the armies of both sides were fascinating too, and no doubt there were implications for us although I cannot recall the details. By 21st-century standards the communications were primitive, perhaps, but it was fast-moving and actual enough to be exciting and to give a real sense of participation. The senior Foreign Office people involved worked amazingly long hours for a considerable period, and I had a profound respect for their stamina and coolness.

Interruptions of this kind were rare, and both office and family life proceeded normally at a relatively sedate and enjoyable pace. We settled happily into our Wimbledon home, enjoyed the boys' developing skills, made friends locally, paid regular visits to the grandparents in Farthinghoe and Osmotherley. 1970 merged imperceptibly into 1971 and then 1972. Mii-san left us and married David Ward, but we remained in touch - she had become a very good friend and we and the boys owed her a great deal. A three-year limit on a home posting was quite usual, and I suppose we were beginning to wonder where they would send us next. But fate had a different sort of move in store. At some time presumably in early 1972 I fielded an urgent request from the professional head of the Office, the Permanent Under-Secretary (PUS), for advice on a technical Law of the Sea question. Neither the Head nor the Assistant of MTD was available, so I went down alone to face cross-examination. Shortly afterwards I was required by the PUS to consolidate what I had said into an authoritative but chatty draft letter for him to send - I think it was this way round, but it may be that draft came first and cross-examination second. Anyhow, I seem to have made a good impression on Sir Denis Greenhill. Some months later I was summoned by Personnel Department and told that I had been selected as the next Private Secretary to the PUS - "PS/PUS", a plum job. I was to start work at the New Year of 1973. It was farewell to MTD and to the relatively humdrum work of a desk officer, and in at the deep end, right in the centre of things. All a little alarming.

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Simplifying a bit, there are only two people in the Foreign Office who see the whole picture of foreign policy - the Foreign Secretary, and his Permanent Under-Secretary. And, of course, their Private Secretaries. The various Ministers of State and Parliamentary Under-Secretaries who support the Foreign Secretary on the political side have each their assigned portfolios. The Deputy Under-Secretaries (DUSs) and Assistant Under-Secretaries (AUSs) on the official side are similarly responsible for specific geographical or functional areas. It was all quite a neat pyramid - and still is, although the titles have changed in recent years. In practice life would be impossible if every decision had to be referred to the PUS and/or the Foreign Secretary, and only matters of key importance reached the very top. One of the implications of this, though, was that the "private offices" of the two top people had the considerable responsibility

of keeping their bosses informed of what was going on at all times, and ensuring that they did not miss anything of actual or potential major importance. This was one of the real excitements of the job.

All DUSs and AUSs met every morning under the PUS's chairmanship for a thirty-minute *tour d'horizon*, where anybody could mention anything of current importance. The political Ministers were not present, but at least the Foreign Secretary's PS was always there, and also his press spokesman (usually but not always a civil servant). No record was kept, but I sat in and was therefore able to follow up anything where responsibility might have been left obscure. Before that meeting everybody present - including the PUS and his PS - was expected to have mastered the essential details of any information which had come in overnight from around the world, from our overseas missions and to some extent from the media; essentially this meant reading all the telegrams. There were hundreds of them, and all the important ones came to the PUS's office, ie me. Those responsible for determining the distribution of any telegram or series of telegrams would naturally tend to include the PUS's office when there was any doubt, just in case an issue turned out to be more important than it seemed. It was my role to make a selection, and to carry the can if the PUS missed something because his PS had been over-solicitous in saving his time.

Broadly, the same principles applied for all my work. Side-copies of paperwork on its way to political Ministers for decision would almost always come to me, and I had to understand the issues involved (some of them inevitably were pretty complex and not always lucidly explained) and judge whether the PUS was likely to wish to intervene. A lot of the material was fairly routine, but it was easy at first to miss hidden implications, through lack of knowledge of the back-history or lack of experience of the PUS's specific interests. Denis Greenhill, who had been PUS for some years already, was very good in making sure that I knew what to look out for, and in pardoning lapses. But inevitably they occurred. To minimise them, I sometimes needed to check with the department or desk responsible for a given issue, to find out a little more about the background, and sometimes even to suggest a clarification or correction. So the job required a measure of tact; a pretty clear head, and the ability to master sometimes complex detail quickly; and a dustbin-like memory for facts (or at least a painstaking capacity for writing little notes to oneself).

The kaleidoscope of detail in view from my desk was fascinating. A daily note of the subjects discussed at the morning meeting of Under-Secretaries serves as a reminder of what was going on in the early 70s. The UK had just joined the European Community, after years of hovering on the margins. Rhodesia was frequently on the agenda, and Denis Greenhill took a personal hand from time to time. Idi Amin in Uganda was in full spate; I recall a mildly heated exchange with the BBC World Service people about the extent to which they would be willing to adjust the tone of their reporting in the interests of the British subjects threatened by his activities. The AUS who covered Europe, an interesting man with a mildly

lugubrious manner concealing a razor-sharp brain and immense stamina, was constantly agonising over the doings of Mintoff in Malta and the dispute with Spain over Gibraltar. The defence experts, who spoke a language of their own full of acronyms, talked learnedly about the various international negotiations on disarmament and related matters - SALT, MBFR, CSCE and the like. And the Middle East, then as now, overshadowed everything - 1973 was the year of the "oil shock", and one of the many years of Arab-Israeli conflict. Henry Kissinger in the US seemed constantly to be on the line to our Washington ambassador, Lord Cromer. On one notorious occasion the news was so bad that Lord Cromer rang the Office in the middle of the night, and asked the duty Resident Clerk (one of a group of alert, usually unmarried young first secretaries taking turns to live in a flat at the top of the building and answer any out-of-hours enquiries) to get word immediately to 10 Downing Street. Apparently the man in question, somewhat blearily taking the extraordinary news in and concluding that it must be a hoax call from one of his friends, said something like "oh shut up, George" and put the receiver down. Lord Cromer called Number 10 direct, war did not break out after all on that occasion, and the Resident Clerk in question was spoken to severely.

The great men had to make time for strategy as well as tactics. One of the chief instruments was the Planning Staff, a small body of officials selected for the penetrating quality of their brains and required to think laterally about present and future issues. The papers they produced were discussed by the Policy Planning Board, chaired by the PUS and including the six DUSs, the head Planner and a few others. I did not sit in on these meetings, but I did see the papers as they went across my desk, and there were always opportunities - on matters of this kind, as for everything else - to talk about the issues with those responsible as they foregathered in my office before the meeting. In 1973 the future of energy supplies was of high topical interest, and I recall some wise observations by the senior Planner of the day about the inevitable decline of conventional sources of oil and gas and the need to look for alternatives (he had the dates wrong - erring on the pessimistic side - but the general shape of the conclusions has not been disproved by events since). The rise of China as a genuine world power, and alternative scenarios for how this might affect the world, were being debated as something for the more distant future. Maybe there was even talk about the possible demise of the Soviet Union, but I confess I don't remember that anybody was predicting that event then.

As well as controlling policy, the PUS has ultimate responsibility for all personnel questions. He chairs the board which determines appointments at ambassadorial level, and approves the conclusions of the next board down (counsellor-level, in the jargon). Serious disciplinary matters are referred to him. Questions of finance and funding inevitably come up pretty often. As a result, I saw papers of a very personal kind about persons and issues at all levels - and fascinating they were, too. Aggrieved individuals wishing to bend the PUS's ear about their failure to get a coveted appointment, people whose temporary lapses from the strict

path of morality or wisdom had laid them open to reprimand or other sanction - they all came my way. For that brief period, I could claim to know how pretty well everybody in the higher echelons of the Diplomatic Service was regarded. Maybe that was why everybody on the whole was rather friendly and polite to me.

One of the best sources of information and insight was the PUS's own telephone conversations. It is understood and expected that a Private Secretary should monitor all his boss's telephone calls, incoming or outgoing, at least on the normal telephone line - to be able to provide a note of any substantive call if needed, or a memory-jogger if action was agreed, or sometimes even just a second opinion on the matter discussed. Two of Denis Greenhill's most frequent interlocutors were the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Burke Trend, and the Queen's Private Secretary, Sir Martin Charteris. All three had been in post for some while and shared a pleasantly cynical and objective view of the world which made for some sparkling exchanges. The conversations were often allusive, in particular about individuals (naming names might have had security implications as well perhaps as verging on the tactless). But they were never boring. Any subject which caused any one of those three to pick up the telephone and call one of the others was likely to be of considerable significance. I found it especially interesting to learn how much the Palace was involved. Certainly Denis Greenhill never grudged the time he spent, sometimes two or three times a week, climbing into diplomatic uniform and being driven over to Buckingham Palace for a credentials ceremony for a new Ambassador to London, including I assume a few private words with the Queen before or after.

The task of the PUS was essentially to mind the shop at home. However Denis Greenhill did like to travel occasionally, and fortunately for me he liked to give his PS the same opportunity. In May 1973 he accompanied the Prime Minister, Edward Heath, to Paris for a meeting with President Pompidou. (One odd feature of the party, unlikely ever to be repeated, was the number of Old Etonians - the two senior Private Secretaries in No 10, Robert Armstrong and Tom Bridges; the PM's Political Secretary, Douglas Hurd; and, very much the junior, myself. I don't think the Foreign Secretary, Alec Douglas-Home, was there - had he been, both he and his PS Antony Acland would have swelled the number.) The substance of the discussions was no doubt of great moment, but my recollections are largely of the atmosphere; the two great Parisian palaces inhabited by the President of the Republic and by the British Ambassador, dinners and fine wines - it all seemed rather unreal. - More actual was a three-day trip to Budapest in October, this time by the PUS solo (but with Lady Greenhill), and with a little more of a role for me in that I had to take something of a note of the meetings and to get my head around the pronunciation at least of the Hungarian names and a few basic courtesies. Our Ambassador's residence is a beautiful period villa, and the quality of the social conversation was scintillating, with some highly-intelligent Hungarians invited to every occasion. Again I remember rather less of the official talks, though I do recall that every call we made was lubricated by the local apricot brandy. - The most elaborate overseas trip in this period,

though, was to Ottawa in August for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. Corridors filled with Africans in swirling robes; Fijians, Tongans and the like in long skirts; the eloquence and high intellect of Lee Kwan Yew of Singapore, one of the stars of the show; the urbane Pierre Trudeau as host. Several days of predictable posturing, no doubt some progress on some issues, but frankly not much real role for me.

These were Denis Greenhill's final months as PUS. In November 1973 he retired, much-loved and widely acclaimed. We were invited, memorably, to the farewell dinner given for him by Edward Heath at 10 Downing Street, and sat right at the bottom of a large and immensely distinguished table of guests. His successor was Sir Thomas Brimelow, the Office's greatest expert on the Soviet Union and its satellites, and himself only a couple of years off retirement. Tom Brimelow was a very different character, with a mild manner covering an incisive brain and considerable determination. His approach to the job was different in some respects but he made no fundamental changes - and above all he kept his Private Secretary. The political world around him was changing, though. Already in December 1973 the morning meeting was debating the implications for the Office of the domestic political scene, with industrial action over coal-miners' pay precipitating electricity cuts and leading eventually to the three-day working week. The Heath government seemed to be in disarray. Top civil servants agonised together and privately over the right course of action to advise. As Head of the Foreign Service, the PUS had a standing equal in some ways to the Head of the Home Civil Service, Sir William Armstrong, and became involved in consultations with him. Another dimension was added to the fascination of my job.

Over that winter it gradually became clear that Edward Heath would have to call a general election, and this had implications for foreign policy as well as domestic. When there is the prospect of a change of government, civil servants have to prepare for a different set of ministers with different policies - in other words, to create a set of briefing papers tailored to the known predilections of the principal party of Opposition, just in case they win. The convention in the UK is that members of a new government of a different political complexion are not allowed to see the records of their predecessors' deliberations and decisions. (It is sometimes a matter of judgment exactly what this covers - obviously records of discussion in Cabinet and documents on which Ministers have recorded a decision in any detail; obviously not papers on lesser subjects written by officials which give an objective view and make no reference to the detail of any political decision; but there is a grey area in between.) The drafting of papers for new Ministers therefore is a matter of some delicacy, and has to be centrally coordinated in each Government department. So the PUS was naturally much involved.

For the Foreign Office at this time there was one very significant difference about a possible Labour administration - their known scepticism about the UK's membership of the European Community. (All very different from the attitudes of the two major parties 20-30 years later.) When the election

did take place at the end of February 1974, and Labour took over with a narrow majority, the word "renegotiation" soon began to appear among the items discussed at the PUS's morning meeting. Harold Wilson as Prime Minister had to harness the enthusiasms of a team of senior and talented Ministers holding widely differing views on the EC question, with Tony Benn and Peter Shore perhaps the most outspoken in their opposition to British membership, but others distinctly in favour of our staying in. The bridge over these differences was the policy of re-negotiating the terms of our membership achieved only a couple of years earlier by the Heath administration, with the revised terms to be submitted to the British people in a referendum. Whatever individuals in the Foreign Office might think (I assume that most who had been closely involved in the earlier negotiations were pretty clearly in favour of UK membership), they had to tailor their advice to an audience which included some powerful sceptics. It was fascinating to see how the experts did this, without any loss of objectivity or precision, in such a way as gradually to achieve a general Cabinet-wide acceptance of the re-negotiated terms, and agreement that they should be positively recommended to the nation in the 1975 referendum.

Meanwhile there were plenty of other issues. Some were the result of the change of government, such as the Defence Review, often bracketed in my notes with the phrase "east of Suez" - the recognition that the expensive commitment to maintain a substantial military presence in the Far East was perhaps no longer relevant to our real interests; and the somewhat obscure phrase "politically sensitive countries", which were of various kinds but all needing care when determining our arms export policy in particular. But most were of the traditional foreign policy kind, problems surfacing and needing to be dealt with. Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, a British territory but also a major US base, was constantly on the agenda in early 1974. Northern Ireland was going through one of its periodic convulsions, with the imposition of direct rule. Some of my old MTD subjects were still there at the top table, like Icelandic fisheries and the Anglo-French continental shelf. There was always much talk about the Middle East. And in July a new subject began to dominate - Cyprus, where Greek and Turkish Cypriots had long been at odds, with the numerically superior Greek side seeking to impose its will under the leadership of President Makarios; Turkish patience cracked when Makarios was suddenly replaced by one Nikos Sampson, a Greek Cypriot with an unsavoury reputation, and the Turkish army invaded from the north of the island. Our interests were heavily involved, with a substantial British military presence in the two Sovereign Base Areas on the south of the island, and the UK's position alongside Greece and Turkey as a guarantor power since Cyprus's independence from British rule in 1960.

This somewhat breathless catalogue of great events, national and international, might seem to imply that there was little time for the domestic. Surprisingly, it was never like that. Even in the PS/PUS years of 1973-74 I was able to leave the office at a reasonable time, and reach home in Wimbledon often in time to say goodnight to Justin and Giles or even read an occasional bedtime story. Weekends were very rarely taken

up with work, and I have never been one for bringing paper-work home - not that there was any paper in the PUS's office suitable for me to bring home, although the PUS himself, like Ministers, took a carefully-selected boxful of papers home each evening to catch up on. Holidays like Christmas and Easter were genuine holidays, and even if some small crisis intervened, the necessary response would come from individuals or departments directly involved, with any necessary consultation with the PUS or Ministers being done generally by telephone. We could take a couple of weeks or more off in the summer, to visit the grandparents or go walking in the Northern dales. There was time to enjoy and mould our little house at 6 Ridgway Place, time to become better acquainted with our neighbours. And before long there was schooling for the boys, first play-groups - one Miss Lecky, something of a dragon by reputation but kind and effective in her methods, presided over the most serious; and then real primary school, for both boys in their turn Bishop Gilpin School in Lake Road about ten minutes' walk away, a very good Church of England school with a usefully flexible approach to children of different levels of talent. Julian began to build up something of a local network with other friendly local parents.

By 1974, with Justin rising 8 and Giles 6, we clearly needed to start thinking about the next stage, which really meant boarding-school. We were in our fifth year of a home posting and had to expect to be sent abroad before long. The chances of our going anywhere with good local provision of British-style education were small. We had both been sent away to school when still equally young, and although Julian had certainly not enjoyed it, there seemed to be little alternative for the boys. (The cost was never a problem; the Office provides a generous boarding-school allowance which covers most of the likely fees.) For the secondary stage, all would depend on their level of scholastic attainment; they might even win scholarships somewhere, as I had done to Eton, although in 1974 we were not thinking in those terms at all; but we probably needed to make provisional reservations of places at some serious public school with the right sort of atmosphere and equipped to provide a good all-round education for the reasonably intelligent boys which we assumed they were. We visited Shrewsbury, and settled for that - lovely country setting, pleasant people, good reputation. But Justin would not be due there until 1979 and Giles not till 1981. For the immediate future we wanted somewhere within reach of Karin and Bill in Farthinghoe, as we could see that we might well have to seek their assistance when we were abroad; and we wanted something of a musical background if possible. King's College School in Cambridge fitted the bill admirably, and Justin started there in September 1974.

As it turned out, our time in London was drawing rapidly to a close. At some time in the autumn of 1974 I was summoned to Personnel Department, and offered a posting to Nicosia in Cyprus as First Secretary and Head of Chancery. They were very careful to explain that if the idea did not attract me, then of course they would look for something else - the implication being that they knew the PUS would intervene to find something better for me if I were to utter a word of complaint. Actually I

am not sure that Tom Brimelow would have - he was a stickler for having everything done by the proper process and not bringing influence to bear; but Denis Greenhill would not have hesitated. The Cyprus job, they said, could be both interesting and exciting, with the recent change of regime and the Turkish invasion in July and continued occupation of the north of the island. There was a need too for sensitive handling of staff problems in our High Commission (not Embassy, as Cyprus is in the Commonwealth). Even if it turned out otherwise, they said, then Cyprus was an extremely attractive country. A Head of Chancery job in a medium-size mission, with general coordination and staff responsibilities as well as charge of political reporting, was right for me at that stage of the career. Cyprus was a novel thought but definitely attractive, on a moment's reflection. I had no hesitation in accepting.

The wheels turned fast. My successor as PS/PUS had to be identified, and I had the pleasant task of going carefully through the files of three outstanding candidates before Tom Brimelow made his selection (the choice fell on John Kerr, certainly one of the brightest stars of that generation, as the subsequent years have shown). There were things to be sorted out at the Nicosia end, where a temporary and more senior Head of Chancery had been rushed out to mind the shop after the traumatic events of July and since. Our own domestic arrangements had to be set in train - fortunately Justin's installation at his new school was achieved, and Giles could apparently be found a place in the local English school in Nicosia which had survived the political upheaval; but we needed to equip ourselves, and find a tenant for 6 Ridgway Place.

By the middle of December all was ready. The PS/PUS years had been a totally fascinating glimpse of the world of high foreign policy, a bird's eye view and an education at the same time. I had become a member of an exclusive club - my predecessors and successors in that job were a distinguished bunch, among whom I frankly had little real claim to be included. In career terms, it had been a tremendous boost. Domestically, we had been granted a full five years in London just at the time when it was important to settle into our own house and make a start with the boys' education. We had been very lucky. Now for the next adventure.

VII - CYPRUS

It was a strange journey to Cyprus in December 1974 - very different from our previous departure from England, by P&O liner from Southampton in 1965. There was no time now for us to travel by surface route, and no port open in Cyprus since the catastrophic events of July; and no civilian international airport either, as Nicosia airport had been rendered inoperable by the fighting and remained on the boundary between Greek and Turkish control. The only option was RAF flight to Akrotiri in the Western Sovereign Base Area (SBA). The whole family therefore reported at RAF Brize Norton near Oxford, in the cold small hours of 19 December, together with several dozen Gurkha soldiers travelling out on duty, and boarded a distinctly military-feeling Britannia aircraft about which I can remember little except that all the passenger seats were facing backwards for safety. Our mood improved as we flew south over the Alpes Maritimes, down the Italian coast with lovely views of Etna, to land at RAF Luqa in Malta at about 10 am into a wave of dry heat and a baked landscape. Thence a shorter hop to Akrotiri, where we were officially greeted and ushered into a VIP lounge while our bags were cleared, somewhat to our surprise; there had been no such treatment at Brize Norton, but in Cyprus my future status in the High Commission just qualified me for this degree of respect. The car journey up to Nicosia, two hours or so, was all a bit unreal, but I recall several check-points and a degree of apprehension. Cyprus was not now a war zone, but there was a good deal of tension still around.

At the beginning, however, this affected us little. We were put in a small hotel for the first night, and taken to our official house the next morning - an airy two-storey flat-roofed building on a quiet leafy street, with marble floors and wide balconies and a garden full of citrus-trees and vines. There were welcoming parties, a gentle introduction to the office, a local Anglican church, something of a Christmas holiday feeling. We were struck by the mixture of Englishness on street signs, in the varieties of car, even the food in the shops; and Mediterranean colour, with an abundance of poinsettias, bougainvilleas, palms, graceful olive-trees, oranges and lemons. The atmosphere was very informal, even among politicians, with very senior Greek Cypriot figures relaxed and approachable at social events. There were stories (told admittedly on the Greek side - the Turkish side saw things rather differently) of fraternisation between Greek and Turkish Cypriots; "if it were left to us [ie without the interference of the mainlanders] we could settle all this in no time".

Despite the superficially relaxed mood, the real situation was highly volatile. The events of summer 1974 had left the Turkish army in occupation of the northern third of the island. A few Greek Cypriots still held out there, in enclaves mainly in the north-eastern peninsula of the Karpas, but most had escaped to the south and as refugees represented a considerable strain on the economy of the Greek Cypriot controlled area. Some Turkish Cypriots similarly remained in enclaves in the south, although they would shortly be moved out northwards. A United Nations

force - UNFICYP - held the line which divided the island between its two parts and was known as the Green Line. Through recent history, and particularly since independence in 1960, there had been tension between the two Cypriot communities, with the minority Turkish side resenting the dominance of the Greek Cypriots, and the Greek side for their part dissatisfied with the constitutional checks and balances which prevented them from imposing their will totally. However well individuals and individual local communities managed to rub along together, there was a constant tendency for emotions to flare up and develop into violence. The physical separation achieved after the Turkish invasion - with the Turkish Cypriots concentrated essentially in the North and the Greek Cypriots in the south - did something to lessen the probability of local violence. On the other hand the division of the island left many people aggrieved by the loss of their ancestral land and possessions, and made an eventual partition seem more likely, an outcome which would certainly not please the Greek side which had effectively controlled the larger whole before 1974. On paper the general shape of a solution seemed reasonably clear - some form of confederal relationship between the two parts of the island, with appropriate guarantees; and redrawing of the border between them to satisfy as many individual communities as possible and to approximate to the proportions of Greek Cypriot to Turkish Cypriot. In practice the road towards such a solution was beset with problems.

The location of the High Commission office was, to say the least, interesting. It was in no-man's-land between the warring factions. To reach it from our house - a few minutes' walk - one had to pass through a Greek and a UN checkpoint; the Turkish front line was just across the road from the front door of the office. The High Commissioner's grand but dilapidated official residence was the far side of the Turkish lines, and not therefore very useful as the bulk of our business was with the only legitimate administration of Cyprus on the Greek side (a more modest and accessible substitute had been found). The advantage of our position was that we were spared demonstrations by infuriated Greek Cypriot mobs (far too close to the Turkish army); the disadvantage, that further advances by the Turks would be distinctly uncomfortable for us (the story was that they had stopped where they did through awareness of the diplomatic awkwardness of sending the tanks through the British High Commission, but this might not work a second time). Our security officers manning the building at night were apt to say in typically British fashion, when cross-border shooting broke out, that they got used to the tennis-like interplay of fire over their heads, but were a bit nervous about the thought that one day somebody would put their shot into the net.

This location was one of the reasons for the disarray among High Commission staff which had precipitated my posting. The strains of summer 1974 had been obvious and considerable. There had been a need for extremely rapid evacuation not only of the offices and staff houses to safety in the UK bases (SBAs), but also of the large numbers of British citizens resident in the northern part of the island. Regrouping thereafter had taken a little while, and not everybody had enjoyed the experience. The High Commissioner, Stephen Olver, and his Counsellor (deputy head

of mission) Derek Day had performed nobly. Stephen Olver, now Sir Stephen, was still in post, but Derek Day had met with a complicated accident not in the fighting but (oddly) on the tennis court, some weeks later, and was in the middle of medical treatment and recuperation in the UK - he did not return to Cyprus until late March 1975. Other staff changes reinforced the need for the swift introduction of an active Head of Chancery - in effect the chief of staff and next in seniority below the Counsellor. Hence the vacancy for Elliott.

It was a very political post. Diplomatic missions generally have a substantial commercial and maybe economic section, a consular section busy with routine visa work and the problems of visiting British passport-holders, and a management section handling administrative problems deriving from the complications of local bureaucracy rather than anything more sinister. In Cyprus in early 1975 there were no tourists, scarcely any British businessmen or openings for trade promotion, and all the administrative problems were fundamentally affected by the political situation. Much of the consular-style work was in fact done by a strong Property and Interests section, whose task was to help British citizens with their claims in respect of property on the island which had been damaged, destroyed, or otherwise removed from their use and enjoyment as a result of the Turkish invasion; there was clearly a political dimension to all of this, and I became much involved. The presence of two substantial British sovereign bases, not to mention a large British contingent in UNFICYP, made the work of the Defence Adviser and his staff more than usually important, but much of the importance was political rather than military - and liaison with the SBAs and their administration fell almost as much to my political section (especially in the absence of the Counsellor) as to the Defence Adviser. Retaining the SBAs was a major British interest, for reasons going well beyond the confines of Cyprus itself. Even the narrow Cyprus question - how the Turkish and Greek Cypriots should reconcile their differences and discover how to live together - was of more direct concern to the British Government than it might appear. The UK, along with Greece and Turkey, was a guarantor power under the constitution, or at least under the treaty which had created the independent state of Cyprus. So my political duties, together with staff responsibilities for a group of people who seemed to have more than their fair share of hang-ups and internal feuds, made for a real job.

The first weeks after arrival were a time of crisis which left no time for sober analysis of these intricacies. In mid-January the British SBA authorities in the Western base of Episkopi decided that the few Turkish Cypriots who remained there, in an area which unlike the Eastern base (Dhekelia) was not contiguous with the Turkish zone, should be evacuated to the north. This was bound to provoke the Greek Cypriots, who may have regarded Turks in the south as hostages for the eventual return of the Greek Cypriots enclaved in the north. By sheer ill fortune, in a totally separate but simultaneous incident, a Greek Cypriot student was run over and killed by a British armoured car from UNFICYP. On Saturday 18 January tempers boiled over, the police miscalculated, and a dozen youths managed to penetrate our consular offices in downtown Nicosia. They

were battering down the last remaining door behind which our three UK-based consular officers were sheltering when police reinforcements arrived. It was an uncomfortable moment, and we were lucky that our main office was out of reach of the Greek Cypriot mob. (The Americans suffered worse - I forget whether it was on this day, or during another flare-up, that my US colleague the Ambassador's deputy arrived for dinner at our house rather late and with eyes streaming from tear-gas.) By the following Monday we had established an emergency link with the Canadian UNFICYP contingent whereby they would extract us in armoured cars from the High Commission office - or indeed from staff homes - if it became necessary. The Greek Cypriot authorities too recognised the dangers of whatever their police strategy had been, and took much more positive steps to protect us.

A far more serious threat disrupted our lives in early February. My letter home tells little of the story, to avoid alarming Karin and Bill. Our memories however are clear. Information reached us that the Turkish army were seriously contemplating a further move south from the Green Line, which was almost bound to provoke panic generally on the Greek Cypriot side, even if by a miracle the High Commission building was spared again. At one moment we even heard that "the tanks are rolling". The number of staff spending the night in the office building - one UK-based security guard in normal times - was increased, as there would be a need to do something with essential equipment at the last moment. Emergency cypher communications equipment was dusted off. For the crucial night when the attack was expected the High Commissioner and his essential staff actually moved up to relative safety, in the form of the small RAF station at Nicosia airport which was protected by UNFICYP. (We were not exactly reassured when we arrived at our temporary office - a one-storey hut, with a line of bullet-holes stitched across the ceiling from an earlier air attack enabling us to see the night sky ...) This was something we could do unobtrusively, and therefore without revealing to the populace at large that we knew something. It was judged, however, that for British High Commission wives and families to start moving out of their Nicosia homes could rapidly lead to local panic. The Canadians were given the locations of all houses where we had families which might need emergency evacuation, but for the moment the families were told to sit tight. Julian and Giles (Justin was away at school) were going through the normal evening routine, I assume with typical British *sang-froid*, when Jack Cheeseman, First Secretary Commercial and a wise senior figure who had been left in charge as not required for the emergency group up at RAF Nicosia, telephoned. "Are you all right?" Julian made reassuring noises. "Sure you wouldn't like to come round here?" Julian protested that she was quite relaxed. "I have a nice log fire, a bottle of malt whisky, and a radio which gets the UN communications network; it's fascinating ... " Julian bundled Giles into suitable garments and went round like a shot, to imbibe whisky and listen enthralled to the clipped voice of the British colonel and UNFICYP chief of staff controlling precautionary movements by the UN troops - an evening she has not forgotten. In the event the attack did not materialise, thanks to some frenetic diplomatic activity at a very high level outside Cyprus. But it was an exciting moment.

Despite all this, and the regular night-time exchanges of shots on the Green Line which were clearly audible from our house, we were mostly able to lead a relaxed and really rather pleasant life even during these first months. There were walks in the foothills of the Troodos mountains, past steeply terraced farms and painted churches, or in forest scenery with precipitous views. There was a climb among fragrant herbs up the little peak of Stavrovouni towards Larnaca, crowned with a charming small white-painted monastery with a shady courtyard and magnificent views of the south coast. An old Cyprus hand temporarily attached to the High Commission in January took us to Asinou church, isolated in a steep tree-clad Troodos valley with exceptionally fine mediaeval paintings covering every square inch of the interior. Nearer the summit of Troodos at 6000 feet there were a couple of short ski-slopes, where we all hired the necessary equipment from an efficient British army store (odd to be collecting skis from a maiden called Aphrodite), and made our first faltering efforts to descend gently while remaining vertical; Julian had done it before in France and was ahead of us, but the three males did not disgrace themselves. The US Ambassador had an unfair advantage - he had specified that his bodyguards had to be expert skiers, so he had free tuition. But the real expert was a three-year-old, son of the local innkeeper, who tended to charge straight down the slopes like a bullet pursued by despairing cries of "Socrates ...!" from his mother.

Justin, of course, was with us only for school holidays. The initial journeys to and from the UK for school terms were not easy. In January we had to leave Nicosia at 3 am to get him to Akrotiri for the military flight. By March the new civilian airport facilities at Larnaca were just open, although driving there was complicated by the fact that the old direct road from Nicosia passed through newly-conquered Turkish territory and we had to detour on rough country lanes. At the airport, it was all pretty primitive. When the incoming flight from Athens was about due, a man emerged from the small control-tower, peered westwards into the dusk, nodded sagely, went back and switched the runway lights on; a tiny-looking and ancient Viscount edged cautiously down on the very end of the shortish runway and slammed on the brakes, stopping just in time. White- and green-faced children then clambered stiffly out ... it had been a bumpy flight. But things got better. - It was an excellent Easter holiday, skiing on Good Friday and swimming at the RAF Nicosia pool (Olympic-sized and magnificent) on Easter Monday. There was tennis at the High Commission club, and more walks, with brilliant carpets of flowers everywhere - wild irises and gladioli, fields full of poppies and marigolds, cistus and gorse on the hillsides where shepherds whistled, goat-bells tinkled melodiously and larks sang. A drive down to the Roman ruins at Curium near Limassol gave the boys a splendid time exploring cellars and caves, while we admired the mosaics. There was even a contribution by the Army, with opportunities for High Commission children to clamber over helicopters and even to manipulate the steering-wheel of a jeep, with grown-ups managing the pedals. We began to appreciate the coolness of our house, with the midday temperatures in the nineties Fahrenheit.

Giles remained with us, and attended the Junior School of the English School in Nicosia, a well-run establishment which had managed to survive the invasion. He seemed to flourish there, starting every morning from home at some absurdly early hour with the sort of "break" provision which we and he favoured - things like raw carrots rather than biscuits and chocolate, provoking at first amusement and then envy from his classmates. The athletic side attracted him as well as the academic, an omen for the future. (Even his parents did not do too badly - in May I wrote home proudly that we had each come second in a large field for the mothers' and fathers' race, beaten respectively by the ex-PT mistress and her husband; "the diplomatic community is still talking about it", presumably because we did not look like athletes.) We discovered the joys of camping by the sea in Happy Valley in the Episkopi SBA, untroubled there by any Cypriot competitors, and gradually developing friendships with a few congenial Brits working in various senior capacities there and encountered by me at the regular coordination meetings at which I represented the High Commission. It was strangely satisfying to attend, formally clad, the ceremony of Beating the Retreat at Episkopi one Friday evening in May, with splendid bands from the Devon & Dorsets and the Royal Irish Rangers; to move on to warming cocktails with one of the senior officers; and then, with Giles, to rush back to our tents, and wake up the next morning with the sea a few yards away and warm enough for an invigorating swim before breakfast.

We did not neglect the Turkish side. Our diplomatic identity cards enabled us to cross the Green Line, which at that time was barred to all Cypriots not on official duty. From the first we could shop in the Turkish market, where beef was 40% cheaper than on the Greek side, and visit the old Residence, where there was a small swimming pool, and where a few Turkish Cypriot staff kept a consular office open. Before long we ventured further, to Kyrenia on the north coast, which had been a favourite place of resort before the invasion but was now a rather sad little town with Greek Cypriot restaurants transformed into Turkish kebab-houses and a much-diminished population. The Pentedactylos range of mountains, a splendidly spiky panorama visible to the north from Nicosia and even boasting a little snow in mid-winter, had many delights: the Crusader castles of St Hilarion, Buffavento and Kantara; open mountain walking, in particular Mt Kornos at the western end of the range; the scenic village of Bellapais, beloved of the writer Lawrence Durrell. Further east, the ancient city of Salamis near Famagusta was a treasure-house of Greek columns and avenues and pieces of sculpture, almost empty of visitors and patrolled uncomfortably by the odd pack of dogs running wild. It was a while before we got as far as that, but drives to the North were a constant feature of the programme we offered our private visitors, as including some of the best things on the island. One just had to get used to the unceremonious treatment meted out by the mainland Turkish Army border guards, and to remember that Turkish time was one hour ahead of Greek time, reflecting the difference between the two mainland countries - an awkwardness, especially as the border was closed at evening curfew, and we always forgot whether that was 5 pm Turkish or 5 pm Greek time.

In practice some of the more interesting diplomatic exchanges for me were also on the Turkish side. I had an energetic Second Secretary with that portfolio, and through him met a couple of extremely sharp and clear-headed first secretaries in the Turkish Embassy, with whom we had occasional relaxed and conversational meals. The Turkish Cypriots who mattered on the political side of the administration were relatively few in number, and approachable. In May 1975 I was invited to a lunch at the US Ambassador's beach-house in Kyrenia, and noted that "almost everybody who counted on the Turkish side was there". Opportunities for actually influencing the course of events were extremely rare, and really it was only the High Commissioner who had access to the top people - Glafkos Clerides on the Greek side, Rauf Denktash on the Turkish, two London-trained lawyers who had been colleagues and adversaries for very many years; and the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative (SRSG), Perez de Cuellar for most of my time. The so-called "inter-communal talks", through which only the future of the island could effectively be determined, were essentially in the hands of these three men. I did occasionally have exchanges with Rémy Gorgé, an immensely experienced Swiss diplomat with a conspiratorial air who was the next man down in the UN political team. But the nearest I got to a relaxed conversation on the issues, with people who could have an influence on them, was with the young but senior Turkish Cypriot politicians.

Contacts on the Greek side, where of course we lived and could entertain at home, were much easier to achieve. At one dinner-party in the summer of 1976 I noted that we had as principal guests the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, an ex-Minister of Justice, and the Mayor of Nicosia - all rather powerful and highly intelligent individuals; and added that there must be few places where a middle-ranking British diplomat in his mid-thirties could persuade persons of such eminence to come to his home. With hindsight, that was perhaps wrong. It is surprising how much British diplomats around are held in respect, and how it is understood (though only by the *cognoscenti*) that even a less senior one may be an effective channel of communication with a government which still matters internationally. In Cyprus, of course, Britain mattered more perhaps even than the Americans, as a guarantor state and because of the bases, not to mention our position as the former colonial power. (On one occasion my colleague in the French Embassy, not one of the more powerful members of that excellent foreign service, telephoned me to ask for advice; his new Ambassador had been in town for several weeks, but did not seem to be making much of an impression; what should he do? put an advertisement in the local press?) Even so, policy on the central Cyprus issue was held very close at the top, and made not by people to whom I had access, even towards the top of the Foreign Ministry.

There was still plenty to do for me on the political front, though (and even the High Commissioner's exchanges with the top people did not produce real movement towards a solution of the Cyprus issue, which after all has eluded us for the several decades since the 1970s). The main tasks were analysis based on such information as we could gather, and

communicating the results of that analysis in the form of briefings. One target audience was the senior military and civilian staff of the SBAs, who needed to know what was going on around them and sometimes even required a little education in the sensitivities of the Cypriot communities among which they had to operate. Another was visitors from London, whether officials from the FCO (plenty of them came) or others with a need to know. Two Select Committees of the House of Commons descended on us in the autumn of 1975, the first - I assume it was the Foreign Affairs committee - for a whole five days, with an intensive programme of calls and discussions. (The other was the Defence and Overseas Expenditure committee, which stayed for a bare eighteen hours but grilled us pretty thoroughly in that time.) I came to enjoy the stimulus of being required to explain the complexities of the local scene coherently and concisely.

Less satisfying, but equally demanding, was the whole business of staff relations. In those days the archaic post of Head of Chancery in British missions around the world symbolised as much the chief personnel officer as the chief political adviser. We gave many staff parties, of all sizes from the small welcome or farewell dinners for individuals to the large thrashes for the entire staff on occasions such as the Christmas holiday. As well as organising and catering for these, Julian played a demanding part in the wives' association, with coffee mornings and the like. And we both, Julian especially, had to cope with the grumbles, complaints and general heart-searchings of all the UK-based staff, on matters from marital problems (of which there were a number) to the inadequate provision of furniture by the Administration Officer. The locally-engaged staff were included in some of the larger functions, but their personal welfare was really a matter for the Administration Officer rather than for us - and they were a pleasant and efficient lot, from all communities including a number of Armenian Cypriots (useful especially because they were fluent in both Greek and Turkish, not to mention English and Armenian). At one stage Julian said - maybe it was before we even came to Cyprus, on the basis of experience in the earlier Tokyo posting - that she never wanted me to be either a Head of Chancery or an Ambassador, partly because of the burden on her. As it turned out we had fifteen or so years of it.

Management issues bulked large in the latter half of 1975. Derek Day left, to be replaced as Counsellor in August by the bachelor John Cambridge. Donald Gordon succeeded Stephen Olver as High Commissioner in October. All this meant more on my shoulders, to see them in. And the load was increased by the arrival in November of the FCO Inspectors on one of the periodic visits which they make every few years to all posts. Their task is to assess whether the post's effort is being correctly directed, with the right number of staff doing the right things, and to update the calculations on which everybody's financial allowances are based. These allowances are designed to compensate each individual for the extra cost of living in the country concerned as compared with life in a London suburb - conventionally Bromley, for some reason. As the inspectors are ordinary members of HM Diplomatic Service assigned temporarily to this job, they can be expected to be reasonably

fair and objective - not least because at some future date they will themselves be subject to the scrutiny of others, whom it would be wise not to have offended in the past. Even so an Inspection imposes a substantial burden of prior preparation on the post, much of which has to be supervised by the Head of Chancery. (Various techniques are used by individuals to secure the best possible financial deal for themselves, for example by devising typical menus for eating out or entertaining guests at home which show how high local costs can be. I was accused of not playing the game, when it emerged that I had given a cheap but delicious local Cypriot kebab as my typical working lunch, rather than expensive steak-and-chips in an upmarket restaurant - with damaging effects on the average provision for all first secretaries.) By chance my opposite number in Athens, Peter Vereker who was Head of Chancery there, came to stay for a few days' official visit in October, and was able to offer a few tips on how he had handled their inspection by the same team a little earlier.

All went off well in the end, and we settled down with the new leadership. The Gordons were extremely pleasant, and I wrote home about a particularly enjoyable outing with them and John Cambridge in January 1976 for a picnic on the Pentedactylos range. The spring of that year was very much more relaxed than 1975. We knew our way around, had made some friends, had developed a considerable interest in the local wild flowers - the fragrant wild narcissi in Episkopi were wonderful, and we were building up quite a collection of orchid photographs. Our skiing was improving. We had tracked down most of the best accessible painted churches. All of this helped us to act as convincing guides to our respective parents when they came on visits, Julian's mother for the month of March, and Karin and Bill for a couple of weeks in April and May. I had acquired some knowledge of modern Greek, largely founded on a basis of classical Greek from schooldays and Oxford, and had even passed a couple of simple FCO exams to earn a small language allowance, but was rarely called on to use it except sometimes with village priests when hunting for the key to the church. An official visit to Athens in March 1976 gave me a little more opportunity of practice, and it was encouraging to find that the version of Greek used in the Parliament was much closer to the classical language. But that visit did teach me one salutary lesson. At dinner one evening with the Verekers I made some remark, which I thought was reasonably objective, about the rights and wrongs of the Cyprus situation. My neighbour at the table, a prickly female member of Parliament, promptly rose to her feet, made her excuses and left. Even then I could not be sure exactly how I had offended, but it was plain that one needed to exercise extraordinary care in talking about matters which touch on the sensitivities of one's interlocutors.

Family life was very good at this stage of our lives, and we have always looked back on the Cyprus period as one of our happiest. Swimming at RAF Nicosia, in the wonderful Cyprus climate, was a great pleasure. By September 1975 Justin had developed to the stage where he could swim a mile, by sheer dogged perseverance (Giles was not able to manage that distance on the day the rest of us did it, but had rather better style). We all enjoyed tennis at the club, and Julian became a force to be reckoned

with, taking a set off the High Commission star in one epic struggle. Camping in Happy Valley on the Episkopi SBA was a constant delight, for much of the year; we celebrated Justin's birthday in September 1976 with a memorable barbecue there, with the Canning family from Episkopi who had become good friends. The polo-field in Happy Valley was a perfect area for kite-flying (Justin had a new "stunt kite"), the rocky promontory which bounded the bay was good for scrambling on and viewing griffon vultures soaring, and after sunset we could swim out lazily along the path across the waves formed by the moonlight, and listen to the calling of Scops owls. The place where we pitched our tents was shaded by mimosa trees - idyllic in blossom season. Both in 1975 and in 1976 Julian went back to the UK in June/July, to coincide with the end of the King's College School term and do an equipment check, as well as visiting her family. Giles had started at KCS in April 1976, a few weeks before his eighth birthday, and Julian was to our surprise able to view him participating in the final of the under-9 tennis.

By October 1976 we were due for our so-called "mid-tour leave", on the presumption that we would do our full four years in Nicosia. We planned a gentle trip to England; by sea via Athens to Venice, thence by train to Paris where we were to stay with Anthony and Veronica Goodenough in the Embassy there (Anthony was an old friend from New College days), and then to London by train and ferry. This all worked out very well. But there was a strange interruption at Athens. A mysterious message had reached us at sea before we reached Piraeus, from Peter Vereker in the Athens Embassy, saying merely that he had urgent news for us and would meet us off the ship. Family tragedy? we had no idea, and wasted much time in speculation. It turned out that Personnel Department wanted to talk urgently to me on the telephone, and the only secure way of doing so was from the Embassy. When I got through, somewhat nervously, I learned that they needed a candidate for Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, an important job involving immediate promotion to Counsellor rank if I got it; would I be willing for my name to go forward? The job involved constant travel between London and Belfast and was high-pressure, to say the least; and of course it meant an immediate end to my Cyprus posting. I had little hesitation in refusing (although to preserve the decencies I did ask for an hour or two to think about it - I think we took a walk up Mt Lykavettos in central Athens for the purpose). It was far from certain that I would get the job - there might well be other candidates, maybe from other Whitehall departments; Cyprus was far too enjoyable a posting to abbreviate; and I was not at that stage of my life a good traveller, suffering from a kind of nervous nausea before any significant journey, which alone would make the proposed job something of a potential nightmare. So we continued our journey, a little shaken, and proceeded to enjoy a reasonably normal three months of UK leave.

At some point during that period I had a further conversation with the personnel people, of a more relaxed face-to-face kind. They had made clear that refusing the Northern Ireland would do me no harm in career terms - one can always refuse things occasionally, and this was clearly a

job of a rather unusual kind. But they made it pretty clear that I could not expect to stay for a full four years in Cyprus. I would be 38 in May, at that time the earliest likely age for accelerated promotion, and was on the rather short list of those for whom such promotion was expected. They presented a selection of the jobs which might be on offer. Two were in Washington, one in Tokyo - I cannot remember what the other was. I did not want to argue too strenuously against early promotion (repeating only that I was in no hurry to leave Cyprus), so merely offered an opinion on the choice, giving the view that delaying the inevitable eventual return to Tokyo would enable me to gain wider experience, and that either of the Washington jobs would be attractive. They listened, as is their wont, and said little.

The three months passed quickly, in happy domesticity and based almost entirely on the two grand-parental homes. By the end of January we were back in 12 Demosthenes Street in Nicosia, to be greeted by a vase of flowers from the High Commissioner's wife and a well-stocked fridge by courtesy of the Administration Officer, and the next morning were welcomed with cries of delight from the greengrocer and general storekeeper at the end of the road who had benefited a good deal from our regular custom. Even the political climate seemed relatively sunny, with Archbishop Makarios (who as President had remained aloof from the inter-communal negotiations since his return in 1975) having agreed to meet Denktash for talks. Both sides seemed genuinely to want to negotiate, I was writing in late February, and adding that though no settlement was likely in 1977 we might just possibly get a long way towards one (with the rider "if we don't this year, we never shall" - sadly, only too prescient). However Makarios died in August that year, and nobody after that was strong enough on the Greek side to take the necessary bold steps. He was a remarkable man, surprisingly small in real life (as we had discovered when Donald Gordon presented his credentials as the new High Commissioner) though the familiar tall black headgear of an Orthodox Archbishop greatly enhanced his presence. Though much criticised from all sides, he had been able for many years to steer a path through the Byzantine intricacies of Cyprus politics, and to remain in control. In its way, the country had flourished under him, though the seeds of downfall were there.

My task of analysis and briefing continued with little change. There was frankly not much to say about the machinations of internal politics in Cyprus, with party differences existing only on the Greek side and even then signifying little for the main territorial issue (although there were some colourful characters). A tour along the Green Line in a UN land-rover gave me a vivid insight into the parochial nature of the confrontation between Greek and Turk; the blue and red flags flew from buildings often very close to each other in urban areas, separated by the pale blue of the UN, and at one point when I was looking out of the window of a UN-held building at the Greek flags across the street and enquiring idly where the Turks were, my guide silently pointed up at the ceiling - they were upstairs, in the same building as the UN. Incursions across the line were a regular business, and resolved by a variety of devices. The British

contingent were fond of describing how the local commander in one rural area, needing to induce a small Turkish unit to vacate the trees on the Greek side which they had occupied, sent a large and extremely hairy Welsh sergeant to prowl wolfishly round the clump of trees, caressing his light machine-gun and glancing up at the invaders with the occasional grimace of bloodthirsty anticipation ... when he turned deliberately away, the Turkish unit hurriedly clambered down and returned to their lines.

In leisure moments, we explored more of the island. We became fond of Paphos, where there were some charming harbour-side cafes serving delicious fish, and where some of the best Hellenistic mosaics on the island and at least one of the best painted churches - in fact half a cave, excavated from a rock face - were to be found. Further north the Akamas peninsula and the small town of Polis were at that time almost totally undiscovered by tourist visitors, with an unmade road flanked by drifts of wild cyclamen in spring, leading to grassy swards at sea-level and to a wilderness of tortured rock forming the cape at the end of the peninsula. The snow-clad mountains of mainland Turkey were clearly visible to the north in the late afternoon light. On another occasion we were able to penetrate a little further than people usually did into the western part of the Turkish-held area, towards Morphou and the historic palace of Vouni, high above the sea and with one superb courtyard graced by a still-standing statue of Cybele, and the ancient city of Soli with some mosaics and a much-restored theatre. That was a sad journey, though, with heaps of rotting oranges lying in the orchards, once farmed by Greek Cypriots and evidence of the inability of their Turkish successors to cope with the demands of their new territory. The Greek side was better looked after and more populated, although even there we found ourselves often on unmade country roads, sometimes high up on the southern flanks of Troodos with the wheels of our brave Austin Maxi running dangerously close to the precipitous edge. Further to the east, beyond Larnaca and approaching Cape Greco at the south-eastern corner of Cyprus, we found ourselves once near a tiny village with huge empty sandy beaches, called Ayia Napa, with the only human in sight being a Cypriot hunter with two recently-shot kingfishers hanging from his belt; odd to think that this is now a major holiday resort with mile upon mile of popular hotels thronged with British tourists.

Back in Nicosia, there was still plenty of variety. Tennis and swimming remained constant features. We developed more of an interest in the history and archaeology of the island - "did I tell you that Julian successfully delivered her talk on Homeric Burials to the US Embassy wives' archaeological group?", as I wrote in one letter to Karin and Bill after we had visited the horse-burial sites at Engomi near Salamis. As always we became involved with singing in the local Anglican church, and used to foregather with a couple of long-term residents of an evening to sing plainsong together from black-note music on the original four-line staves, and on one occasion to sample home-made retsina flavoured with some of the large lump of ancient resin discovered depending from the underneath of a church pew. We became more knowledgeable about local eating-places, and still cherish the memory of a farewell party for a British

Council couple in an outdoor restaurant in a small Nicosia square, where the proprietor, on learning the purpose of the party, brought out several more bottles of the local wine as a gift from the management to lubricate us - which by that stage we hardly needed. Eating out was always a pleasure, in the balmy climate and with food absurdly cheap and wonderfully plentiful, but that evening was special. Another evening with gastronomic delights of rather a different sort was spent among the guests at a Chinese Embassy house, with our congenial host (the Counsellor in the mission) having in those peculiar Red-Guard days been plucked from his position as principal cello in a major Peking orchestra to become a diplomat. After the meal we were shown a remarkable Chinese film, a sort of cross between the Archers and a Western full of goodies and baddies, set in Shinkiang in the far west of China; the dialogue was dubbed, with all the baddies talking in impeccable Oxford accents and the goodies in American, and larded with phrases like "thanks to the Party's programme of artificial insemination and the thoughts of Chairman Mao".

In April 1977 Ruth Dashwood from Karin and Bill's village of Farthinghoe, a friend of many years' standing who had visited Cyprus as a girl, came with her younger son Bruce to stay for two weeks. We had some excellent days out together, including a couple of days of comprehensive touring on the Turkish side which was not normally accessible except to diplomats and their families (Ruth successfully passed as Julian's sister), and in our turn learned things about Cypriot agriculture which only the farming eye of Ruth and Bruce would have perceived. A happy visit, but coinciding (as the file of letters shows) with the less welcome news that our time in Cyprus was definitely drawing to a close. The FCO had decided to send me back to Tokyo in September as Information Counsellor, the posting among those trailed before me some months earlier which I had wanted least. The argument was that I would have to go back sooner or later to use my Japanese skills; that a more extrovert job like dealing with the press would perhaps bring me a little further out of my academic shell; and that this early promotion should surely be sufficient bait. So we would have to leave Cyprus at the end of August.

The remaining months were a whirl of activity. Not a great deal happened on the political front, fortunately, as John Cambridge was on leave and his duties devolved to me - the elections in mainland Turkey, and then their inconclusive result, inhibited any progress on the central political issue. Celebrations of the Queen's Jubilee in June made for some extra rushing about, and we attended a splendid parade in Episkopi with a proper fly-past and a twenty-one gun salute from a visiting British frigate moored offshore and visible, beautifully floodlit, from the venue for the evening reception. For a week we had staying with us a young Canadian archaeologist with her leg in plaster, which complicated life - the reasons were "essentially charitable", but history does not relate what they were. In May Justin had taken and passed a preliminary qualifying examination to be inscribed on the list for Eton, which recent researches had shown to be a credible alternative to Shrewsbury for the boys after KCS Cambridge - apparently the academic standards for non-scholars were higher and their attitudes a bit less offensive than in my day, and Eton was

undeniably convenient for the airport when they had to fly out to Japan. Julian went back to England for a couple of weeks at the end of June, as had become usual, to sort things out and collect the boys from Cambridge. And then they were back with us; and we made the most of our final weeks of Cyprus life, with the outdoor delights which we had come to relish so much. On 29 August we left by air for Athens, to spend three nights of brief holiday on Crete and one with the Verekers in Athens itself; by 2 September we were back in the UK and embarking on a hurried three weeks of preparations for Japan.

We were sad to leave. It had been an ideal posting in many ways. Climate and opportunities for doing what we most enjoyed could not have been bettered. The work had been exciting and demanding at first, and never boring. The Cypriots were very easy to live among, and we had made some good friends among the High Commission staff and those of the British bases. Probably another year or two would not have seen any dilution of these delights. But in a sense, from my point of view, it was time to move on. There was only one real political issue to cope with, although it was a complex and important one for British interests, and it was difficult to see how any real progress on it could be achieved in the short term. None of us relished the thought of having to move many thousand miles farther away from home, but at least Japan was a known quantity and we were sure that we would be welcomed there - the letters from the Ambassador and others had been enthusiastic. There would be advantages, we said to ourselves. Time would tell.

VIII - BACK TO JAPAN

Our return to Japan in September 1977 was less leisurely than the original journey in 1965, but in some ways more luxurious. Counsellor status in those days meant first-class air travel, with all the delights of champagne in proper glasses, a choice of meals served elegantly by obsequious stewards, even an upstairs bar with comfortable chairs. The polar flight route by way of Anchorage was now the norm, and we peered eagerly out of the windows at the Greenland icecap below and the sharp ridges of northern Canada. Even so it was a long flight, and we were tired when we touched down at Haneda airport, to be met by an Embassy member (Francis Connor, my deputy in Information section and a famously fluent Japanese linguist, whom we had not met before) and taken to our new home in the Embassy compound.

Number Three House, a title somehow redolent of British colonial days, was one of five substantial detached houses in the Embassy compound. Number One was enormous and occupied of course by the Ambassador. The other four were almost identical although their gardens were different (ours was the smallest and least attractive, partly because the Embassy tennis court had been built in it), with a very large drawing-room, an almost-as-large dining-room, a smaller study and a large (but inconvenient) kitchen in two parts on the ground floor, and five bedrooms and two bathrooms on the first floor. Each house, and indeed all the compound houses, had separate servants' quarters - ours I think were designed originally to house no fewer than ten Japanese servants, but surplus space was not a characteristic of traditional Japanese homes, and by 1977 the quarters seemed just about right for our two (married cook with a family, and housekeeper). The style was known as "concrete Queen Anne", with narrow balconies and retractable awnings over the terrace, and heavily earthquake-proofed as they had all been built in the aftermath of the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. Allocation of the houses varied a bit, but Number Two House generally went to the Minister or Ambassador's deputy (for a time there was an economic minister as well as a political minister, but that reverted to one by 1977), and three of the counsellors took the others, the precise allocation depending on family size and status. In addition to the five large houses there were two pairs of largish semi-detached houses, two smaller pairs for juniors, and a couple of blocks of apartments for Japanese locally-engaged staff.

Our house was pretty bleak when we arrived. Our predecessors had been heavy smokers, which didn't help. They had gone in for rather drab colour-schemes for curtains, chair-covers and so on, which we were fortunately able to have replaced quite soon - there was a Property Services Agency representative among the UK staff who controlled all that side of the administrative operation and was able to get supplies up from Hong Kong. As our heavy baggage was not to arrive by sea for several weeks, we were not able to do much in the early stages to personalise the house. But Harumi-san was an excellent cook and soon developed an easy working relationship with Julian, and Miyako-san was a devoted

housekeeper who had worked for generations of Embassy staff, so we were well looked after. And the compound itself was an oasis of relative quiet amid the roar of Tokyo traffic, with the tennis-court just behind our house and the swimming-pool just across the internal compound road in front - both of course open to all UK-based staff, but extremely convenient for us. We had three enormous ginkgo trees in the garden which overshadowed everything, but the small lawn was at least partly green, and we had lots of azaleas, a couple of fine camellia trees, a magnolia or two and various other good shrubs. The whole compound was a mass of blossom in the spring, and there was a renowned avenue of cherry-trees across the main road outside the compound beside the Imperial Palace moat. In fact the Embassy occupied a much-coveted site, leased to Britain by the Emperor Meiji a century earlier for a trivial sum - the sum was renegotiated from time to time, but remained very acceptable; occasionally the Japanese Government would try to prise us out with offers of an alternative site, so that our immensely valuable central acreage could be redeveloped, but the original arrangement could not be terminated without our agreement, which we never gave.

Also in the compound were the main Embassy offices. The original 1920s office was now large enough only to accommodate the political, defence, economic and administration sections, and the top management - the spacious days of the 1960s when the Ambassador could operate from his own house were now past. A new commercial block had been built between the old office and the Japanese staff quarters. My own information section was out-housed, on the fifth floor of a commercial building a few hundred yards away. It was a snug little empire - two other information officers and my PA forming the rest of the UK-based staff, and locally-engaged Japanese at all levels covering translation and newspaper monitoring, commercial publicity, and the mechanics of document production. The Japanese staff in particular knew their jobs extremely well and many of them had been many years in the Embassy. So I needed to find out quickly what my own role was.

It was a curious job. Information work does not vary much from country to country, and although I had never done it before, the task of producing publicity material in support of our trade-promotion effort, and of issuing the occasional press release or placing the occasional article in support of British government objectives more generally, was essentially routine. I needed to find out how it worked in the Tokyo context, and to introduce the odd change to make the machine run faster and more smoothly. There was an additional dimension of routine in the form of the daily press summary which we produced, essentially for the benefit of those members of the UK-based staff (including the Ambassador, Michael Wilford) who could not read the Japanese press, and to pick out key stories which might have eluded the breakfast-table attention of those who could. I came to enjoy doing this - it involved 20 minutes or so of concentrated discussion with my chief translator, who had got up very early to comb through all the major dailies and was ready to disgorge by 9 am, and then another 20 minutes or so dictating the results so that they could be circulated around the Embassy by mid-morning. This was challenging, but

a comprehensible task. The special and creative element of the job which warranted counsellor rank was separate from all of this. It was something of a historical survival, similar to the Oriental Secretary post occupied in British embassies in the remoter parts of the world decades earlier by British-born specialists in the country and its language, who remained at their post for many years and could offer advice based on a depth of knowledge which no three- or four-year postee from London could attain. The Tokyo Embassy had for many years until the late 1960s benefited from the wisdom of John Figgess as Information Counsellor (he had earlier been Defence Attaché), whose mastery of the Japanese language and encyclopaedic knowledge of much of Japanese culture rendered him at least as valuable as any Oriental Secretary. His successors had tried to emulate him by cultivating Japanese opinion-formers, not only in the media world but much more widely, and thereby developing an ability to comment wisely on a wide range of issues spanning the Embassy's work in general. Whether or not any had come close to achieving this goal is not for me to say - but I was now required to try.

It was not too hard at the beginning. My fluency in Japanese came back reasonably quickly, and I did the round of the major newspapers and TV channels. We entertained at home quite a bit - ten foreign editors from different media organs one week, a group of resident British and Japanese journalists the next, the occasional staff party, visitors from the UK including one who had been commissioned by the Illustrated London News to write an in-depth article about the Tokyo Embassy and whom I therefore had to shepherd around. I gave an occasional talk in Japanese, including one or two on the British economy about which I must have known singularly little. We joined the Foreign Press Club, conveniently located in central Tokyo and renowned for its excellent rack of lamb (lamb meat is not traditionally beloved by the Japanese and is therefore rarely to be found). Julian, as a senior wife unencumbered by resident family and already knowledgeable about the Japanese scene, was much in demand in the Embassy; as I wrote in one letter, she was "always ready to help, make a fourth at tennis, advise, bake, offer the house for wives' functions, and generally make up for the deficiencies of the uncooperative and the neurotic - of whom there are a surprising number". She even gave a two-hour interview to a Japanese women's magazine on the typical English breakfast, including practical demonstration.

Rediscovering the local scene was also a necessary part of our joint responsibilities. Tokyo was a little brasher and less attractive than we remembered it, with more glossy shops and fewer unsophisticated local streets. But expeditions outside the city were rewarding. In the first few weeks after arrival we joined the Defence Attaché and his wife, the Ryans, for a couple of walks in the accessible forested areas near Tokyo; on the first, after labouring uphill for three hours and gaining some 4000 feet, we found ourselves suddenly on a summit with a view - rolling tree-clad hills as far as the eye could see. We had forgotten how green Japan was, and how different from the bare brown countryside of Cyprus. We had also forgotten the crowds; we shared the summit with thirty or forty Japanese, all equipped with cameras clicking away, brewing up noodles and opening

cans of cold *sake*, and noisy with transistor radios. We made contact again with Andrew and Joke Jameson, friends from our first posting, and visited their country cottage at Onga, near the popular resort of Karuizawa north of Tokyo. But driving anywhere outside Tokyo at the weekends - we had acquired a second-hand Toyota, as no British-made car which we could afford would pass the stringent and rather protectionist Japanese tests - was horrific. On one occasion we left home at 7 am, hoping to beat the Saturday traffic, for a 120-km drive to the pottery village of Mashiko, where the renowned Shoji Hamada, teacher of Bernard Leach, still operated. It took us nearly four and a half hours to get there - and the no-overtaking zone lasted for the first 100 km. We had a good day, marvelled at the profusion of beautiful pots and their skilful production methods, bought a few things, enjoyed the scenes of rice-harvest and the autumn colours - and were pleased to take only four hours on the return journey by a better route.

There were pleasures to be had without leaving the city, of course. We took up Scottish country dancing, persuaded by the Jamesons, and became eventually quite proficient (at a much later date we even participated in a public demonstration). The St Andrew's Ball on 30 November was a splendid occasion, with a six-foot Canadian pipe-major leading in a small troop of diminutive Japanese pipers in kilts and sporrans past a row of impassive Japanese waiters and an Imperial Prince with a beard, to the strains of Scotland the Brave. We did our duty in hosting seventy or so junior members of the Japan-British Society for the annual New Year *mochi*-pounding party (*mochi* are singularly glutinous cakes created by prolonged pounding of a special kind of rice in huge wooden cauldrons). We took shorter trips, to view the plum-blossom in Kamakura in February and in Mito (traditional home of the Tokugawa Shoguns) in March. But before that there was the reuniting of the family for Christmas, with Justin and Giles flying in after a saga of flight delays and bearing a crop of amazingly good school reports from King's College School. We treated ourselves to a table-tennis table (there was just room for it in the hall of Number Three House), did our bit musically at the Embassy Christmas party where Justin and I performed respectively on flute and clarinet (Giles was doing well with his oboe but not quite up to public appearance) and we led the carol-singing, and were allowed a little spare time to be a family together at home. There was a Royal Navy frigate in port in Tokyo, and the boys enjoyed a conducted tour and marvelled at the electronic displays in the ops room. We even went off for a few days' skiing in Akakura, on the other side of Japan, rediscovering and improving on our Cyprus-learnt skills.

A meaty letter of 27 February 1978 gives insights into some of our activities. Amid the succession of banquets and receptions, there is a colourful account of a cultural evening spent with some senior people in NHK, the Japanese equivalent of the BBC: "some medieval Court music with very curious intervals, played on a variety of instruments from miniature organs blown with the mouth down to a tiny treble gong; half a Kabuki play, unutterably sad with a love-suicide and an inconsolable widow and various inconsolable parents, all lamenting in a minor key; a

brief but funny short Noh play with a Sancho Panza-like character, played by a 79-year-old, getting colourfully drunk and incapable; and a Kabuki lion-dance, the main female character (who turns into a lion) being played as usual by a man of over 70. Four cultural hours, semi-comprehensible, quite enjoyable in bits. Then we went on to an Italian restaurant ... We are now stinking of garlic, and shall be unapproachable for days. A pity, with the Japan-British Society annual gala cocktail party tomorrow - perhaps we can drown it in neat whisky." Separately, Julian had been for the first time to *bunraku*, the classical puppet theatre, and wrote lyrically of the construction of the puppets, their manipulation each by three puppeteers - the junior, who spends ten years working the legs and using fists to simulate female feet or knees; his senior, who has been promoted to work the left arm; and the master, who controls the head and right arm; "it is fascinating to watch the emotion of the puppeteers pouring into the doll, behind an inscrutable face, and to watch the infinitesimal change of angle of the inclination of the head to achieve a subtle shift of tenderness or longing".

All of that was work of a kind - getting to know individuals and becoming more deeply immersed in the national culture. But the same letter gives the first hint of a change on the way. "The business of cultivating journalists and other opinion-formers ... is agreed to be worth doing but probably not for ever ... slightly detached life as an observer and occasional commentator, almost like a sabbatical year with no requirement to write any theses ... prospect of moving over to do political work in due course increasing in probability." The catalyst was a London-imposed requirement on the ten largest British Embassies around the world, of which Tokyo was one, to cut ten per cent off their manpower budgets. I was given the task of working out how we should do this. Tables of figures giving the overall costs of maintaining UK-based staff at different ranks, in the expensive city of Tokyo, were provided. Some sort of judgment on the relative value of each individual's contribution to the Embassy's objectives was required. I laboured conscientiously, and I hope objectively, at all this. But it was clear pretty soon that of the FCO-funded senior staff I was myself the most expendable, as a counsellor whose contribution to the Embassy's work could well be seen as something of a luxury. Cutting out me and my PA, and leaving only two UK-based staff in information section - the senior could be slightly upgraded to a junior first secretary - would, with one or two small changes elsewhere among the staff, achieve the necessary 10% cut. Moreover an external review of the diplomatic service by the Central Policy Review Staff in London had recommended that information work abroad be given a lower priority. By happy coincidence from my own point of view, Nick Spreckley, the Head of Chancery and also an FCO counsellor, could credibly leave around the end of 1978, and I was obviously qualified to move across to replace him. It all seemed to work out very neatly.

And indeed that was what happened. The die was cast in April, with the date for my moving across fluctuating over the ensuing months but eventually being set at late October. The intervening period was busy enough, even professionally. My language skills in particular were taxed

over the summer, when Francis Connor had left and I was holding the fort until the new down-sized information section was in being. On one occasion I even had to interpret at a formal Ministerial press conference, oddly enough for Roy Mason, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, for whom I would have been working had I gone for the Private Secretary job in 76/77. Attendance at the National Newspaper Convention in Sendai, some hours' journey north of Tokyo, in early October was my swansong. It was a fascinating occasion, mingling with the well-informed and cynical observers of the national and international scene that pressmen are the world over. I wrote afterwards of my increasing sense of Japanese self-confidence in their country's achievements, no longer needing to pretend that they had much to learn from other countries. Ten years earlier they would exhibit an apparently genuine humility towards, say, the British, on the grounds that we had a more stable and prosperous society and less anxiety about living conditions or our place in the world. That had changed, as many in the Embassy had observed. The Japanese were still polite, but conscious of what was beginning to be described as the "Japan as Number One" feeling - the title of a popular book of that time. The 80s would be the decade of Japanese arrogance.

During the final Information-Counsellor months there was a bewildering variety of miscellaneous tasks, and dinners and receptions to give and to attend. There was a visit by Princess Margaret, with a high degree of press interest which it was my task to control (I won a signed photograph for my trouble). There was a constant flow of requests from the British and Japanese press, for facilities of various kinds. There were Japanese language examinations to supervise (I had re-acquired this task, familiar from the earlier posting in the 60s), and my own re-qualification at Advanced level, when I recall floundering over a particularly technical economic passage in the interpretation test, rather sneakily chosen by the Economic Counsellor who was a better linguist than me - kindly, they let me squeak through. There was a visit by King's College Choir from Cambridge in August, in which we were more deeply involved than we might have been because Justin and Giles of course knew the treble element from school; we were included in all the events, and Julian was able to help the school matron, travelling with the party, in a number of small domestic ways. They were all good company, and the concerts were tremendous, including a more informal farewell occasion when the choral scholars - many of them better known as the Kings Singers, then in the early days of that famous group - ran riot with close-harmony renderings of modern songs.

One duty occasion stands out. We were chosen to join the Ambassador and Lady Wilford in an excursion to view traditional cormorant-fishing in Gifu near Kyoto, one of the annual excitements for the Diplomatic Corps. We viewed the proceedings from large flat-bottomed boats, propelled by traditionally-clad oarsmen at bow and stern. "At dusk the fishing-boats appeared, with braziers swinging from hooks over the bows, filled with brightly-burning pine logs to dazzle the fish. The cormorants swim in formation on both sides of each boat, each attached by a cord to the master-fisherman, an expert in a traditional straw skirt and a head-

kerchief who manipulates a dozen or so birds with consummate skill. As each bird fills its gullet with fish it is pulled in to the boat and its gullet emptied into baskets; only the smallest fish can pass directly down into its stomach. The splashing of the cormorants, all eager and competitive with their necks straining forward to the fray, and the hollow sound of the fishermen's knocking on the side of the boats to encourage their birds, and the showers of sparks from the braziers driven by the wind, make for an unforgettable scene."

There was time too for a little private travel. In early July, before the boys joined us for the summer, we took four days off for a trip to Hokkaido, Japan's northern main island. Wild flowers were the highlight - roadsides ablaze with orange lilies, an iris-festival with literally millions of blooms, orchids, wild roses, a rare fritillary-like black lily "smelling of old cheese"; and there were sea-eagles, and red-crested cranes. But it was good too to relax in a different countryside, more rolling and less forested, with strangely Scandinavian coastal lagoons, and misty scenes of fishwives manipulating great fronds of (presumably edible) seaweed on the shingle-beds. We glimpsed the Russian-held southernmost Kurile islands which Japan claims, and worked our way through an enormous hairy crab each for dinner in our first local inn, attacking it as far as I recall with a pair of giant scissors. In the middle of August, with the boys, we were given a weekend's use of the Ambassador's villa by Lake Chuzenji, high in the mountains near Nikko north of Tokyo, a rare treat; and at the end of the month, with Prescott Winter from California who like us was a member of the church choir, we climbed Mount Fuji for the second time (the boys' first), sleeping overnight at the eighth station and finding the mountain relatively deserted because the climbing season had officially ended a couple of days earlier and the Japanese are an orderly people. This time we really did see sunrise from the summit at 3776 metres, actually not that different from sunrise seen from an aeroplane given the amount of cloud-cover below us. Uncharacteristically, we even collected a stray dog on the summit (surely this must have been Prescott Winter's influence) and brought it back down with us, eventually disposing of it in Tokyo to some reputable quarter or other.

The last few days of October were a hectic transition period, with everything being flung at us - my diary included an Embassy tennis tournament match, an Imperial garden party, Teng Hsiao-Ping's visit (this was before the days when we all learned to spell him Deng Xiao-ping) and press conference, farewell and welcome parties various, the first meeting with my future colleagues in charge of political work in the serious Western embassies, representing the Ambassador at United Nations Day and a couple of national day parties, Scottish dancing, and a Cambridge and Oxford society lunch. On 1 November we met Mike Dixon, the new head of information section at first secretary level, at Narita (now Tokyo's main international airport, seventy kilometres from the city centre). Nick Spreckley had left some weeks earlier, and so now had the first secretary who was running Chancery until I was able to move over. At last we had reached that stage. After briefing Mike Dixon - an old Tokyo hand and Japanese speaker who was familiar enough with the general scene - I

could shed the day-to-day responsibilities of information work. It had been interesting enough, certainly challenging at times, mildly educational in many ways. But it had not turned me into an extrovert, and I was grateful to be back in a familiar saddle as Head of Chancery.

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The "H of C Tokyo" job was much more substantial than the Nicosia equivalent. There were several other Counsellors - economic, commercial, administration, scientific, even an Atomic Energy counsellor handling our highly important commercial relationship with the Japanese in that area, and a Financial Counsellor seconded from the Bank of England to report on financial questions. There were naval, military and air force attachés at colonel level in the defence section. The information section under its first-secretary head continued to report to me. There was of course the consular section, under a highly-experienced first secretary. And there was my own political section. In one way or another I was responsible for co-ordinating the activities of all these, under the Ambassador and his deputy the Minister, and generally for looking after staff welfare. And the staff side alone was a significant responsibility for us both; I cannot recall the precise numbers of UK-based staff, but the Christmas lunch which Julian hosted for the Diplomatic Service wives' association (in effect all UK-based wives, whether or not from the FCO as parent department, plus single girls) worked out at a total of 48.

The meat of the job was political work - reporting on Japanese internal politics and social questions, the job I had done in the 1960s; Japanese foreign policy, including representations to the Japanese government on matters of urgent concern; and any other general question about Japan, or indeed the servicing of any visiting group from the UK, which did not fall obviously to another section of the Embassy. Even some which did, such as the mass of questions surrounding civil nuclear energy, tended to come at least partly within my area of concern. Among the major subjects which crossed my desk in the first few months were relations with China and with Russia, Vietnam including the Chinese invasion at that period, Iran, and Rhodesia on the foreign policy side; and the raft of issues surrounding the arrival of a new Japanese Prime Minister and consequent cabinet reshuffle on the internal side. There was also a mass of staff and administration questions, including accommodation issues, where the Administration Counsellor would generally need to consult me; and, as in Cyprus, we were due to receive a visit from the FCO Inspectors in the spring of 1979, which necessitated a good deal of advance preparation.

It helped that I was now well back into the Japanese scene, and had some Cyprus Head-of-Chancery experience to draw on. But Japan was very different from Cyprus. There was no single dominating political issue, but a bewildering multiplicity of current problems. On the plus side, there were plenty of others to work with who could share the burden - not only within the Embassy, where there was a great deal of talent at all levels and indeed some excellent senior Japanese staff with a great depth of

knowledge; but also through the regular informal consultation between the political counsellors of the US, French, German, Italian and British Embassies, where there was a considerable overlap of interests. The Americans were the only other embassy in the Western grouping which had a substantial Japanese-language programme producing diplomatic officers who came back again and again on Tokyo postings, and we and they probably took most interest in the detail of the internal scene. But the exchanges of opinion between all of us were extremely valuable on a wide range of subjects. There were similar regular discussions among the political counsellors of all European Community embassies, including the European Commission office in Tokyo - and these too were useful. (The Commission expert, an Italian, was also a fluent Japanese speaker and rather less fluent in English and French, so some of us would tend to talk together in Japanese.)

The representation side of the job was as busy as ever. I still needed to maintain my contacts with the press world, and Julian was still taking requests to give interviews or participate in discussion groups. But the range of invitations, both received and issued, expanded significantly. Interpreting for the Ambassador embraced his own dinner-parties - I recall one for a visiting TUC delegation led by the great Len Murray, to whom Michael Wilford was noticeably polite, recognising where power lay in the UK at that time - and his speeches at some major external events. We represented the Embassy as spectators, and were very happy to do so, at an England-Japan Rugby match, and on the last day of a *sumo* wrestling tournament (we had become addicts of this curious sport on television). During one week we gave a wedding reception for one of the Chancery PAs, and a dinner for a visiting delegation from the Gilbert Islands in the Pacific; and attended receptions (separately) with Princess Chichibu and with Archbishop Michael Ramsey. And there was a host of staff parties to give - mainly farewells and welcomes. It helped that the house had been substantially redecorated inside during 1978, and with the new soft furnishings now looked much more attractive.

There were slacker times too. We did our duty at Christmas, entertaining three junior Embassy singletons (together with our US friends the Winters) to Christmas Day lunch, and organising a scratch football team of thirty or so, between the ages of 8 and 58, to take on the Embassy team proper on Boxing Day (Giles's footballing skills were much applauded), then regaling them all with an enormous ham and mince pies, mulled wine and beer, back in the house. But we also had family time, to enjoy Justin's new train set, and take a few days off to ski at Akakura. At Easter we played a good deal of tennis with the boys, who were becoming uncomfortably good at the game, and spent a little time at the Jamesons' country house at Onga in which we had now formally taken a share. Onga was becoming a very welcome retreat from the claustrophobic strains of Tokyo, which were beginning to weigh on us both by 1979, and we needed the relative quiet and the green atmosphere and bird-song. The Easter holiday was important, because Justin needed to collect himself and prepare for the Eton scholarship examination in May, having been identified by KCS at Cambridge as a strong candidate. (They were right -

he came high enough up the list to be certain of a place in College probably in January of 1980, which meant a term in an Oppidan house from September 1979.)

Conveniently given Justin's change of school, the summer of 1979 was our date for mid-tour leave in the UK, eagerly anticipated. We would be allowed to take our full entitlement of three months as there was sufficient cover in the Embassy. But there was one major hurdle to surmount first, in the shape of the Tokyo Summit at the end of June. This was the G7 Economic Summit, alternating annually between the capitals of the seven participants, and attended by Heads of Government (Presidents, in the case of the US and France); so we would have either James Callaghan, incumbent at the beginning of 1979, or Margaret Thatcher if the Conservatives won the May election. The Japanese, like any host country, wanted everything to go perfectly. From well before the event they had kept in close touch with the six embassies concerned, and I was the agreed local contact point for the UK. As the time drew closer the intensity of the meetings increased, and experts started coming out from capitals - security, conference administration, eventually the very senior officials known as "Sherpas" who guide the politicians to the summit itself. By 17 June I was writing in a letter home "we are surrounded by zealous Japanese policemen who fear some anti-Summit demonstration against one of the participating powers. Water-cannon at the back gate, movable steel barriers at the front, youths with riot shields and heavy sticks and a bored expression ... Efficient Japanese officials ... want most of the answers yesterday. The police press us for decisions on the smallest details and deploy literally tens of thousands of extra policemen. The Foreign Ministry people are much gentler in their approach ..." I remember spending much time on the unanswerable question whether our PM would want to walk from point A to point B, or be driven; as this was before the election, it seemed to me to depend not only on the mood of the moment, but also, rather crucially, on whether it was J Callaghan or M Thatcher. It was only at a late stage that we even got a decision whether the PM would stay in the top hotel which had been assigned to delegations, or with the Ambassador. In the end all was resolved (she went to a hotel, much more conveniently), Tokyo was full of Presidential limousines and flags and impossibly tight security for a couple of days, and I got my signed photograph of Margaret Thatcher as a reward when she came to greet those concerned in the Embassy afterwards.

Julian flew back to the UK on 18 June, to cover the boys' half term and to be around for slightly more of Justin's last days at King's College School. I was able to extricate myself on 30 June, the day after the Summit finished, through the kindness of others who helped to pick up the pieces. There was even another wedding reception to be given in our house that day, an unexpected complication fixed only after I had booked my flight, but somebody else acted as host. On 1 July I was back in the UK and restored to the bosom of my family. We embarked on a busy but sybaritic programme of family visits, school farewell events, preparations for Justin's move to RD Haddon's house at Eton for the Michaelmas "half",

and simple enjoyment of space and quiet and long rolling views of fields and moorland. For three months Tokyo seemed a world away.

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We returned in late October to be greeted by a major typhoon, the most intense to hit Tokyo since the night when Julian and Justin returned from hospital after his birth 13 years earlier. Fortunately the re-introduction to Embassy work was not so violent, though there was plenty going on - developments over Rhodesia to explain to the Japanese, commercial and parliamentary delegations to brief, a pastoral visit by the Head of Far Eastern Department in the FCO touring his parish, a pleasant round of strategic talks with the Japanese on international defence and security issues led on our side by two charming and erudite visitors from the FCO Planning Staff. Julian similarly was thrust into professional activity in the shape of meetings and outings with the Japan-British Ladies' Group (the Elizabeth-Kai, a title with strong resonance for any former Tokyo-based expatriate). There were eminent political visitors from London too. In a letter of 16 November I wrote "Lunch with George Brown yesterday, in splendid form and telling stories about Harold Macmillan, *chez* the Ambassador. I had to try to interpret, in the usual fashion while stuffing mouthfuls of quail down myself, between him and a taciturn Japanese ex-Prime Minister (Mr Miki). G-B jokes don't go well into Japanese, and it was difficult to judge whether the occasional fleeting smile which illuminated the Miki features represented a linguistic triumph or merely oriental courtesy. Dinner in the same setting with Denis Healey as guest on Monday, when I hope that somebody else will take the linguistic strain."

Christmas gave us a bit of a break. Three months of Eton had made an amazing difference to Justin - he was inches taller, with a bass voice and long flowing curls, and had won glowing reports from his teachers and scored extraordinarily well in end-of-half examinations. Giles too was in good form despite an uncomfortable flight three days earlier and appalling traffic jams on the way back to Tokyo from Narita airport - four and a half hours to cover the 70 kilometres. We did all the usual things, including the now-traditional Boxing Day football match and mass buffet lunch in Number Three House afterwards, and four days of excellent skiing. Visits to the mountains for a few days of family skiing were becoming a regular feature, and we did it again the following Easter, by which time both boys were becoming quite stylish (one of the main hazards was the clusters of Japanese learners dotted here and there around the slopes, but I suppose it all helped to develop our slalom skills). But they were more clearly superior at least to their Tokyo Embassy contemporaries in tennis, and at Easter the tennis coach laid on by the Tokyo English boarding-school club was beginning to murmur to Julian, *à propos* of Giles, "you know, there's a lot of money in tennis" and "see that he plays in lots of tournaments so that he's spotted for county teams".

The third year of any four-year posting is generally regarded as the time when one is most useful - well into the swing of things, but not yet seriously starting to be distracted by speculation about the next job.

Certainly I was finding during this spell that my understanding of the Japanese approach, and the dialogue with my various interlocutors, were improving significantly. It was a time not only of the increasing Japanese self-confidence which I had noted earlier, but also of increasing readiness to play a positive role internationally. There was still a long way to go. But on matters such as sanctions against Iran, European initiatives on oil prices, and the difficult situation in Afghanistan - all perennial issues, as subsequent years have shown - we detected a new and marked interest and readiness to cooperate on the part of the Foreign Ministry at least. It helped that I was able to draw on the wisdom of Japanese political commentators in analysing these trends, and indeed in attempting to comprehend the cross-currents of Japanese internal politics. Although many of them could operate well in English, one undeniably got more out of a dialogue if it was conducted in Japanese. Of those experts whom I came to know well, one, Kei Wakaizumi, invited me to join a select group of Japanese commentators and foreigners with fluent Japanese which met for occasional discussion at a pretty sophisticated level. There were not many foreigners present - a US Embassy expert, certainly, and the New Zealand Ambassador who spoke the most elegant Japanese - and we felt very privileged to be there, as well as gaining some useful insights.

This growing expertise would be severely taxed in the remainder of my Tokyo time. Change at the top of the Embassy was imminent. Sydney Giffard was replaced as Minister by John Whitehead, who arrived at the beginning of June 1980 after a gap when I was naturally rather busier; we knew both well from the 60s, but the Whiteheads had children exactly the same age as Justin and Giles (plus two extras), and would be next-door neighbours in the compound, so we were happy to welcome them. In early October Michael Wilford left Tokyo on retirement and was succeeded as Ambassador by Hugh Cortazzi, whom again we had known when he was Head of Chancery in the 60s. It was all very incestuous. - Change is always a little unsettling, and the arrival of a Japan expert at the top of the Embassy, which could have meant that his staff had a little less to do, had the contrary effect that we were all soon rushed off our feet answering questions which he knew only too well how to ask. The management of the Embassy and its reporting soon evolved into a kind of Cortazzi/Whitehead/Elliott triumvirate. Ideas, suggestions and requests came explosively from the top, were refined into practical proposals in discussion between the three of us, and generally I then went away to produce the first draft of a paper. Sometimes the first draft came from the Ambassador himself, which did not necessarily mean less work for me. My recollection is that thirteen major papers on a wide range of subjects emerged in this way over the first three months of the Cortazzi regime. It was all a bit wearing - but challenging, and fun in its way.

There were other strains. One major one in the early autumn, which bore especially on Julian, was the need for structural work in the bigger compound houses which required us to move out for several weeks into Number Nine House, smaller and temporarily unoccupied. The process of packing up and storing the majority of the Government's and our property from Number Three, and ferrying the rest by hand along the road to

Number Nine, was hair-raising. Camping in our temporary abode was not always easy, and sometimes we even had to entertain there. One occasion still vivid in our recollection was the visit of the top FCO personnel and administration man, the Chief Clerk in person, to whom we offered supper - I had a lot of talking to get through with him and wasn't able to do much to assist on the domestic side; we had no other help at the time, and the house was a bit cramped and full of too many things, not all ours; and even Julian's equanimity cracked slightly at one point. But the conversation went well despite this, and may have had an effect on my personal future.

Before all this hit us, however, we had a happy family summer. The holidays began with a brief trip to Hokkaido in early July with Justin (Giles was still at school) for some mountain-walking in the beautiful volcanic Asahi-dake area, with occasional snowfields and jagged crests, alpine flowers and odorous sulphur vents, steep gorges and magnificent waterfalls. When the family was complete, Justin and Giles quickly made friends with their contemporaries in the Whitehead and Elston families - Chris Elston, from the Bank of England, was the current Financial Counsellor - and they did a lot of things together, making arrangements among each other by telephone and often going off on bicycles (there were cycle lanes which made coping with Tokyo traffic a little easier). There was a Royal Navy visit again, and a ship for the boys to clamber over. There was tennis, and swimming, and the odd local walk in the cooler wooded areas outside the city; there was mah jong and table tennis. The same group re-assembled during the Christmas holidays, joining us for part of Christmas Day and performing stoutly at the traditional Boxing Day football match, Giles indeed scoring a much-applauded goal - the relaxed atmosphere usefully relieved some of the work-related tensions which had been beginning to build up in the Embassy over the autumn season.

The New Year of 1981, for us, signified that we might be only a few months away from leaving Tokyo. Word indeed came in January that I was to take over as Head of Far Eastern Department (FED) in the FCO towards the end of the year. This suited us well. We had hoped for a home posting, to see both boys through some years at least of their secondary schooling from rather closer at hand than Tokyo, and to be able to spend time with our own parents. As one rises up the diplomatic pyramid, though, there are relatively fewer jobs at home, and nobody can be certain of getting one at all. FED, covering China, Japan, Korea and Mongolia, was an attractive job, and its head had usually been a China specialist, so it was nice to win one back for the Japanologists.

There were still many months of Tokyo intensity to survive. The Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington, came for bilateral talks in April (postponed from the previous year, I think by the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war), which meant accommodating a couple of senior officials from his large entourage as well as a good deal of involvement in the professional and social aspects of the visit. It all went extremely well, Lord Carrington in particular proving to be both charming and well-briefed, finding time to

talk to me about my new job in FED and even to exchange a few words with Justin (when in our house for a press conference) about Eton, of which he was a Fellow. Our social calendar included no fewer than three visiting British football teams to entertain - Middlesbrough, Nottingham Forest and Everton - on different occasions during 1980-81 for international club tournaments set up by the Japanese. (Julian was in her element with Middlesbrough, greeting them on our doorstep with the revelation that she knew the city well and had been brought up in County Durham - "hey, lads, here's a girl from Sedgfield!"; but even Everton found us unexpectedly un-toffee-nosed as British diplomats, and by the end of a very bibulous reception one of their stars was draping club ties round Julian's neck and inviting her drunkenly to be "one of the lads"). More demandingly, Julian had to do a year as local chairman of the wives' association (DSWA) and organise the annual spring fete and bazaar - during the Easter school holidays, so Justin and Giles were able to man a stall, and even I was required to officiate at the microphone ("a function which gives one a curious sense of power combined with irresponsibility").

Our last months were however punctuated by familiarisation trips out of Japan. As head of FED I would need to know something at least about China and Korea from the start, and they were much easier to reach from Tokyo. The Office even agreed that Julian could come with me, and we had nearly a week in each country in May. John Field, an old Tokyo hand and friend, was Counsellor in Seoul, and we started there, with a couple of days of weekend tourism and official calls for the rest of the time. Korea was following the high-growth development road which Japan had pioneered, and was already a force to be reckoned with in steel and shipbuilding, though elsewhere still relying to quite an extent on imported technology and machinery. A large elite of highly efficient administrators, many with doctorates from US universities, ran the country - politicians and the senior military, as well as the civil service and business. They seemed more approachable and open than their Japanese counterparts, physically often larger, less disciplined. No doubt there was a darker side, but we were impressed by what we saw. The North Korean threat was very real in their minds, with the border only 40 miles from Seoul; we visited Panmunjom, an eerie place divided by a meticulously-observed straight line extending even across the conference table where the two sides met under UN auspices, and were taken down a tunnel dug through solid rock by North Korean would-be infiltrators but discovered in time. Elsewhere, we saw oxen pulling ploughs and carts, women in traditional long sweeping skirts, gaudily-repainted temples set among cedar-trees and populated by shaven-headed monks and artisans in their workshops; we slept on the oiled-paper floor of a traditional Korean inn, and ate a variety of local dishes distinguished by masses of garlic but delicious beef.

If Korea was a decade or two behind Japan, China seemed a century back. Peking was stiflingly hot, the traffic mostly of bicycles, the people often in Mao suits or uniforms but also in more conventional shirts and blouses, the official buildings heavy and rather decrepit, the foodstuffs on display in the street-markets not very appetising (though we ate superbly when officially entertained). Bureaucratic restrictions seemed to dominate life

for Embassy staff, and travel planning was clearly a nightmare. But the Forbidden City was magnificent - enormous open courtyards, and gold roofs, vermilion walls, marble balustrades, stretching as far as the eye could see. We found it to be somehow imposed, heavily and imperiously, on its surroundings rather than blending with them through the use of natural materials and forms like Japanese architecture. After a couple of days of calls and visits we flew to Wuhan on the Yangtse, for another perspective: a steelworks, partly grim and early-Industrial-Revolution, partly very modern with German and Japanese machinery; Dickensian streets, with a throng of humanity carrying battered goods on shoulder-poles or squatting by market-stalls or street libraries; out in the countryside (on the way to a people's commune) donkey-carts, water-buffaloes, peasants throwing sheaves of corn onto the metalled road for vehicles to drive over and separate grain from chaff. Our China Travel Service guide, the daughter of an army officer and evidently privileged, told us much about China but asked us still more about life in the West. We escaped from her in the evening and found an open-air theatre, selling tickets for a few pennies to a Chinese opera performance, all melodrama, brilliantly-colourful costumes, haunting music played on primitive-looking instruments, masses of audience participation. In Shanghai for the last two days we were suddenly in the twentieth century, with orderly traffic including even a few private cars, well-stocked shops, massive buildings along the Bund from the days of the European concessions, docks and ocean-going ships. A beautiful traditional garden in the middle of the old town was full of bustle - vistas through cunningly-shaped doorways, undulating tiled walls like dragons, strings of tiny colourfully-dressed children. In the streets we were often surrounded by groups of inquisitive Chinese for whom an evident foreigner was still a rarity.

Hong Kong merited a separate visit, and this I did alone in July, while Julian was in the UK. My host was David Wilson, Political Adviser but due shortly to return to the FCO to head another department. He gave me a whirlwind tour, meeting senior British and Hong Kong Chinese officials, seeing the tiny territory from a bubble-shaped helicopter, attending social functions to hear the gossip. Much of it already was of 1997, the date when the New Territories had to be handed back to China under our treaty obligations, raising fundamental questions about the future of the remaining British possessions - the Island and Kowloon. But for the moment the curious Hong Kong institutions of government, Exco and Legco, and the British Governor in all his pomp, survived. David Wilson, who himself would later become Governor, was the ideal person to explain the intricacies of the system. He was also immensely energetic, and led me at an unbelievably swift pace on one of his walking routes around the Peak when we had a spare few hours; no mean performer as a mountaineer, he had just returned from a serious climb on Mt Kongur in Western China, where the British party included Chris Bonington and a number of other famous names (they were all being entertained by the Wilsons when I arrived). After another social occasion the two of us returned late to the Political Adviser's then official residence on the Peak, due shortly to be demolished and not in the best of repair, only to find that the door to my bedroom had somehow locked itself as it apparently

tended to do. Having imbibed rather too well during the evening to retain much subtlety of approach, and in view of the impending demolition of the building, we decided to break the door down. I was just massaging my sore shoulder rather ruefully after the first charge, when David's wife Natasha returned and suggested gently that it might be simpler to go round by the veranda and enter by the unlocked door there.

Julian was in the UK during June and July to see Giles out of King's College School at the end of his time there and make some of the preparations for his transfer to Eton. Giles too had taken the scholarship examination, and had performed well but not quite well enough to enter College with a scholarship. His place in the school was assured, though, and he would be going to Jeremy Nichols's house (JGLN). During the previous year we had seen a good deal of an Eton master spending some sabbatical months in Japan, Colin Cook (and his wife Niddy); they had been with us for Christmas 1980, and we had taken the opportunity of seeking their views on a suitable housemaster for us to approach about Giles. Jeremy Nichols sounded just right, with a good blend of firmness and sympathy, and the strong interest in and understanding of games which was another important element on our shopping list. There was a lot to do with end-of-term functions at both schools - Justin soaring triumphantly through the examinations at the end of his second Eton year to end up joint top of the "election". At the end of July the family was reunited in Tokyo for the final few weeks, and we left Japan on 5 September 1981.

Our emotions in 1981 were a little different from those of 1969. The beauty of Japanese art and architecture, the charm and simplicity of traditional Japanese artefacts, still meant as much to us as ever. I had spent many office hours analysing and attempting to describe the philosophy behind Japanese achievements - the deeply-ingrained competitiveness, the almost total commitment to one's own clan which translated into company or group loyalty, the propensity to accuracy and diligence which enabled high standards and volumes of production. There were other more technical areas, for example in banking and finance, or in applied science, where the Japanese model was certainly highly successful at that time although I personally was not qualified to offer any analysis. It was no part of the Embassy's mission to urge any British institution to copy these examples, some of which anyway might well not apply in a different context - but, like any Embassy steeped in as powerful a local culture as that of Japan, we may sometimes have come across as advocates for our hosts. In fact I think we personally had become more objective, with longer exposure to the Japanese phenomenon. We understood more both of the reasons for success and of the aspects of Japanese success which we did not wish to copy. We really needed to get away, now, not only because it had all been fairly tiring. And maybe we had had enough of Japan, close to, for a lifetime - we had learned our essential, rather provincial, Britishness.

IX - FAR EASTERN DEPARTMENT

We were delighted to be back in Britain in September 1981. No precise term had been set for my tenure of the Far Eastern Department job, but it would be four or five years at least before I could even start to think of promotion beyond Counsellor grade, and Heads of Department tended to stay put for quite a while. It was nearly seven years since I had last served in London and since we had lived in our own house. At last we would see some of the detail of the boys' time at school and be able to visit our own parents with normal regularity.

The first three weeks or so after arrival were busy. We delivered both boys together to Eton for the first time (Elliott major and Elliott minor, an oddly old-fashioned description). We rushed off then for a quick week's walking in Austria at the end of the summer season there, a sudden decision inspired by the sense of relief in escaping from metropolitan Tokyo combined with my happy memories of childhood holidays with Karin and Bill. We re-inhabited 6 Ridgway Place in Wimbledon, not too dilapidated after seven years of tenants - though the boys found it initially a bit cramped after Number Three House in Tokyo ("where are we going to put a table-tennis table?"). But then, at the beginning of October, it was back to an office routine for me, and blessed freedom from diplomatic demands for Julian.

Oddly enough, Far Eastern Department (FED) had been my first experience of the Foreign Office, back in my Oxford days when I put my name down for a few days' visit by a group of undergraduates to the FO - what one might now call "work experience" - and was allocated to FED to sit at the elbow of one of the China desk officers and see how it all worked. It is very much what one expects of a Foreign Office department, handling a defined and easily-identifiable part of the world. To the outside world the Far East is often taken to include most of Asia from India eastwards, certainly countries such as Thailand and Vietnam, and my title as Head of FED therefore sounded rather grander than it really was. But China, Japan and Korea gave one plenty to think about. Moreover, unlike Western Europe or North America, it was an area on which at that time there were relatively few experts in the Office, and where the currents of world politics and economics had a sufficiently special flavour for the FED opinion to be worth listening to. My own knowledge of course was confined to Japan, but the Assistant Head of the Department was a China specialist, and there was always another China expert at first secretary level running the China desk. Korean specialists were rare creatures, and Mongolian specialists almost non-existent, but we had good Embassy reporting to rely on, and at least very few people could call our bluff.

During my FED years one issue came to dominate all else in Britain's relations with the Far East - the future of Hong Kong. The FCO became involved in crucial and highly detailed negotiations with the Chinese Government, in which the powerful Hong Kong administration - not least the Governor himself - played a very major part. Profound knowledge both of China and the Chinese mentality, and of Hong Kong, was required.

Fortunately for me (and, frankly, for British interests) the responsibility for servicing these negotiations did not fall to FED. There was a separate Hong Kong Department (HKD), headed by one serious China specialist and containing others. The Assistant Under-Secretary (AUS) for Asia who supervised FED, HKD and other departments was also an eminent Sinologue. And when the two sides got down to serious business, still some way into the future as we saw it in 1981, Percy Cradock had retired as Ambassador in Peking and took charge at the top - advising the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary who were much involved throughout. None of this crossed my desk in any active sense, although it profoundly affected UK-China relations for much of my time there.

But there was much else going on. One of the odd conventions about Embassy correspondence with the FCO, at that time at least when much of it came in typescript and by diplomatic bag, was that Heads of Mission tended to address themselves to Heads of Department, even though they were usually much senior to them and could naturally go in at a higher level when appropriate. Correspondence from more junior Embassy staff would generally be addressed to the Assistant or to the desk officer. Embassies also correspond directly with other Whitehall departments and other parts of the FCO, as well as with private individuals in the UK (not to mention their local correspondence in the country where they are located); and there was the separate telegram traffic - all of this in the days before email - not normally addressed to any named individual but widely distributed in the FCO and Whitehall. But a fairly high proportion of the important correspondence, on a wide range of subjects, from the four Embassies in the FED region would come to me. There were also in London a wide range of organisations either dealing specifically with FED countries on a bilateral basis, or having a professional or commercial interest in the region. And there were the London Embassies of our four countries, three of them large and very active. The diary soon filled up with out-of-office engagements.

The commercial/trade side accounted for a good number of them. Although the Department of Trade was directly responsible for trade policy, businessmen also wanted a broader view of local conditions including the political side, for which the FCO was the natural repository of knowledge in London. My diary for those years was peppered with entries for the Sino-British Trade Council, the Japan Trade Advisory Group, the Japan Chamber of Commerce, and so on; and there was a constant stream of lunch invitations from the City, both institutions with a long history of activity in the Far East (Jardine Matheson, Swires, Dodwells) and others with a world-wide reach (Barclays, Flemings, Hambros, BP, Plessey, Cable and Wireless). I hope the issuers of these invitations felt they got some value from my responses, as even what I had to say about Japan would have been pretty general, and on China and Korea there would at first have been a large admixture of bluff. But from my point of view it was fascinating, giving something of an insight into the preoccupations and indeed the blind spots of the real world outside government.

Another very enjoyable strand of the job was cultural. During my FED years there were major exhibitions in London from China, Japan and Korea, all involving a great deal of preparatory work mostly done by others, but all happily including invitations to private views and other related events for the Head of FED. There were London-based institutions with great expertise on Chinese and Japanese culture in particular - the Great Britain-China Centre, the Japan Association, and others. The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London University appears in the diary from time to time, partly because I retained an interest in the administration of Japanese language studies for the Tokyo Embassy and this developed into an interest in the teaching of oriental languages in the UK generally. (Oddly, at a time when businessmen were beginning to appreciate the value of having fluent speakers of the local language among their British staff, the study of languages at British universities was steadily declining - Korean in particular, despite the obvious commercial potential of the Korean market, was scarcely taught at all.) Chinese scientific achievement was beginning to attract attention, and on at least a couple of occasions I was included in events at the Royal Society for particularly eminent visitors.

Inevitably it was the Japan dimension in all of this which came to involve me most deeply. As well as our own Embassy language students receiving their first year of tuition in the UK before going on to the Embassy language school in Kamakura, there was a flourishing scheme for sending young volunteers to Japan for a year or so to teach English and in the process to pick up some conversational Japanese, after which they became distinctly more interesting to prospective employers in the UK - this was a private venture, but the FCO had a natural interest. The Japan Society of London, matching the Japan-British Society in Tokyo, soon had me on its council. I had a good deal to do with the UK-Japan Parliamentary Group, controlled by Julian Ridsdale. Another energetic Conservative MP, Richard Needham, was one of the main moving spirits behind a new private body which became known as the Japan-British 2000 Group, including politicians, academics and many others, with a general remit to develop bilateral contacts and hold discussions across a wide range of disciplines, and I was much involved with this. The BBC's Japanese Service was among my professional interests, not least because of the FCO's responsibility for funding the BBC's international outreach - although the most successful of all the BBC's activities in the FED region, by far, was the English-language teaching series sold to the Chinese, and its TV presenter was a nationally-known figure in China.

The core of the job, though, was the interplay on political matters between our own embassies in the four countries, the embassies of those countries in London, and the internal hierarchy of the FCO. Much of the work was routine, and driven by events - outward Ministerial visits requiring internal briefing and probably including a dinner at the Chinese, Japanese or Korean Embassy beforehand; incoming visits with bilateral talks and the inevitable social occasions; requests by and briefings for Members of Parliament; approaches by especially favoured journalists seeking background briefing (most such requests were handled by the

FCO News Department). We (FED in general) were on good terms with our counterparts in the London embassies of our four countries, and there was a regular pattern of calls by them on us in the office, reciprocated by invitations from them to lunches or dinners to cement the relationship. Both the Korean Ambassador and the Japanese Minister (Ambassador's deputy) lived quite close to us in Wimbledon, and somehow this made occasions there particularly relaxed. Chinese Embassy events were almost always more formal and hosted by the Ambassador, but the banquets they gave were memorable. One at least remains vivid: we had been through the lengthy menu, including the obligatory sea-slug which most Westerners found a little hard to take, and the Peking duck which was always delicious, and the dish where hot sauce is poured over some cereal of a vaguely Rice-Krispie kind creating a crackling sound which the Chinese, giggling, described as "bombs over Tokyo"; we toasted each other repeatedly in *mao-tai*; the Ambassador then rose to his feet, and announced with a twinkle that he intended to mark this special occasion (I think Lord Carrington as Foreign Secretary was there) by reversing the normal practice and speaking in English, which a member of the British side would interpret into Chinese; Alan Paul, the senior Chinese desk officer in FED, who had *not* known in advance, rose magnificently to the occasion and not only translated into Chinese with perfect fluency but managed to include some plays on words which brought warm applause from the Chinese side.

As usual home life provided not only a secure basis but also an interesting counterpoint to all this office activity. Soon after settling in to our little Wimbledon home we started to look for something a little bigger; we had some savings from our seven years abroad, and although house prices had multiplied over the years we could afford to bridge the gap (we were lucky in our timing - 1982 was possibly the last year when such a bridging would have been within our means, at least in the Wimbledon area). There were various possibilities, but for six months or so nothing really suitable came up. We were beginning to become reconciled to the idea of staying where we were, when Julian went in May to look at a house in the next road to ours, at the top of the hill and Edwardian in period so a lot more spacious - and with the garden on the sunny side of the house, which was important for us. There were nervous moments, not least over the summer when we went off with the boys on an Austrian holiday while the vendor was still hoping for a better offer than ours. But all was well in the end, and on a foggy damp November day in 1982 we took possession of 35 Murray Road, for a price which 25 years later would buy approximately one-fifteenth of the same house. We have never regretted our choice for a moment.

Eton and the boys gave us another dimension. Justin was moving serenely up the school and developing new talents and interests - playing the flute in the school orchestra, spending a good deal of time behind the stage at the school theatre where he became something of an expert on the lighting side, active on the tennis court and the river, as well as in the various types of football on offer. Giles excelled at most sports, enjoyed other diversions, and was no slouch at academic work either. We had

plenty of occasions to visit and lend support, whether on the touch-line or in the audience, and were able to provide the traditional superior picnic for the Fourth of June open day each year. Austria in 1982 was our last foreign holiday as a family, but in 1983 Karin and Bill organised a three-generation holiday for a week on the island of Arran in the Clyde estuary, which worked out very well and included some serious walking for all the generations; and in the following year Justin and Giles joined us in doing the bulk of the Coast-to-Coast walk from Richmond in Yorkshire to St Bees on the West Cumbrian coast (we felt that we could leave out the North York Moors stretch, which we knew well enough from Julian's family home in Osmotherley; and we decided to save time also by omitting the day allotted to the flat Vale of York crossing). It was a happy time in many ways, and we felt ourselves very fortunate to be at home just when there was so much to enjoy.

By the autumn of 1983 I had been two years in the department, and thought it was time to refresh my memory of the region by making a pastoral visit. With the Far Eastern specialist in the FCO Research Department - a body of experts who rarely go on foreign postings and provide a sort of academic underpinning for the more ephemeral opinions of traditionally-mobile diplomats - I set off, oddly, for Helsinki at the beginning of October. The idea was to go out by way of Moscow and to take a couple of days there to meet our counterparts in the Soviet Foreign Ministry and exchange views on the Far East. As it happened there were no flights to Moscow by Western European airlines at that time, because of a quarrel over a recent air-related incident when the Russians had behaved unusually badly, so the best way of getting there seemed to be by train from Helsinki. It was fascinating to climb on board the Russian train - was it the Chekhov or the Tolstoi Express? - and move off at dusk past the endless Finnish forests. It was dark when we passed through Leningrad, and light enough to see the countryside only as we approached Moscow. The Embassy looked after us well, providing sleeping accommodation for a couple of nights in the apartment of a first secretary who happened to be on leave, and we had a couple of good sessions at the Foreign Ministry, pretty relaxed and open (and linguistically interesting for me, as by the second day I found that I was understanding most of what was said although having to rely on the Embassy interpreter for our replies). I had never been behind the Iron Curtain professionally, and was very struck by the evident constraints on life and work there for resident diplomats. Maybe it was fortunate that, having entered the Foreign Office as a Russian speaker and expecting to spend at least part of my career using that skill, those two days were the only time in 35 years when my Russian was even near to being called on.

From Moscow we flew by Aeroflot - normally shunned by the FCO, but there was no alternative for this journey - via Omsk, Tomsk and Irkutsk to Ulan Bator in Mongolia. Unchanging views of steppe and forest, *boeuf stroganoff* for every meal - it seemed like a long flight. Mongolia was then a Soviet satellite, with the military presence very evident and a pretty unbending regime, but the city of Ulan Bator was very different from Moscow. The strongest first impressions were of the all-pervasive smell of

mutton - even the Ambassador's driver was redolent of it - and the picturesque sight of traditional *yurts* (large circular skin tents) on any open ground even quite near the city centre. Our Embassy is tiny, and our dealings with the Mongolian Government at that time frankly did not have much substance, but I was very glad to have the experience of brief exposure to the culture and history of a once-powerful people, and seeing how our staff operated in a thoroughly claustrophobic environment. Almost all necessities of the Western lifestyle needed to be imported, and the fortnightly visits by the Queen's Messengers - bringing the diplomatic bags, and travelling in pairs for company and security - were something of a lifeline. (Our Ambassador told us one story illustrative of local conditions. He and the Japanese Ambassador, almost the only resident ambassadors from outside the Soviet bloc, had decided to play golf. There was of course no golf course, but they thought it would introduce some excitement into their lives to set up a Royal and Imperial Golf Tournament. The British and Japanese Second Secretaries accordingly set off into the steppe just outside Ulan Bator one Saturday morning carrying spades and a bundle of eighteen sticks with flags attached. When they proceeded to dig the first hole, the Mongolian military personnel shadowing them closed in and enquired belligerently what this new example of nefarious spying activity might betoken ... The explanation was apparently accepted in the end, but the experiment was never repeated.)

From Ulan Bator we went on by train across the Gobi Desert, rolling sandy country peopled by yaks and other herded beasts (unfortunately it was the wrong season for flowers, as the edelweiss are apparently spectacular in the summer near Ulan Bator). We had a reasonably comfortable compartment to ourselves, and there was a samovar of tea always hot at the end of the carriage, and decent food from time to time. The principal excitement of the journey came at Erhlian on the Chinese border, where the gauge of the railway changes, and in the middle of the night passengers were instructed to remain in their carriages while they were jacked up, the bogeys exchanged for ones of the correct dimensions for Chinese track, and the carriages lowered again onto them. The other important change was in the catering arrangements - the Soviet dining-car which had served up the same cuisine all the way across Siberia was replaced by a Chinese version, and passengers flocked hungrily in to take early advantage. Otherwise the countryside was little different at first, until eventually we neared Peking and were at last in familiar territory.

Our exchanges in Peking and Tokyo were more substantial, the purpose being almost as much to meet Embassy staff as to talk to officials of the host governments, and to provide a listening ear for any local concerns. Conditions in Peking were still austere, and the climate, in particular air pollution and the extremes of cold and heat, compounded the hardship of everyday life; but it was all noticeably more relaxed than Moscow. Tokyo of course was familiar ground for me and it was more a matter of meeting old friends, both British and Japanese, than anything else. And I never got to Seoul, because there had been another air-related crisis - the supposedly accidental shooting down of a Korean passenger aircraft over

the Soviet Union, I seem to remember - and the Embassy was far too busy to accept a visit by me. I did look in on Hong Kong on the way home, to talk to the Political Adviser (Robin McLaren, my predecessor as head of FED) and stay a night or two with the Jamesons from Tokyo days who had moved there. I flew back by way of Vienna, the original plan being to meet Julian there and spend some days with the Bruce-Lockharts, old friends from our Nicosia posting. Alas, we had miscalculated, and Julian had to remain in England to cover the boys' half-term break; but I had a relaxing day or two, going to the Volksooper and eating well in Viennese restaurants and reliving Cyprus experiences. - It had been a good trip, necessary in a way to thicken up the relationship between our missions and their London interlocutors, mildly educational for me, but not designed to achieve any more substantial objectives.

Back in London, I now felt reasonably well established in my job. Many of my original FED team had moved on since my arrival two years earlier, and I had new but still highly competent people as Assistant Head and senior desk officers. The patter of supposed expertise on the Far Eastern scene came a little more readily to me, and I took part in various seminars and conferences - at Chatham House, the International Affairs centre in St James's Square; at the Wilton Park Conference centre in Sussex, sponsored by the FCO; at Ditchley Park in Oxfordshire. A variety of military establishments also appeared in my diary - the Royal College of Defence Studies (RCDS), the Staff College at Camberley, the National Defence College near High Wycombe, and others. The RCDS in particular has a close relationship with the FCO, as a couple of FCO counsellors are generally included in their courses as well as senior officers from the armed services of other countries; and their overseas tours always included the Far East. But in general, as I had found in Cyprus, there is a substantial overlap in the interests of the British diplomatic and armed services, and each can learn from the other. At one stage I was invited to join the Chief of Defence Staff on a tour to China, and was very much looking forward to that though a little apprehensive about the shallowness of my knowledge of the Chinese scene, but sadly it was cancelled because something else cropped up; the preparations, including a dinner in Greenwich with the great man himself and some equally famous military names, were themselves an excitement.

Another task which came up occasionally was participation in meetings of the European Community's Asia Working Group in Brussels. The Far East was not always on the agenda, and when it was our China-specialist Under-Secretary (who covered the whole of Asia) was very well able to handle it without advice, but sometimes he was not free and I won the 24-hour trip. The meetings were mostly an exchange of information, as I recall, but sometimes there were decisions to be taken. Very different in kind was the other category of meeting which regularly took me away from FED, the Final Selection Board interviews of FCO fast-stream entry candidates, where there was always a senior head of an ordinary FCO department present as well as a personnel man and two or three outsiders. I enjoyed the process of scanning the candidates' files - mostly reports from the previous stages of the selection process - and devising

probing questions to bring out their qualities or lack of them. Other departures from the normal pattern included a lunch hosted by the Archbishop of Canterbury in honour of a group of senior Christian dignitaries from China, and a reception at 10 Downing Street given by Margaret Thatcher and related to her own visit to Peking. On one occasion, with a few other Heads of Department, I was even required to attend the Queen's annual reception at Buckingham Palace for the Diplomatic Corps in London - very much in a junior capacity and essentially behind the scenes, but definitely a departure from the daily business of FED.

One prolonged episode gave me a rather closer acquaintance with the business of monarchy. It was decided that the eldest son of the then Crown Prince of Japan, Prince Hiro, should spend some time in Britain broadening his horizons and improving his English. Others in the family, though none so close to the Imperial throne, had spent time at Oxford University, and Prince Hiro was to follow their example. The Japanese consulted Sydney Giffard, who had been Minister in Tokyo and was now Deputy Under-Secretary in the FCO supervising Asia and the Americas. He brought me into the circle of those to be involved in making the necessary soundings and preparations. There were two main points for decision - which college in Oxford would be best for the Prince to pursue his studies at Masters level (in a rather specialised field related to transport by water in the mediaeval period)? and where could he spend several weeks beforehand brushing up his conversational English?

We sought appropriate advice on both points. We consulted eminent persons in Oxford about the choice of College, deciding eventually on Merton - one of the oldest colleges, architecturally attractive, headed by a distinguished scientist with an international reputation, and incidentally renowned at the time for the quality of its cuisine. The choice of a mentor for the initial weeks of acclimatisation before the Oxford term was less easy, and we searched cautiously for persons of appropriate distinction and means who lived in some style not too far from the Oxford area. The search was successful, identifying a friendly and suitable family with all the right connections, plenty of opportunities for tennis (Prince Hiro, like his father, is a serious player), and some expertise also in the teaching of English. Prince Hiro duly arrived in the summer of 1983. Ensuring that he had a reasonably relaxed time, and something approximating to a normal student life, sometimes required the odd departure from normal protocol. I was not involved in the detail, which was sorted out between the Oxford authorities, the police where appropriate, and the Japanese side. But we were included in some events during his stay, including a very pleasant evening at Eton where the Prince, a talented musician, played his viola as part of a chamber music group after dinner. In general, both over the initial summer and at Oxford, all seemed to go very well.

The summer of 1984 saw the beginnings of a period of change for the family. Justin came to the end of his time at Eton, ending up at the head of the school list (like his father before him, but with much better

academic credentials), and looking forward to reading mathematics at Trinity Hall, Cambridge - a departure from two generations of an Oxford tradition. Before that he planned to spend a few months working for Hambros Bank in Hong Kong, and then make his way around South-East Asia. Giles was already a prominent member of the school football team by the end of the year and travelling with them on overseas tours - one was to the United States; during his final years his academic achievement would be recognised by the award of an Oppidan Scholarship (OS), and he too ended up in the select group of twenty (ten King's Scholars, ten Oppidans) at the head of the school. Julian's mother came to stay with us in Wimbledon for several weeks over the winter, recuperating from an operation, and Karin meanwhile was recovering from a broken hip. Visits to Karin and Bill in Farthinghoe were a regular pleasure, and we had developed a tradition of helping them to get the Astwick House garden into trim each summer for the regular opening to the public of the small Farthinghoe gardens, involving much last-minute weeding and manicuring of the lawn and path edges. It was all very good, and we were in no hurry to move on. But by autumn 1984 we had been at home for three full years, and needed before long to brace ourselves for the possibility of change.

There was as yet no suggestion of a move from FED. But one sign of eventual change came when in February 1985 I was sent on the first of a series of Top Management Programmes (TMP1), a four- or six-week residential course which brought together civil servants and private sector managers who were on the way up. Reportedly originating in an idea by Margaret Thatcher, this was seen as a means for the public and private sectors to understand each other a little better, to learn from each other as well as from the lectures and seminars. Civil servants for example discovered that there was something called the profit motive which seemed to be rather important for businessmen, but which of course played no part in the business of government. Maybe the private sector learned something from us about logical thought or verbal precision - I don't know. The press were told about the new institution, and articles appeared characterising it as "a course for gorillas" - I was never quite sure why. But all the participants (a total of some thirty) were on the edge of senior managerial positions if not already there, and some of them both in the public and private sector certainly ended up much later at the head of their organisations. So it was a lively bunch. The conference centre near Fleet in Hampshire was a cold place in that icy February, but everybody enjoyed the quality of the speakers, on a range of current economic and political issues as well as on management science, and the projects assigned to us for group solution were interesting and challenging. I was the only FCO participant, and very little of the proceedings were directly relevant to anything I ever expected to be doing (I did not stay for the final two optional weeks which were really designed for the Home Civil Service), but in general terms the course greatly improved my understanding of many things and of different types of people.

Another sign that the authorities were thinking what to do with me, which fortunately for all concerned came to nothing, was a summons to 10 Downing Street. Four Diplomatic Service counsellors were called in to be interviewed separately by Robin Butler, the Chief Cabinet Secretary, who would determine their suitability for recommendation as the next private secretary to the Prime Minister on the foreign affairs side. Even in my own estimation I was an unlikely candidate. Robin Butler had details of my career to date, and asked pointedly at an early stage what experience I had to offer which might be useful to Mrs Thatcher. I muttered something about Japan, which did not appear to interest him. He mused aloud that China was rather topical at the time and obviously I must know something about that; I thought it best not to disillusion him too forthrightly. Apart from this we got on quite well together, although I think he did say that the successful candidate would have to be "one of us" in Margaret Thatcher's terms, and I had to admit that I might find it something of a personal effort to fit myself into that mould. But I knew that Charles Powell, a New College contemporary of mine though a couple of years younger, was one of the other candidates, and I had a strong feeling that he was a good deal closer to being "one of us". And so it proved.

Back in FED at the beginning of March 1985, my life resumed its normal pattern. Lunches with European diplomats - the Dutchman was a good friend, and the Swedes and the Italians figured from time to time; the Canadians and the New Zealanders took an interest in our doings and were hospitable. Our previous ambassador in Mongolia used to take me out regularly to lunch to talk about old times, and very entertaining he was, having in his time penned lengthy and eloquent despatches about his travels around that rather impenetrable country, with tales about strange foods and strange customs which entranced his readers. A group of Chinese Sovietologists came, and I gave them lunch, neatly paralleling my exchanges with the Russians in Moscow. Sydney Giffard went off to Tokyo as Ambassador replacing Hugh Cortazzi, amid a haze of farewell parties. The Hong Kong negotiations became more and more intricate.

And then there was real news of a move - an unexpected one. The London and Dublin Governments had been in negotiation for many months about their respective attitudes to the future of Northern Ireland. While the British Government could not and would not depart from the principle that the province of Northern Ireland was a part of the United Kingdom, we were prepared to admit that the Republic of Ireland might have a legitimate interest in what went on in the province. There was after all a common land border; a large minority of the population of the province believed that it should be part of a united Ireland and not of the UK; and one at least of the political parties - Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA - operated both sides of the border, although their legitimacy as a political party might be questionable. In the late summer of 1985 the two governments signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which gave expression to the Republic's interest by establishing a structure for bilateral discussion of certain elements of what went on in Northern Ireland. There were to be regular meetings at Ministerial level, and a permanent Secretariat

based in Belfast and manned by officials from London and Dublin. An FCO counsellor was traditionally seconded to the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) in Belfast to head the Political Affairs division there - its role was rather similar to that of Chancery in an embassy abroad, to monitor political developments in the rather special circumstances of the province. No final decisions had yet been taken on the rank and identity of the officials in the new Anglo-Irish Secretariat, but there was a fair presumption that I might be in the frame for that job. Meanwhile I was to go to Belfast in October as the new head of Political Affairs division in the NIO.

The news did not immediately thrill the family, who were quite happy with the London posting and did not regard Belfast as the same thing at all. It was not an ideal time for us to decamp wholesale to Belfast; Giles was beginning his last two important years at Eton and we wanted to remain close and available at need, and one of Julian's sisters was ill with cancer and Julian wanted to be at hand for her and the family too. But travel to and from Belfast was easy, and "unaccompanied" postings there by London-based officials were not uncommon. The NIO in Belfast was not like an embassy abroad, and there was no representational need for us to operate there as a couple. So we decided to divide our forces, Julian remaining in Wimbledon, while I lived in Belfast but came back at the weekends as often as possible - we had no idea precisely how it would work out, but were reasonably confident that we could manage.

My association with the Far East thus came to an end. I had spent the last eight years, and more than 12 of my 22 years to date in the Diplomatic Service, concentrating essentially on Japan. It was time for a change. The experience of serving in the London Office as a Head of Department had been valuable and interesting, because it is arguably at that level that one can have both expert knowledge and some influence on higher policy - as influence increases with seniority, one's real expertise tends to be diluted; and it is at the London HQ that foreign policy is really made. FED was a significant department, and there were many which covered less glamorous parts of the world or more pedestrian issues. I had been lucky in the quality of my staff, some of whom were outstandingly able - particularly on the China side; and all of whom were friendly and competent. The department had been spared crises and tragedies. The four years in our own home had enabled us to settle in properly, and we were very happy with our purchase of the Murray Road house. The Belfast posting should at least enable us to maintain the stability of that home for a while longer. Whatever the family thought, I was quite excited about the new job.

X - BELFAST

It was strange to be going off alone to a new posting, without Julian for the first time since our marriage more than twenty years earlier. But the introduction to Belfast was gentle, and travel was clearly not a problem. At the beginning of October 1985 I flew over by the shuttle service, with which we were to become very familiar, for three days' briefing by my predecessor as Head of Political Affairs (Belfast)(PAB), Roy Reeve, an FCO counsellor a couple of years younger than me. He introduced me to his two chief lieutenants at Principal (First Secretary) level, one an Englishman from the main Northern Ireland Office most of whose staff were in London, the other from the Northern Ireland Civil Service seconded to the NIO. Their different background and approach gave me my first insight into the new world I would be entering. The NICS in effect ran the administration of Northern Ireland, and their staff were Northern Irelanders headed by their own Permanent Secretary. Some of the mainland British staff of the NIO were based in Belfast, dealing largely with security questions arising from the substantial British military presence in the province of Northern Ireland, and the political direction was in the hands of the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and his junior Ministers, all from the Westminster parliament. But the real expertise, and all the practical administration of matters such as health, education, agriculture and finance, was with Northern Ireland's own public servants. Relations between the two civil services were very smooth. But one clearly had to be aware, coming from Britain, that one would always be an outsider. There was a need for care, and for sensitivity.

The small PAB team demonstrated how well the partnership could work. The local man was one of relatively few Roman Catholics in the upper reaches of the NICS, well known to and liked by a very wide range of politicians and others of all persuasions in the province, and admirably objective in his assessment of both majority and minority communities. His British counterpart contributed the external London view of the political situation, and had himself developed a wide circle of friendly and well-placed contacts. PAB's role, like that of the Chancery in an overseas embassy, was to analyse and report to London on the local political scene. Contact-making was important. All but the very senior political figures - party leaders such as Ian Paisley - were quite willing to talk openly to PAB staff. In 1985 the Stormont Assembly, or local parliament, was still functioning and holding regular debates on matters of local administration, and the currents of opinion there were a fruitful field of study, as were the local press, the various churches, and so on. The political parties were mostly identified clearly with either the majority Unionist view (in favour of Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom), or the minority Nationalist community which broadly saw Northern Ireland's proper future as part of a single republic of the whole island of Ireland. There were organisations, and indeed at least one political party, which straddled this divide. But essentially it ran through the whole community, and the resultant tensions and frequent outbreaks of violence are a matter of history. So the politics of Northern Ireland mattered, to the British Government. Strategic planning was done essentially in London, but PAB

in Belfast provided much of the raw material which the planners needed. It looked like being an interesting job.

By the middle of October I was back in Belfast for real, having bidden farewell to my Far Eastern Department colleagues, delivered Justin to Cambridge to embark on his university career, and prepared myself as well as I could for the problems of self-catering in my temporary bachelor accommodation. The house which went with the job was in the little village of Crawfordsburn some miles east of Belfast, a pleasant drive over some rolling hills. I acquired a second-hand car (hoping that its green colour would not be taken as any indication of political sympathies with the Irish or nationalist camp), and embarked on a programme of calls and consultations - lunch with the Ulster Unionists, attending the party conference of the SDLP (Social Democratic and Labour Party, the main constitutional party on the nationalist side), the odd journalist, an encounter with the Roman Catholic Cardinal. An unexpected facet of the PAB job was membership of the Life Sentences Review Board, chaired by the NIO Permanent Secretary and meeting several times a year to go through the dossiers of individual cases due for their regular review. The subjects of these reviews were in practice all political prisoners given indeterminate sentences, often highly intelligent people who made the most of their time inside by embarking on advanced education courses; their own statements, included in the dossiers, were in stark contrast to the relatively less educated observations of the prison staff.

There were some initial private pleasures too. Catering for myself in the Crawfordsburn house was curiously satisfying. The house was a mile from the sea, and once there it was a pleasant walk along the coastal path to the local town of Bangor, where one could shop and take public transport for the return. The coast itself was populated with a good variety of birds, in which we were beginning to take an interest, and there were distant views across to the Antrim coast and occasionally as far as the southernmost outliers of Scotland. Further afield, it was an easy drive through County Down to the Mountains of Mourne, where there was challenging walking - snow and ice by early November that year, and dramatic views. There were regular opportunities for sleeping in my own bed in Wimbledon, as consultation in the London office of the NIO was constantly in my diary, and as an "unaccompanied" officer I was also entitled to fare-paid flights home at weekends to be reunited with the family (and Julian too could use this provision to join me in Belfast if that was more convenient). The news of the boys was good too - Justin seemed to be content at Cambridge, rediscovering the pleasures of theatre with the Mummings, and Giles was now a star of the Eton football team and selected to play for the Southern Schools.

It was not long before the nature of my real job in Belfast became evident. In the middle of November the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach, and the Anglo-Irish Conference and its Secretariat were created. One of the smaller points of agreement was on the staffing of the Secretariat. The Irish had wanted the head of each side to be very senior - their own man, a very subtle and

skilful diplomat who had been intimately involved in the negotiation of the Agreement, was newly promoted to the rank of Deputy Secretary. We had apparently wanted our equivalent to be a little more junior but with relevant experience, and there were differences of opinion about whether he or she should come from the FCO or the NIO. The eventual compromise was to appoint an Under-Secretary of FCO provenance, in the terms of Margaret Thatcher's message to the Irish "a senior official of proven competence, in whom all three of us [Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Northern Ireland Secretary] have confidence". That was me, on promotion (they must have given up on the idea of relevant experience). Happily, my former NIO Principal in PAB was also to be promoted and become my chief assistant in the Secretariat at Assistant Secretary (Counsellor) level; and the circle was completed by promoting the NICS Principal to be head of PAB, which would also report to me in my new role. All very gratifying.

The Belfast authorities moved quickly to identify a suitable office building for the Secretariat and to install the necessary security protection, as the institution was bound to be unpopular - certainly with the unionist community, which saw it as the beginnings of a treacherous handover of sovereignty from London to Dublin; and possibly also with the extreme nationalists, whom nothing short of full surrender of sovereignty would satisfy. By early December the Secretariat's new home was ready, at Maryfield on the edge of Holywood Barracks in north-east Belfast. It began work, appropriately in Irish Catholic eyes, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. For the Irish side it was home as well as office, as they clearly needed to be resident in Belfast and their security could not be guaranteed anywhere else. Their three senior officers - two from Foreign Affairs in Dublin and one from the Department of Justice - were supported by secretarial staff and a cook to look after the inner man (the seniors drew the line at self-catering). We matched them (less the cook), but had the luxury of living in our own homes and driving in past the security barriers every day. For additional security we did not use our own cars to drive into the Maryfield complex, but drove from our homes to Stormont and took official cars from there. It was a curious set-up, and distinctly unnerving at first, especially when there were noisy unionist demonstrations at the Maryfield gates which we had to pass.

The Secretariat's functions were to serve as a constant channel of communication between the London and Dublin governments on Northern Ireland matters, and to service the regular meetings of the Anglo-Irish Conference held at Ministerial level in London or Dublin. The Agreement defined the main areas for discussion, across a wide spectrum, essentially those where there had been perceived discrimination against the interests of the minority (nationalist) community. The administration of justice was one contentious issue, embracing the "Diplock courts" system which functioned without a jury for sensitive political cases often involving the use of informers (this worried the Irish side), and also questions of extradition where the British side considered that the Irish were over-reluctant to hand over persons suspected of terrorist activity. "Irish identity" questions were also important, matters such as the teaching or

use of the Irish language (considered by the unionists as a mark of republican sympathies, but by the nationalists as a legitimate part of their tradition). Flags and emblems were similarly matters of contention, and above all the traditional parades held by both the unionist and nationalist communities and used as occasions to assert each community's identity in the face of the "enemy". The Protestant Orange Order's parades on the Twelfth of July, commemorating William of Orange's victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, were the best-known of these. Policing was a major issue, for the parade season and generally; the Irish wanted the police (whose personnel were drawn mainly from the unionist majority) to be seen to act without discrimination against the nationalists, while the British side called on Irish and responsible nationalist leaders to encourage more from the minority community to join the police and lessen the perceived imbalance. And there was a whole range of more hopeful matters, such as cross-border economic cooperation, where a practice of working together in the interest of all communities could gradually help to reduce tension.

Day-to-day work at Maryfield was a strange incestuous affair. We could not receive visitors from outside - it was emphatically not the intention that the Irish presence should be seen as any sort of embassy, which even the Irish could not want given their constitutional position that the six counties should really be a part of their own jurisdiction. Very occasionally a top London or Dublin official would pay us a visit, and at a later stage the Irish side would include the odd very senior Belfast-based dignitary in one of their excellent dinner-parties, but such occasions were the exception. The opinions of the nationalist community would reach the Irish side in a roundabout way, usually via Dublin. Similarly we on the British side would call on our colleagues in London or Belfast in their offices and not expect them to come to ours (most would be very reluctant to be seen entering Maryfield anyway). So when in the building we were either working alone and separately, or engaged in lengthy Anglo-Irish debate with our opposite numbers. As the Irish side were cooped up there the whole time apart from occasional weekends in Dublin, they were keen to create opportunities for socialising with us, and a considerable amount of rather good wine was consumed in the evenings, generally ending in somewhat lachrymose Irish ballads and accompanied by clouds of cigar-smoke. We got to know each other very well.

There were benefits. We each came to know the constraints on the others' position, and a lot could be left unsaid. Sometimes we would even plot together; I recall getting credit from my London seniors for my account of a particularly heated exchange and the vigour with which I had put the British case, when in practice my opposite number and I had planned the course of our debate rather like a chess problem, each predicting what the other would say next. It was helpful that he was so expert ... I don't think I was being manipulated. Anyhow our common interest was that the dialogue should continue, and that a degree of objective common sense should slowly seep into the administration of Northern Ireland whereby the rights of all including the minority were fairly catered for. The long term objective, I suppose, was that the

unionist majority should accept the existence of the dialogue, and that the nationalists should accept that talking was more likely to achieve results than terrorist action. Years later the Good Friday agreement of 1998, and the consequent winding-up of the Maryfield Secretariat, could be seen as vindication of that strategy.

Letters home during this period are scarce, but one dated 19 January 1986 gives something of the flavour of the hectic initial weeks. Christmas at Wimbledon was interrupted by a series of telephone calls to various parts of England, Belfast and Dublin setting up a meeting in London on 30 December. That may not have been a full Conference, because a Conference session was held at Lancaster House on 10 January, far too grand a venue (I wrote) but the only place available at short notice which provided all the catering and other facilities. Immediately after that meeting I was driven up to Oxford by the Northern Ireland Secretary's political adviser to take part in the British/Irish Association's annual conference from 10-12 January at Balliol. "The standard of meals in Hall was really quite high, and the draught Guinness in the JCR was free in the evenings until it ran out. In the intervals of gossip and drinking we heard a selection of speakers of various shades of green ... Like all Irish occasions, a mixture of emotional attitudes and friendly responses, optimism and pessimism, blunt speech and tall stories. Unlike some, I went to bed both nights; the poker school apparently reached a stage at about dawn on Sunday when an American was wagering the whole US financial contribution to a putative Irish fund against an Irishman who had nothing to offer in return except [the county of] Fermanagh." There was little pause thereafter; back to Belfast on Sunday, summoned back to London the following day for an early Tuesday meeting in the Cabinet Office, back to Belfast the same day and then in London again on the Thursday for what must have been a slightly more relaxed day, as I had lunch in Wimbledon with Julian and her mother between morning and afternoon office meetings.

Later in January Julian helped me move house in Belfast, from the Crawfordsburn bungalow to a rather more substantial place in Helen's Bay, close to the coast and with a substantial south-facing garden as well as a full supply of Under-Secretarial silver. This was to be my home for the next couple of years, and it suited very well. I had also moved my non-Maryfield office (I needed a base for the non-Secretariat part of the job) up to Stormont Castle, more convenient for meetings with the Secretary of State and Permanent Secretary to whom I reported. This turned out to be a mixed blessing, and later on I moved back down the hill to Stormont House and was given a really very fine and beautifully-furnished room, the best I ever achieved despite subsequent promotions. But generally things were now settling down. The limitations and opportunities of the job were becoming clearer. The routine of constant shuttle-flights to and from London was no longer a problem. The family seemed content, and Giles had secured his place at Cambridge (Jesus College) to join Justin after his final months at Eton and a gap year. Giles was now very grand - not only an Oppidan Scholar and member of the Sixth Form (the top ten Oppidans and top ten scholars in the school list), but also a member of the Eton

Society (Pop), the sort of prefects' club to which sportsmen and the social elite were elected by their peers; he was now captain of the school tennis team and excelled at a variety of other sports to add to his prowess at football.

One highlight of the early months of 1986, described in a surviving letter, was our joint visit to the home south of Dublin of my Irish counterpart. The intention was to fly down, but a technical problem caused us to switch to travel by road, a dramatic journey involving a somewhat nervous transfer from British to Irish cars in a dark lay-by near the border, and thereafter a mad dash through the Irish countryside and the streets of Dublin with police escort, lights, sirens, the whole performance. The central event of the weekend was a small but remarkable dinner where the other invitees were the British Ambassador to Dublin and his wife, and an even grander couple on the Irish side whom even now I feel hesitant about naming. Three different sets of security-men were milling around the garden as we sipped our superlative Rioja, and the conversation was totally fascinating. The next day Julian and I borrowed a car and drove off into the Wicklow Mountains, spectacular in wintry weather which forced us to turn back at one point after a mile or two of driving on ice-sheets, and viewed the cathedral ruins and Celtic round towers at Glendalough. Another day, with our hosts, we strolled nearer the coast amid heather and bracken, and sampled Guinness in its natural surroundings (somehow it tasted even better than usual). The return to Belfast, rather less nerve-rackingly, was by Irish Air Force executive jet. Quite a visit.

Another letter sent in late July 1986 illustrates some of the interweaving strands of our complex life. It begins by looking forward to the August visit to Belfast of Karin and Bill, to stay a few days and see the sights - that visit took place, incorporated the Giants' Causeway on the north coast and the South Down scenery near the Mountains of Mourne, and briefly included Justin, in Edinburgh at the time being theatrical at the Festival after a successful spell at Minack theatre in Cornwall with his Gilbert and Sullivan troupe. But the main narrative covered the recent past. It included the Twelfth of July parade season: "... spent several hours trying to persuade the Irish that the decisions on control of Orange marches that were being taken were in everybody's best interests, and that it would be sensible of them to restrain themselves from public recrimination in the opposite sense. By the end of the day, which culminated in a small dinner *à quatre* with [Northern Ireland Secretary] Tom King, they were beginning to believe us ... Unfortunately [our side made] some incautious statements on radio and TV on 14 July, and the Irish exploded into a fury of statements and messages ... It has taken us the last week to calm things down again." In the middle of all this I had to rush back to London to attend a Buckingham Palace garden party on the 15th, a different world with formally-dressed Gentlemen-at-Arms (one came over to greet us - he had been the generous host to Prince Hiro of Japan for several weeks in the summer of 1983) and various diplomatic and other personages, some known to us; "very hot, but good-ish tea, pretty flamingoes, and a welcome ice-cream". On the previous day we had been able to celebrate Julian's birthday with a drive to the South Downs from Wimbledon and a

longish walk distinguished by a marvellous profusion of fragrant orchids. Maybe it was the sheer variety of all this which kept me sane.

The drama of high politics, and the tensely argumentative world of the Secretariat, were only a part of my time in Northern Ireland even though they tended to dominate it. There was also time to become immersed in local atmosphere, and to attend to the business of reporting on the local political scene which was the other dimension of my responsibilities. Memories are still sharp. Democratic Unionists (DUP), steel-hard in their determination, often slightly sinister in dark glasses - I recall entertaining one senior leader (not Ian Paisley) at Stormont House, and noting with interest that when he removed his jacket to get down to a relaxed conversation he also had to remove his gun in its shoulder-holster, personal protection being something which a public figure in that world had to take seriously. SDLP nationalist politicians, often charming and easy-going, tending to a mix of idealism and pessimism, but the best of them having a clear and sympathetic vision of a rational and secure utopia with the rights of all guaranteed. Rare encounters with the extremes - talking directly to Sinn Fein was not open to us, but hard-liners of all kinds would crop up (I recall one fascinating encounter with a former loyalist paramilitary leader turned charity worker). Senior British Army and police commanders - the three-star general at the top of the Army pyramid was a wise and weary-looking man who had seen it all, his two-star deputy a tall and upstanding figure with famous exploits to his name, but at all levels there were brave men coping with constant threats. The senior RUC men, from the Chief Constable down, had unlike the mainly-British top army people lived their whole lives in the province and their responses were instinctive. Cooperation between the two forces, coming from their very different stables, needed managing. But that was not my job, just part of the background.

Travelling around the province, one was constantly aware of its nature as a divided community. This was most evident in the urban areas, and driving up the Falls Road - a nationalist stronghold in Belfast - was a jumpy business even if the odds against anything happening were long. Slogans painted on walls and hoardings, and the fact that barricades had had to be erected between areas occupied by communities with opposing loyalties, were a constant reminder of the underlying tension. Kerbstones painted alternately in red, white and blue were a clear indication of a loyalist area, and this occurred even in small rural communities. But few in the province needed any reminder of the nature of any given area. Everybody knew the sites of historical notoriety - the café where a murderous attack had been carried out, a block of flats of evil memory, the famous prisons. The H-blocks at the Maze prison - built in the shape of an H - had an eerie atmosphere, as the home of political prisoners and deaths by hunger strike. Army patrols, young men with rigid expressions and guns at the ready watching for danger from any angle, were always in evidence in the streets. Security guards checked every handbag at the entrance to Marks and Spencer. Policemen were visibly armed. Army check-points in the countryside caused an instant rise in blood-pressure even for the innocent outsiders like us, so that it was easy to imagine the

perpetual state of unease engendered in the province's permanent population of whatever community. Occasionally we would find ourselves in the vicinity of a serious demonstration of community solidarity in the face of the supposed enemy - the funeral of a Sinn Fein activist with attendant procession of family and friends, a loyalist march with Lambeg drums and provocative flute-playing - and the mass emotion generated was almost palpable.

At the same time we found a warmth and a welcome from the individual people whom we encountered, of both communities unionist and nationalist, which was somehow special. I grew to like the various accents, and even to distinguish reasonably accurately sometimes between them (though there were initial difficulties; Julian at first found it almost impossible to tell the difference between the words "two" and "three" in an East Belfast accent, which meant that she tended to take the simple way out and produce a five-pound note when buying any ticket on a train or bus). The area where we lived, running along Belfast Lough to the east and north of the city, was undeniably privileged - indeed it was known as the "Gold Coast", from the number of wealthy mansions - but we met kindness and acceptance everywhere else too. In some ways Northern Ireland out-performs the rest of the United Kingdom. The provision of public housing is unusually good. Educational standards are high, and although at primary and secondary level almost all the schools are segregated (the Roman Catholic church is very influential in preserving this situation), at university level there is a fair amount of cross-community fraternisation. A significant number of individuals deeply regretted the pervasive atmosphere of hatred and prejudice and some of them worked actively for reconciliation. Academics and indeed the senior journalists were capable of being admirably objective.

The Helen's Bay home was essentially a private home, despite our official silver. But I did have a few visitors, family and old friends from England, and occasionally even cooked for them. And on one famous occasion we did entertain the Irish side of the Secretariat to dinner, one of their rare excursions outside the barricades of Maryfield. It was a lively occasion, and we soon forgot about the inadequacy of the security protection. There was reinforced glass around the front door, said to be bullet-proof, and there was a mysterious cord hanging down in the hall pulling which apparently set off a siren which would summon help. (It might just as well have summoned more attackers.) But the glass in the dining-room windows, also at the front of the house and in full view of passers-by if any, was certainly not bullet-proof; and most of those present were potential targets for someone. We survived, though; and I think Giles was there too, because I have a clear memory of the Irish side testing his linguistic ear by challenging him to pronounce the word "plastic" in the tones of Ian Paisley. The result was applauded.

The months passed. A few events stand out. Julian's sister Monica died of cancer in the summer of 1986, at the age of barely 50, and this cast an obvious shadow over the whole family; it was good that Julian was able to be in London and at hand. She was later able to relax a little in Belfast,

which had its driest and sunniest September of the century followed by some lovely autumnal October days - we climbed Slieve Donard in the Mourne and blackberried happily on the way down. In both 1986 and 1987 we took a fortnight off for a summer holiday in Austria. The whole family were at Farthinghoe for Christmas 1986 (it was becoming an event for us to see both Justin and Giles at the same time), and in the following March we all joined again in London to celebrate Karin and Bill's golden wedding. In early May 1987 Julian and I drove from Belfast to Londonderry and across the border into Donegal for three ecstatic days. I wrote of eighteenth-century warehouses and a fine Georgian mansion in Rathmelton, of the play of light on Atlantic breakers and 800-foot cliffs looming through the mists, of a secret inlet with marvellously soft greensward flanking sandy beaches, of moors criss-crossed with peat cuttings and decorated with rocks seamed with coloured ores. We loved Glencolumbkille - "the sun sparkles on the breakers as they foam into the bays and cascade round the base of the cliffs. The fields are studded with tiny farm cottages and occasional stones with incised Celtic patterns. Every roadbank was alive with primroses. One bay, reached only by a flight of 160 steps, has sand so fine and silvery that it would adorn an hourglass, and looks out over the open Atlantic between cliffs with swooping and soaring seabirds; we sat there for half an hour in the warm evening sun, watching a kittiwake diving into the sea." We climbed Slieve League, visited Donegal town, and crossed the border back into Fermanagh by Lough Erne, looking at Belleek pottery and noticing the air of relative prosperity after the apparent economic hardship and rough roads of Donegal.

Inevitably, as 1986 became 1987 and we moved on through the second year of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the Secretariat, the initial excitement of the work began to subside into routine. There were still high points, of controversy or achievement. But the initial objective, of creating the Secretariat as a fact and building a process of consultation, had been achieved. Nobody really expected any early acceptance by the whole unionist community of the legitimacy of involving the Dublin government in discussion of the affairs of Northern Ireland. (I still have a vivid recollection of sitting in the spectators' gallery of the Stormont Assembly, fairly early in my time before it was dissolved, with my much better-known Assistant Secretary colleague from the Northern Ireland Civil Service who ran PAB, when Dr Paisley was speaking, and cringing a little when he turned and pointed at us, bellowing "There are the traitors!" - maybe it was a compliment of a kind; but things did not change.) And certainly nobody yet expected real negotiation between the leaders of the two communities; the John Hume/David Trimble talks, let alone the Ian Paisley/Martin McGuinness understanding, were well into the future. So our task for the moment was just to survive. And something of the stimulus of the daily debate within the Secretariat was dulled for me when my main Irish colleague was replaced; his successor inevitably lacked the experience of the process from its inception, and there was a natural change of style too.

So word from the FCO in London of my next proposed posting, received at the very end of 1987, was probably timely even though I had then been only just over two years in Belfast. I was sitting at ease in my grand office in Stormont House (I remember now that there was a television set at my elbow for monitoring the news - I have to confess that that was not the only purpose to which it was put) when the head of Personnel Department in the FCO called. "Would I be interested in going to Israel as Ambassador?" Taken by surprise, I said something appropriate about the job clearly sounding very exciting and an honour and all that, and then added carefully that perhaps I ought to have a word with my wife before giving a final firm acceptance. David Logan, on the other end of the line, almost exploded - "you're not going to TURN IT DOWN, are you!" - but was then mollified. I assume now that there had already been some discussion at the London end of my appointment, which was clearly a sensitive and important one, and the Prime Minister's office may even have been consulted as Mrs Thatcher took a close interest in Israel. The whole Irish question was also very important to her, and I knew that she followed the implementation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement which she had signed, so this might have helped to get me the job. Fortunately Julian was quite intrigued by the idea of going to Israel, and I was shortly able to reassure David Logan that he did not need to look any further for a candidate for Tel Aviv.

The posting would not become actual until mid-1988, and although there would be a good deal of briefing and some Hebrew language study to fit in before that, I had some months still to serve in Belfast (and indeed a successor for my job there had to be found). There was something of an end-of-term feeling. Most of those whom I worked with had remained the same for my two years so far, and I had been very content with the relationship we had built up. But in the nature of Civil Service life some were due to retire and others to move to new jobs, and it felt right for me too to move on. Happily the delay in finding a successor for me was not too protracted; somebody slightly older than me had through force of external circumstance left his ambassadorial post well before the expected time and was available, and I had lunch with him in London in January and just about succeeded in persuading him that the high profile and inherent fascination of the job would make it worth his time. January and February were the usual mix of normal work, much of it of a tidying-up kind, and farewell parties. Julian came over for the final spell, and we left Northern Ireland for the last time by the Larne-Stranraer ferry on the first of March, 1988.

The experience had been valuable. My career before Belfast had had its moments of excitement, opportunities to become expert on a country or a subject, some practice in supervising the work of others, participation in substantive discussion. But until Belfast I had had very little experience of real negotiation with those representing a different viewpoint. Work in the Anglo-Irish Secretariat was an almost constant process of negotiation of a kind. Inevitably I was often in sympathy with the Irish point of view - maybe one has to be a little that way in order to understand one's interlocutors better. But doing the job properly meant putting across the

British Government's position with conviction and determination. Too much sympathy for the other side would have detracted from this. On occasion I was genuinely persuaded that our own position needed to be modified to resolve an immediate difficulty, and in practice I think that this always worked out satisfactorily for both sides during my time. One of the satisfactions was juggling the various interests - the London view did not always coincide with the local Belfast view, let alone the Dublin view; and within the Belfast view one had to distinguish between accurate perceptions based on deep understanding of the local situation, and misconceptions based on partiality and prejudice. Happily there were wise people around whose objectivity one could always trust. One objective fact, not always sufficiently recognised, was that for the very large majority of British people the affairs of Northern Ireland were frankly of little real interest - except insofar as they threatened the lives of British soldiers serving there. Those in government in Whitehall could not afford to take so detached a viewpoint, but it affected the underlying attitudes of most. Occasionally it led to carelessness by British politicians in their public utterances, when they failed to appreciate the genuine depth of public feeling on the island of Ireland and the damage that could be caused by misuse of the accepted terms. (This last point may sound obscure. But it really did annoy citizens of the Republic of Ireland, for example, when the British spoke casually of Northern Ireland as "Ulster"; properly Ulster denotes nine Irish counties, of which only six constitute the British-ruled province of Northern Ireland. There were many more obscure cases where a particular phrase had a historic resonance for either community in Ireland which might not be evident on the surface.)

It is tempting to conclude that the Brits should simply get out of Northern Ireland - in the long run, maybe. But it would be a mistake to think that this would be easy or solve all the problems. There is no perfect solution to the conflict between a majority and a minority population. The unionist and largely Protestant majority in Northern Ireland are at the same time a minority of the whole population of the island of Ireland. For Northern Ireland to leave the United Kingdom might solve some problems but would certainly create others. In Cyprus too I had seen how dividing populations can cause as many headaches as mixing them up together in a single state. Now, for me, it would be Israel, a state with a majority of Jews but in a region where the huge majority is Muslim, and where it was far from obvious that drawing a line between one side and the other was the answer. That was for the exciting future. But I would not forget my Belfast days, and for the rest of my life would remain emotionally involved with the fate of Northern Ireland. It is after all very close to home, and it matters that British governments should do the right thing there, whatever that is. It had been a privilege to be allowed to make some small contribution.

XI - ISRAEL

Back in London after the drive from Stranraer, we had a little time to turn round before the formal process of ambassadorial briefing started. But the focus was already pretty sharply on the transition to a new stage of life. We were reasonably familiar with the business of leaving our own home and shopping for a different climate, and the traumas this time were not particularly severe. There was no question of putting 35 Murray Road in the hands of estate agents, and the extended family would happily look after it in various combinations over the next years. Neither the climate nor the social demands of Tel Aviv looked like being extreme - we were glad that we had still managed to avoid the pressures of the great European capitals where diplomats are expected to maintain a certain social status. But it was nearly seven years since we had lived abroad, and then we had been well out of the public limelight. Ambassadorial life was bound to impose new and unpredictable strains, particularly perhaps on Julian (I could to some extent hide behind my professional paperwork).

Background reading could of course start at once. The official reading list for Israel began promisingly - "the Bible: still the best history". I settled down to read it from cover to cover - a gripping story, in parts, many of them not as familiar as they should have been. There was much else. Some knowledge both of the more ancient periods of Middle Eastern civilisation and of recent political developments had inevitably rubbed off on me during the process of education and diplomatic life elsewhere, but I had never had to deal directly with any aspect of the Middle East, and it was all fascinating. Study of the Hebrew language was clearly part of the requirement, and the Office arranged for me to have a number of hours of tuition with Bruria Hirsch, who with her husband was in London for a year or so representing the commercial interests of their *kibbutz* between Haifa and Tel Aviv. We met in a fairly cramped office on Oxford Street, and as usual I found the initial stages of a new language totally fascinating, especially given its different script and semitic origins. Bruria was an excellent teacher and immensely patient, and although I achieved little fluency at any stage, and found newspaper-reading much more demanding than in any other language I had attempted, the hours of study in London were an eye-opener and in some ways a delight.

Three weeks are customarily allocated for the formal briefing of ambassadors, handled by the highly-professional Heads of Mission Section of the Office. Apart from the obvious in-house calls - Ministers, the relevant geographical department (NENAD - Near East and North Africa), other senior FCO officials and departments - there was a great variety of outside calls. Whitehall as a whole is invited to bid for an opportunity to brain-wash the new "our man in Tel Aviv", and to suggest others outside whom he or she should visit. Heads of Mission section, in consultation with NENAD in my case, then weeds out the less important and builds a programme. Commercial and City firms with an interest in one's new territory generally figure significantly, and there are occasional out-of-town visits - I think it was at this period that I was flown by helicopter up to the headquarters of JCB in the Midlands, the big construction-

machinery firm, a memorable trip because the JCB helicopter pilot who collected me was an enthusiast for RAF fighter tactics, and at one point, to demonstrate a particular manoeuvre and seeing a fellow-helicopter from the same firm near our destination, wrenched our machine sideways and swooped down at an alarming angle (no doubt out of the eye of the sun) pretending to machine-gun his colleague. I remember little else about the visit but the journey there and back is still vivid.

A dimension peculiar to an Israel posting is the Jewish community in the UK, influential to an extent which I had not fully realised. I was told early on that my accreditation to the Government of Israel gave me responsibilities also vis-à-vis the Board of Deputies of British Jews and a variety of other Jewish institutions and organisations, going well beyond the normal bilateral friendship associations. During my three weeks' briefing, and on many subsequent occasions both in Israel and London, I met leaders of the business, financial and legal world in the UK, as well as the usual crop of politicians and academics, whose interest in my patch was far deeper because of their Jewish origins and sympathies. This did not at all mean that they all saw themselves as apologists for the State of Israel, let alone the policies of the current Israeli Government. But their knowledge, and their sensitivity to the attitudes and policies of the British Government, were profound. I needed to watch my step.

One element in the final stages of preparations for a British ambassador's departure from London is "kissing hands" - the audience with The Queen, which does not in fact involve anything more than a handshake and a few minutes' gentle conversation. The ambassador-designate's spouse is also present, and the conversation is surprisingly relaxed. We emerged with an increased sense of admiration for the courage with which she handles the enormous pressures of her role, and her ability to put people at their ease. Years later we were invited to lunch at Buckingham Palace when President Herzog of Israel came to London on a visit, and it was a pleasure to see The Queen thoroughly relaxed, enjoying the company of a fellow Head of State who also happened to be an Irishman with some of their natural charm. Such events may be rare in her official life.

On 9 June 1988 we left London again - by train. For once we had an opportunity of surface travel and could avoid the increasing horrors of the airports. Crossing the Channel by the Folkestone-Boulogne route, we experienced the familiar emotions of departure as the white cliffs receded into the distance, but were cheered by the gleaming modernity and comfort of our first-class carriage in Boulogne, and by the encounter with a pleasant couple of similar tastes who shared both our compartment and a respectable evening meal at the station restaurant in the Gare de Lyon in Paris. Thereafter it was the *Stendhal* sleeper train to Milan (Evian water for cleaning one's teeth); three hours or so there for breakfast and to lay in provisions (some delicious rolls); and then another train on past stations with resonant names - Sirmio, Verona (where two gentlemen from our compartment disembarked), Padua - to Venice. 24 hours to enjoy picturesque little bridges and canal vistas, beautiful flaking facades in shades of ochre and terracotta, the passing pageant of Venetians as we

sat outside unobtrusive cafes at our beer or coffee. Then the *MV Orient Express* boat for Athens, clearly associated with the trains of the same famous name, and a curious blend of luxury and questionable taste, but our cabin was superbly comfortable and dinner was of the highest class.

At Peiraeus we were met unexpectedly by a driver from the Athens embassy to take us up to the city, a nice courtesy, and useful as he had some difficulty in explaining to various officials that I was indeed a British Ambassador to another country and merited certain special treatment (they took one look at me and said "prove it"). During our three days in Athens we had only one encounter with the official world, in the shape of a drink one evening with the Ambassador, a friendly and gentle character whom I had come across in other official contexts. Otherwise we were on our own for some relaxed tourism - the Acropolis and associated museums, Byzantine churches, wonderful meals in the Plaka and on the summit of Lycavettus (romantic views lit first by the setting sun and then by a *son-et-lumière* display), and the odd venture outside Athens including a day trip to Delphi which has always had a sort of magic for me. Then it was off again on the last leg of our journey, from Peiraeus by the *SS Vergina* to Haifa. A slightly scruffy boat, not in the first flush of youth (and there were engine problems during the voyage), but the Greek crew were competent enough and the *taverna*-style food was rather good. Time for a brief stroll during the call at Heraklion in Crete, no disembarking at Rhodes but good views from the boat of town and castle, and a nostalgic couple of hours at Limassol including a bottle of Keo beer at a waterfront table and delicious pork kebabs. And then, all too soon, it was Haifa at seven o'clock in the morning of Sunday 19 June.

Inevitably one's first few weeks as a new ambassador are rather different from those at any more junior level - more structured, for one thing. We were met by my deputy and Counsellor in the Embassy, Simon Fuller, together with the Administration Officer; normal enough, and the usual sort of friendly chat between colleagues, but with a touch of extra deference which made us in turn slightly uneasy. There is a sequence of official calls to go through, on the Foreign Ministry and at an early date on the Head of State to present credentials (in strict formal terms one cannot do any business until this has been done), on other Ministers and senior officials, on one's fellow ambassadors in order of precedence and/or importance. There are plenty of other important people whom one is bound to meet at diplomatic functions, national day parties and the like, and need not include on a list of initial courtesy calls. One needs to get to know the Embassy staff quickly, at first through some sort of welcoming party, and also the major local British institutions like the Chamber of Commerce. Office work has to be fitted into the gaps in this programme, and there is plenty of it however efficient the Counsellor may have been in holding the fort during the gap between ambassadors. The simple fact that all telegrams from a post are sent over the ambassador's name requires one, I felt, to find out pretty quickly what was happening in all the matters of any importance which we handled.

By contrast, on the private side one's life is no less complicated and chaotic as ambassador than as a newly-arrived third secretary. Our heavy baggage was not due to arrive from England for weeks. I had an official car and driver, but our newly-ordered private car did not arrive until three or four weeks after us. We had a Residence, on which some decoration work had been done in the interim, but scarcely any staff to run it (Cecile, from the Philippines, had stayed on as maid, but the cook and housekeeper whom we had engaged in England would not be arriving for several weeks). The state of the house was frankly pretty appalling, despite the new paint, with dirt and grease everywhere especially in the kitchen, so that Julian had to spend the first three weeks slaving away cleaning and scrubbing and sorting, and even checking the inventory which had not been done for years. And as it happened there were no other members of the UK-based embassy staff living at all nearby, so we had to do our own exploration of the local shops, and our own domestic catering. It was unfortunate that the Counsellor's wife had just produced a new baby and also had a toddler to cope with, so that both the Fullers were pretty busy and short of sleep; and that some of the other obvious candidates for us to turn to were either exceptionally busy, or on leave, or themselves very new.

For me, there was an easy escape from these domestic hassles into the sheer excitement of the job. Even the initial calls gave insights into the very varied character of the society into which I had been catapulted. The presentation of credentials to the President was perhaps a typical mix of elements. The short drive from the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, where I was collected by the Chief of Protocol (a splendidly lugubrious figure), to the President's residence was frustrated by a small yellow car plainly lost in the difficult one-way system and heedless of the hooting outriders and beflagged cavalcade behind. The band and the guard of honour, when we arrived, were well up to standard. President Herzog responded courteously in the same language to my carefully-prepared sentence of flowery Hebrew as I handed over the official documents of accreditation, and we then returned thankfully to English (he was born in Belfast) for a much-photographed public exchange and subsequent private chat. Despite the apparently strict rules about the length of these encounters, the President gave none of the traditional indications that the conversation should be terminated - we were having a good time talking about the Northern Ireland problem - and seemed reluctant to let me go even when the Chief of Protocol began to show visible signs of irritation. Back in the King David Hotel we were embarked on the traditional *vin d'honneur* for a few appropriate guests when all the lights failed, and we made gallant conversation in near-total darkness, nibbling trustingly at unidentifiable canapés, until the power was restored.

The blend of formality and informality, conformity and individualism, first-world sophistication interleaved with third-world failings, made for a fascinating life. As Israelis would constantly say to us, you are never bored in Israel. (Sometimes we would long for boredom.) Any conversation could develop into an argument, and most conversations sounded like arguments however amicable; on one occasion we listened

with fascination to a heated exchange in fast Hebrew between two electricians fitting a new exterior light on our terrace, wondering when one of them would pull a knife on the other, until the job was done and they revealed that they had merely been discussing which way up the plug-socket should be installed. Telephones would fail to work, equipment would break down, bureaucratic procedures would drag through impossibly illogical contortions; but the quality of scientific research, the inventiveness of agricultural innovators, sublime music and art, were world-beating.

One of the pleasures, revealed early through the process of initial calls, was dealing with my ambassadorial colleagues, many of whom were of exceptional calibre. The US ambassador was in a league of his own, needing to possess both the intimate confidence of the President of the US and an outstanding mastery of diplomatic skills to cope with a relationship of such importance. He was almost too grand to spend much time on day-to-day business, and I would be quite happy to talk to his deputy. The Egyptian was also outstandingly able and well-informed, as the only resident ambassador at that time from the Arab world and one of the longest-serving ambassadors in Tel Aviv. But there were some excellent European ambassadors as well. The German had a particularly difficult task in Israel for historical reasons, and was a charming man - at the first EU ambassadors' lunch which I attended, and which he happened to be hosting, he greeted me most effusively in fluent Japanese, having done his homework on my background (I think he had been born there), and we continued for a while in that language to the bemusement of the others present. France, Spain, Sweden, Portugal - invidious perhaps to pick out individuals, as so many were both wise and excellent company. They, and the few Commonwealth ambassadors, constituted an invaluable reinforcement of advice and support in learning about the intricacies of the Israeli scene.

By late August we had settled down enough for me to attempt an analysis, in a letter to Karin and Bill, of what being an ambassador actually meant in practice. Two broad functions, I wrote: to seek to understand the country well enough to be able to report back to London on anything in which HMG might have an interest; and to develop both his contacts with influential people and his general image in the country sufficiently well to have some credible hope of influencing the local government's policies when called on to do so. The tools of the trade were a good staff, so this meant management; and a combination of energy and ease of manner. Applied to the Israel context, this meant, first of all, constant trips up to Jerusalem (where the Israeli government is located, though almost all embassies are in Tel Aviv because of the continuing legal uncertainty over Israelis' right to control the whole city of Jerusalem). Forcing oneself on very senior people did not come easily to me. But when one secured an interview, conversation was surprisingly easy. Yitzhak Shamir, the Prime Minister, had a lovely smile which he used a lot, but was not especially forthcoming on substance. Shimon Peres, then Foreign Minister, was charming and intelligent but a bit unbending, though his approach to the broad Arab/Israel question was much closer to

ours than was that of Shamir and his Likud party. Yitzhak Rabin, then Defence Minister, seemed more reserved but somehow at the same time very warm in personality, and was forthcoming in private talk. Ariel Sharon was extreme in public and had a notorious reputation, but he too was totally charming in private and had a delightful smile. Senior officials were more down-to-earth and businesslike, but there was never any difficulty in communication.

Apart from specific issues, much of the substance of discussion with the Government at any level, and with the multitude of others whom I met less formally - academics, businessmen, political analysts, lawyers, and so on - concerned the fundamental Israel/Palestinian question. Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza (the "occupied territories") was the central issue. Should Israel negotiate with the Palestinians? if so, with which ones, given that the PLO had never formally renounced terrorism or accepted Israel's right to exist? what should be the status of Jerusalem (divided or undivided, capital just of Israel or of a Palestinian state as well)? International conference or bilateral talks? Should Israel surrender any territory to buy peace? Israelis were deeply divided on all these issues, one broad camp asserting that peace with the Palestinians and the Arab world generally could only be achieved if Israel stood firm in defence of its own security, the other arguing that true security could only be assured if Israel was willing to negotiate first. The latter argument was a little more sophisticated and had correspondingly less appeal to the electorate. One of my favourite election-time cartoons in an Israeli newspaper had Peres for Labour in front of a blackboard filled with complex mathematical equations, all no doubt correct, while Shamir's Likud blackboard read simply " $2 + 2 = 5$ " - wrong, but very easy to understand.

There were many other divisions - between Israelis of European (Ashkenazi) or Middle Eastern (Sephardi) origin; between secular (the large majority) and religious; between Tel Aviv with its cosmopolitan, city-that-never-sleeps image, and sober Jerusalem; and all the usual social divisions as well, old and young, rich and poor. There was a huge variety of national origins, from most European and Middle Eastern countries, not to mention South Africans, Ethiopians, and later in my time a huge influx of Russians; these national differences could be observed even among those actually born in Israel (the *sabra*), although here they were becoming blurred with the passage of the generations. Common to all was a high level of articulacy and commitment. And of course there were the million or so Israeli citizens of Arab origin. All of these mattered, all were now my constituents.

There was still time for private life, though. Even amid the domestic confusion, our house in the township of Ramat Gan, contiguous with Tel Aviv to the west, had some advantages as a haven of relative peace. It was near the top of a hill, but with no views from the house because of other building; essentially all on one level, but with servants' quarters on a lower level because of the slope of the hill, and a good terrace and secluded garden. After our first week I wrote a letter of vignettes -

"breakfast on the terrace; marbled tiles, a low parapet with pots of geraniums and petunias, semi-circular; steps down to the Jerusalem-stone paved area, flanked by frangipani, hibiscus, stocks; hoopoes pecking at the lawn, flights of bulbuls quiet now after their choral exploits at dawn; tea in the biggest breakfast cups, set by the Filipino maid, and brown toast in silver toast-racks; the *Jerusalem Post*; the driver waiting outside the front gates at 8 am, ready for his morning gossip as we thread through the traffic down Arlozoroff, across the Haifa road past the Diamond Exchange, down to the seafront and the Embassy opposite the Hilton." And back home later - "tea on the terrace, too hot to sit on the steps in the sun; shorts and sandals; kingfishers squabbling in the flame-of-the-forest tree, flashes of brilliant blue; a breath of air; sprinklers on the lawn; time for a shower - do we need to be tidy this evening? tie? jacket?" The house was to give us a lot of trouble over the years, and at least one official visitor of wide experience was to describe it as almost the worst ambassadorial residence he had ever seen, but there was something to be said for our terrace and the Mediterranean environment.

The same letter painted a picture of at least one scene further afield: "the hour-long drive up to Jerusalem - third time this week. Haze over the plain, the hills of Judaea a faint suggestion at the edge of vision, though a few miles distant only. New forest plantations alternate with terracing on open hillside. Sand-coloured stone, dry green scrub, blue thistles. New settlements on the hilltops; the road sweeps below, twisting snakelike up the valleys. A sight of more substantial settlement - Jerusalem? no, a Jewish suburb, deliberate expansion into former Arab land. The final sweep up to the City, solid stone all of a single pale-gold colour 'because the British insisted - the only good thing they did under the Mandate'. But this is just the western approach. For the real romance you have to come up from the east, from Jericho, over the Mount of Olives, where the full glory of the walls bursts on you, the Via Dolorosa, the Dome of the Rock, the towers and the battlements over the deep ravine of Kidron. Here you hear church bells - nowhere else."

Gradually the essentials of life began to fall into place. Our car arrived in July, an Austin Montego with no great pretensions to distinction but spacious and powerful enough for us. It was the first time we had been posted in a country where they drove on the right, so there was a new skill to learn. Chris and Joanne, cook and housekeeper, arrived in August. We began to explore: the Christian sites in Jerusalem, many of them on the Mount of Olives; the Golan Heights, where we looked down on a camel-shaped ridge (Gamal) of historic significance as the site of a very early synagogue and a Roman assault on the Jewish stronghold, but also thrilling to us because of the flights of griffon vultures swooping around the cliffs at our feet; the Sea of Galilee (Kinneret), especially the northern shore with the Mount of the Beatitudes and other sites familiar from the Gospels. To all of these we would return many times. Touring of this kind had a political purpose too, enabling us to appreciate much more clearly how the once Syrian-held Golan dominates the Galilee plain below, how close Jordanian territory is, the unreal border with Lebanon bristling with Israeli troops (unreal because at that time Israel effectively occupied a

considerable slice of southern Lebanon north of the border). Border tensions were familiar to us from Cyprus, from Korea, from Ireland, and we looked across at the UN-policed area of Kuneitra on the Golan/Syrian border, something of a ghost town, with a sense of recognition and a familiar lowering of the spirits.

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The familiarisation phase was now over, and by September 1988 we were launching into the programme of intensive official and private activity which was to continue almost unabated. That month was perhaps unusually full of variety. It began with our first senior official visitor, the Lord Chancellor Lord Mackay with his wife, with us for several days; included the Jewish New Year holiday, which we celebrated by joining the British-born Legal Adviser in the Foreign Ministry for a six-hour trek near Ein Gedi in the Judaeen desert (stiflingly hot but exciting), and later by giving a party for Embassy staff; brought us the regular group of Royal College of Defence Studies course participants from London, whom we were familiar with from earlier postings but now had to entertain formally in the Residence; gave us our first experience of Yom Kippur, the major religious event which causes Israel effectively to shut down for 24 hours; and kept us in touch with the family, with a visit from Giles and his current girl-friend, and letters from Justin (now graduated from Cambridge and employed by Unilever) brought personally by our Wimbledon neighbours the Cochranes, also visiting Israel.

The Mackay visit merits a more detailed word. They were a charming and unassuming couple, of strong Presbyterian convictions, whose equanimity remained unruffled throughout the visit despite a variety of taxing experiences. Their journey out to Israel was horrific, with flight delays and cancellations resulting in an eventual arrival time after 2 am. The time they spent in our house was not without its complications too, coinciding by ill and unavoidable chance with some maintenance work; the corridor leading to their bedroom was barely negotiable, and at one stage a plumber, drilling through its concrete floor to resolve some problem, succeeded in fusing the entire electricity supply. Fortunately they spent much of their time (as did most of our top-level visitors) staying at a hotel in Jerusalem, for the traditional round of calls on Prime Minister and Foreign Minister and lunch with the President. The opportunity to put across the British point of view at the highest level is particularly valuable when it is done so sensitively, and it gave me valuable access not only to the top politicians but also to senior members of the Israeli legal establishment, who are not only humane and liberal in their outlook, but also surprisingly influential within the Israeli body politic.

Ministerial visits are an important element of the job, not only because they represent more direct Government-to-Government contact than the humdrum business of ambassadorial contacts, but also because the visiting Minister is likely to have one eye at least open on the performance of the ambassador. The visit in February 1989 of William Waldegrave as Minister of State at the FCO mattered to me for this reason. There is

often a tendency for the FCO in London, frequently dominated by officials with an Arabist background, to be a little suspicious of the objectivity of reports from the Tel Aviv embassy. David Gore-Booth, Assistant Under-Secretary (AUS) covering the Middle East, was very much an Arabist. He and Waldegrave had both been at Eton, I think at the same time, and tended to travel together for visits of this kind. Israeli Ministers and top officials could speak for themselves - it was no part of my function to act as apologists for them (although often enough, in reporting back to London, I had to point out the logic from an Israeli perspective underpinning arguments which on the surface might seem both misguided and dangerous). But outside the formal meetings, and in constructing the programme in general, I needed to introduce an element of balance, to show off other aspects of Israel beyond the crudely political. It helped that the visitors were genuinely impressed, driving down towards Beersheva on the way to Masada, by the way in which Israeli initiative and resource had made the desert bloom - so different from almost anywhere else in the Middle East. Masada itself, where a band of determined Jews had famously made a last stand against the Roman occupation in the first century AD, had its own message about the national character. (Admittedly there were two sides to this; my respect for Waldegrave's capacity for quick thinking went up a notch when, ambushed by a rather senior British journalist when out-of-breath after the steep climb to the Masada plateau and asked to give an instant reaction, he replied at once by describing the Jewish achievement nineteen centuries earlier as "possibly just another example of misplaced stubbornness in defence of a misguided policy".) All in all the visit went pretty well, and although my credit with my London bosses was not always especially high, there were usually some on my side.

One of them was Roger Tomkys, Deputy Under-Secretary (DUS) and also an Arabist, one level senior to Gore-Booth and with a wider perspective in various ways. He came out on a short visit in November 1989, partly perhaps because I had had some differences with the Office over the wisdom of a confrontational approach to the Israeli government. I had a fairly busy programme already at the time and took him along. As well as the inevitable senior meetings in Jerusalem and meals in Tel Aviv, we had a fascinating dinner in Haifa with a mix of articulate Jewish and Arab political commentators, and had a look at the Golan (Roger had been ambassador in Syria) and the Lebanese border. By chance I was scheduled to present some football equipment to a Jewish settlement on the border, which involved making a short speech partly in Hebrew and then kicking-off for the match against the scratch Embassy team; all part of the rich tapestry of ambassadorial life. I think it created the right impression. At any rate we were agreed by the end of the visit that I was doing broadly the right things, and that there were times when too activist and critical an approach to the Israelis could be counter-productive. Perhaps it helped that Roger Tomkys had also been an Oxford classicist, though a much more distinguished one than me.

Very occasionally I was involved in a visit in the other direction. In May 1989 Prime Minister Shamir visited London, and Margaret Thatcher

decided - not, apparently, at FCO prompting - that I should be there. The substantive talks at 10 Downing Street were limited to the two Prime Ministers and one note-taker on each side; word reaching us later was that Mrs Thatcher had let Shamir have his say, apparently at some length, before advancing her own counter-arguments. At any rate the atmosphere over the subsequent dinner, with Geoffrey Howe as Foreign Secretary and me present on our side, was harmonious enough, and the issues discussed were sufficiently wide-ranging for there to be a fair measure of agreement. It felt strange at first to emerge from No 10 into the TV lights in Downing Street afterwards behind the two leading figures, and go back in afterwards for a brief post-mortem with Thatcher and Howe - but in an odd sort of way that was the normality, doing diplomatic business albeit at a high level, and the media hype was the façade. There were Howe-Shamir talks with a different supporting cast, and other ceremonial and social events, all of which added to the usefulness of the experience. - A couple of years later, recalled similarly to attend talks between two other Prime Ministers - Yitzhak Rabin and John Major - I found the atmosphere very different (as indeed was the political context), with the talks held in the Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street, no question of excluding other Ministers or ambassadors, and something much closer to a meeting of minds. But both approaches are entirely valid and useful in their own way.

Proximity of course made a difference - it was much easier to fly home from Israel than from Japan. The same applied to private visits. I could combine an official return to London (this could be for something much less major than a Prime Ministerial exchange) with some family visiting; Julian could and did return for a few days if there was good reason. One such reason was Karin and Bill's move to a smaller house in Farthinghoe over the New Year of 1989, when with unusual alacrity they accepted an offer from Julian to come and sort things out in the new place. A year later, in the spring of 1990, both they and Julian's mother came to stay with us in Tel Aviv at different times. They did the tourist trail in Jerusalem with us, Julian's mother in particular being thrilled by the experience of at last visiting the holy places; we took them down to the Dead Sea, to Galilee, to see the wild orchids in Ein Kerem by Jerusalem. Karin and Bill came with us on our annual visit to the operetta performance in Beersheva, where we were always warmly welcomed - usually Gilbert and Sullivan (a great pleasure to hear a new-immigrant Jewish psychiatrist from Romania singing *For I am an Englishman* in a splendidly fractured accent), but Offenbach this year. Karin and Bill visited one of Bill's oldest friends from school and Oxford, Walter Eytan, effectively the founder of the Israeli diplomatic service after independence in 1948 and still a powerful and knowledgeable figure in Jerusalem; and Walter joined us all for a formal dinner in Tel Aviv when we were entertaining a visiting Vice-Admiral from London and his Israeli counterparts. It was good to be able to show off not only the beauties of our local scene but also a little of our diplomatic life.

The desert fascinated us, and there were opportunities enough to go there. The Israeli Nature Reserves Authority responded generously to our

evident interest in their work, and on one occasion in June 1989 took us on a two-day trip in the Negev, mostly by jeep over rough country. The letter home afterwards is ecstatic. "We started at an ostrich farm near Gaza; went on along the Egyptian border with explanations of sand-dune management, flora and fauna, tracks in the sand and so on; visited a Nabataean site where they have just discovered the ruins of a large Byzantine church; climbed down into some prehistoric subterranean reservoirs in the middle of a more hilly area, and called on the local Ranger in his isolated hut; and arrived for the night at a sparkling new hostel with private rooms in the settlement town of Mitzpe Ramon in mid-Negev. The next day was spent bucketing around the extraordinary geology of the Makhtesh Ramon crater, with a very learned guide talking about anticlines, magmatic rocks, dykes and so on, and pausing to point out the newly-introduced herd of wild asses and occasional gazelles and ibex. 'What exactly are you doing?' say we, as he cranes perilously out of his door while driving with one hand along a precipitous track. 'Just looking for hyena-tracks.'" It was odd to come back to the formal Variety Club Ball in the Tel Aviv Hilton that evening, with Cabinet Ministers and ambassadors hosting each table, and Juliette Greco as star singer coming on around midnight.

Even more dramatic was our first trip to the Sinai desert. The British contingent of the international Sinai observer force, the MFO, flew us (in a French-piloted Hercules) from the Egyptian frontier to St Catherine's (Greek Orthodox) monastery. Time for a stroll in the local hills, and a tour of the monastery with Father Makarios. Vespers in the 6th-century chapel, solemn and candle-lit; a sight of the second-largest library of handwritten manuscripts in the world (after the Vatican), where they still complain of the theft of the *Codex Sinaiticus* for the British Museum; then, incongruously, an army-style barbecue cooked by the Fijian contingent, attended by Makarios with evident enjoyment, his tongue loosened by the whisky which our British escorts had providently brought with them. Up the next morning at 4.30 to climb by the "monks' staircase" steeply up Mount Sinai, the desert rocks full of colour in the almost-horizontal rays of the rising sun; 2500 feet of climb to the summit, brilliant views marred only by the presence of soldiers of various armies shouting and playing loud music. Lunch packs delivered by helicopter to a high shoulder of the mountain, with Bedouin villagers in traditional dress looking on in quiet perplexity. They seemed even more perplexed at the main object of the soldiers' presence, to clear the mountain of the litter discarded by thousands of tourists - why should grown men bother to pick up empty cans? But we all did, and the place looked a little better as a result. (Another stark contrast after this trip - I flew straight on to Cairo for a fortuitous meeting of ambassadors from the region chaired by William Waldegrave, which enabled me to marvel at the splendour of our ambassador's residence there, full of silken-robed and massive Egyptian servants, as well as enjoying a wander in the local bazaars and museums.)

Many of the most memorable experiences were outside the diplomatic heartland of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. I had a soft spot for Galilee, where

the Israeli Arab towns and villages afforded an extra dimension to the Israel scene. Nazareth was perhaps the largest, and had the Christian connection in addition to the active Israeli Arab political parties with offices in the town. Many outside Israel do not realise that there is a substantial Arab presence in the Knesset or parliament of Israel. Their position within the Jewish state is beset by restrictions and limitations, and (apart from the Druze community and some Bedouin) they do not serve in the Israeli army, but in many respects they have a more comfortable life than their cousins in the Palestinian territories. As an embassy we were in touch with the Christian church leaders in Galilee, many of whom - including the Archdeacon of Nazareth and later Bishop of Jerusalem, Riah abul Assal - were also very active politically. One occasion which I found especially emotional was a visit to the small community of Ibillin, with its charismatic priest, Elias Chacour. He has written graphic and heart-rending books about the history of the Arab villages in the north of Galilee at the time of Israeli independence in 1948, and about his own Christian journey. Presenting a gift from the Embassy - probably computers - to his school, I found myself so moved by him and the whole atmosphere of the place that I was near to tears. But Galilee had many Jewish communities as well, with energetic and attractive leaders, and some with their own moving tales of the dangers of attack from across the nearby Lebanese border. It was good to get out and about a bit, and many of my ambassadorial colleagues felt the same. Once I had been labouring painfully through a Hebrew-language conversation with a village mayor, up to the point when thankfully I perceived that the time for departure was approaching and I could sign the visitors' book; but the name above mine was that of the French Ambassador, with a written remark about the excellence of the Mayor's French. My last ten minutes with the Mayor were a great deal easier.

Christianity brought us other moving experiences. Christmas in particular was special in Israel, as one would expect. There were the usual embassy staff parties, mixed with Jewish *hanukkah* parties. But for us the highlight was the trip up to Jerusalem and Bethlehem on Christmas Eve. Christmas 1989 stood out. The coaches took us from St George's Cathedral in Jerusalem through the Israeli checkpoints to Bethlehem, silent and shuttered because of the Palestinian *intifada*. Israeli soldiers convoyed us to Manger Square and the Church of the Nativity, where we passed through the church and out to the roof of one of the chapels, open to the velvety sky and surrounded by bell-towers. Occasional flood-lights stabbed across the dark to illuminate here a cross, there a minaret, symbolic of the diversity of this place. The brief Anglican service was this year graced by the presence of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a diminutive figure most visible in the dark by his immense smile. He spoke too at the later service at the Cathedral back in Jerusalem, as he had earlier in the day in the Shepherds' Fields near Bethlehem, and always of peace; of the need, in the Middle East as in South Africa, to do away with oppression and pain, to release individuals and give them the right to live in their own place in freedom, to experience the joy which should be the contribution of Christians. - For the Israeli government this seemed a subversive and pro-Palestinian message, recalling the anti-Semitism of Christians through

the ages, and Tutu's call for forgiveness of enemies - even the Nazis - compounded this impression. Perhaps partly because of this, in mid-service the Israeli police announced that there was a bomb threat and cleared us all out of the cathedral, to complete the service and take communion there; leaving us all with the sense of being an embattled community surrounded by a sea of hostility.

Christmas Day service the following morning was equally remarkable. We drove up to the Crusader church of Abu Ghosh west of Jerusalem, a Benedictine house. The mass is said in French, the Gregorian chant is in Latin, the music supplied partly by a *chora*, a lute-like African instrument of 21 strings. At one of the quieter moments the *muezzin* from the neighbouring mosque could be heard and did not seem out of place. We had noticed some members of the congregation singing unusually well, and thought it a little strange when one of the lessons was read in Polish as well as French; all was made clear at the end of the service, when there was a movement toward the back of the church, and a sudden blaze of glorious singing - from members of the visiting Warsaw Philharmonic Choir, giving expression to all the joy of liberation in Eastern Europe. We and the rest of the normal congregation stood and let it wash over us, again almost with tears in our eyes. Earlier that autumn there had been a sense of wonder even in Tel Aviv, as the news from Berlin and elsewhere had come through, and the sense of history being made was with us. But in Abu Ghosh that day it came alive.

It was a period of extraordinary variety. One day I would be addressing the British Chamber of Commerce, another presenting an OBE to some resident British citizen on behalf of the Queen. We enjoyed fresh fish by the sea at Akko (Acre), picnicked with the European ambassadors on the beach at Jaffa, photographed exotic wild irises on Mount Carmel. We supported the Embassy cricket team playing at Dimona in the northern Negev, where there is a substantial Indian immigrant population, and went on the next day to climb laboriously through dramatic canyon rocks from Ein Gedi on the Dead Sea to reach sea level only after two or three hours' effort. We attended a *bar-mitzvah* at one kibbutz, and something like a harvest festival at another for the *Shavuot* holiday, the procession including everything from a small calf in a cart to a row of prams containing all the babies born during the year. Julian became President of the International Women in Tel Aviv for a year, and was much acclaimed for her energy and good sense; I was almost booed by a group of Rotary clubs in Haifa for presuming gently to criticise the actions of the Israeli army in Gaza (*plus ça change ...*). Julian rescued the President's wife at an official lunch in the Presidential residence, perceiving her discomfiture at losing a crucial button, by whipping out a safety pin and passing it unobtrusively across. Somehow we got through to the end of our second year in summer 1990, and went on UK leave. And then Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, and life became a little different.

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We returned to our post in mid-September 1990 after a late summer break, a little while after the Kuwait invasion. The Israeli government had been taking a quiet and firm line, discounting any suggestion that they might take the initiative themselves in attacking Iraq, but clearly determined to defend their own territory (if it came to that) by whatever means seemed appropriate. The Israelis never talk about their own nuclear capability but nobody doubts it, and even against Saddam Hussein it was assumed that this would have some deterrent effect. Quiet confidence, in themselves and in their US ally, seemed for the moment to be the keynote.

Against this background, the visit by Douglas Hurd, now Foreign Secretary, in October was clearly going to be important. In some ways it went quite well - his exchanges with David Levy, his Israeli counterpart and something of an unknown quantity, proved surprisingly relaxed largely because Hurd was able to operate in French (Levy spoke no English) for all but the most formal exchanges, and the discussions with Shamir and others were even better; and we were able to contrive meetings with some usefully articulate political commentators and others at social occasions. But the Palestinian leg of the visit was a disaster. The Israeli media put out a story headlined "Hurd opposes a Palestinian state", at best a considerable over-simplification of a remark made by the Foreign Secretary in a supposedly private conversation with an Israeli politician, and because of unfortunate timing (the story broke when we were all in the middle of a formal dinner hosted by Levy in Jerusalem) Palestinian anger had reached uncontrollable proportions before any sort of corrective action could be taken. A couple of weeks earlier Palestinian frustrations had been heightened when apparently indiscriminate fire by Israeli security forces on Temple Mount, in response to stone-throwing from a Palestinian crowd, had resulted in a number of deaths - the British reaction in New York was judged to be insufficiently condemnatory of Israel's action. In this volatile situation, it was perhaps not surprising that scarcely any of the laboriously-constructed Palestinian programme for Hurd (not my responsibility but that of our Jerusalem Consul-General who operates as an independent post) could be salvaged. This was a low point for me. The Embassy *could* have done better, and *might* have reduced the damage.

Fortunately there were no recriminations. Everybody seemed to accept that in the Middle East things were just like that - whatever you did or said was likely to be unpopular with one side or the other, and if you went carefully down the middle of the road with perfectly-balanced action you would probably offend both sides. And senior British politicians had other things to worry about. For a short time in November we had a grandstand seat for this spectacle, when Michael Heseltine came to stay with us for three days on a semi-official visit, just after launching what proved to be the fatal attack on Margaret Thatcher's premiership. Arriving at our house from Jordan on Sunday 4 November with his wife Anne, and unaware of the reaction to the open letter which he had sent to his constituents before leaving the UK, he telephoned his office at home and seemed literally dazed by what they told him of the public mood. "Thereafter the

succession of important calls on Israeli and Palestinian leaders (on which, commendably, he was able to concentrate and which elicited some useful comments) was punctuated by constant hounding from the British press. On his final evening, Tuesday 6th, we had to alternate between setting up the house for a top-people dinner for 18, and fielding the telephone calls from all the British media on one phone while he called back with his answers on another. A fascinating spectacle." We had a slight link with the Heseltines through Karin and Bill in Farthinghoe, who had met them occasionally as the Heseltine country house is nearby, so relations were already easy. But we had not expected that he would have so powerful an effect on our guests at dinner, who were not only impressed by his personality and grasp but found that they agreed with most of what he said on local issues. And he was extremely sympathetic to us - not only during the visit, finding time in the middle of everything else to enquire about my hopes and career expectations, but even after his return, when in the middle of the two crucial ballots on the leadership of the Conservative party he sent me a couple of letters checking that the extra telephone bill he had incurred in Tel Aviv would be sent to his office (and adding the odd personal comment on the leadership situation).

The brooding presence of Iraq did not greatly affect our lives that autumn. We entertained Robin and Ruth Dashwood from Farthinghoe in October, Robin having known the area from his time in the Army soon after the 1939-45 war. Julian as so often took on the major responsibility for conveying them around the sights, and was with them on the Mount of Olives on 8 October when the trouble erupted on Temple Mount, just across the valley from where they were standing. Tear gas, gunfire, tumult - even at a distance it became clear that driving back anywhere near the Old City might be hazardous. As it happens they had all been invited to lunch with Ivan Callan, our Consul-General. Julian telephoned Ivan to say that they might be a little delayed, and he came out in person in his armoured car to escort them back to his house - a nice little adventure for our visitors. (Armoured cars are not always a delight - my official Jaguar was all very well in the front seat, but sitting in state in the rear seat with Douglas Hurd for the long journey to or from Jerusalem required us, as two tallish men, to slouch down in a vilely uncomfortable posture, because the three or more inches of armour-plating reduced the headroom quite appallingly.) There were other expeditions. We did our usual thing at Christmas, including a Boxing-Day drive up to the Huleh nature reserve in Northern Galilee to view cormorants and pelicans, marsh harriers and spotted eagles; "warm sun on the papyrus swamps, dramatic lights on the mountain; quiet and space." But the clouds of war were gathering.

Israel was clearly a potential target for Saddam Hussein's missiles, as were the Gulf states. From the turn of the year 1990/91 we had been recommending to the FCO that we should bring our consular advice in line with that already in force in the Gulf and suggest that British citizens consider leaving. It was considered on high in London (and in Washington) that that would send the wrong signals about Israeli involvement in war preparations. On Friday 11 January that changed, and

the Americans put out what I described as their “all-US-citizens-without-strong-reason-for-staying-in-Israel-should-consider-leaving-Israel-now” notice. We took similar action on Saturday 12th, with the assistance of the BBC and local media. As expected, a majority decided to stay, and many had already left, but a substantial number needed our help in finding flights out before Monday 14 January (after which most flights ceased). Many Embassy wives and children had already gone, and one or two others went now. Julian wanted to stay, but she, and about half of the UK-based office staff who would not be needed for the central political tasks of the first days of probable war, moved down to Eilat - well away from excitement and missile range - on 13 and 14 January. Before Julian went we had a large staff dinner on 13 January for those remaining - about 22 then. Julian’s drive south after dark on the 14th was an eerie business, alone down through the Negev desert for hour after hour and, as she was only too well aware, rather close to the Jordanian border for much of the way.

On the 15th I moved out of the Ramat Gan house - Gladys the cook and Cecile had left earlier - to move in with my deputy, Tom Phillips, in his house in the separate township of Herzliya Pituach north of Tel Aviv where most staff lived. Ramat Gan was uncomfortably close to probable targets such as the Ministry of Defence - in Tel Aviv, unlike most Israeli ministries - and our house had no sort of bomb shelter, while Tom’s had a shelter and all the necessary communications links; and doubling-up made sense for other reasons, including the odd business of the “buddy system” whereby two people could check each other’s protective clothing donned in the event of chemical or biological attack. (This could indeed prove useful - on at least one occasion one of us, without noticing, got his braces hooked up on his gasmask, and discovered to his considerable discomfiture that he was unable to breathe... the other sorted him out.) The coalition attack on Iraq started in the small hours of 17 January. We were spared Iraqi retaliation for 24 hours, but the sirens went at 2 am on the 18th, followed a minute or so later by some very audible thumps to the north of us. More attacks followed in the next days.

I described our routine in a letter on 24 January. “Sirens; throw on a few clothes and bolt for the bomb shelter, as protection against blast; when there, scramble hastily into gasmask and protective clothing in case the attack is chemical [it never was]. Two radios going, one tuned to the BBC and one covering local channels, which are pretty quick at giving essential information - general location of attack, time to unmask, and so on (sometimes we hear the vital details in Hebrew or Russian or French before English). When the all-clear goes, and sometimes earlier when tipped off by radio or telephone, we emerge and check round the Embassy staff through our informal radio network for individual impressions; the Defence Attaché and his staff can usually get quick information. We then telephone the FCO Emergency Unit in London to report in, if they haven’t called us first. The next hour or two are taken up with detail-gathering while London decides what we should say to the Israelis. We then get our telephoned instructions, usually a message from Prime Minister or Foreign Secretary including sympathy at an appropriate level, expressions of

outrage, and a few careful arguments about the continuing need for Israel to restrain itself from retaliating - better by far to leave it to us and the Americans. I find somebody at top level in the Foreign Ministry to say all this to, by telephone in the middle of the night, following up perhaps in person or in the shape of a written text on the next day. We then go to bed and grab a little sleep."

After the first week it became clear that no immediate end to the Iraq hostilities was in sight, but also that the threat to us in Tel Aviv was not quite as extreme as was once feared. So a few more staff rejoined us in the Embassy, the rest returning from Eilat to the UK; and most importantly to me Julian came back to join our small bachelor establishment. This generated a lot of extra warmth in various ways. The Israelis were very appreciative of the British role in the Gulf war generally, and full of warmth to us as individuals standing by them. Other ambassadors' wives had also stayed, and Julian was able to achieve something of a public relations coup by arranging a coffee morning for ambassadors' wives in the Tel Aviv Hilton and making sure, somewhat deviously, that the media were aware of the event (before that most of the Israeli public had assumed that all diplomatic wives had rushed off home at the first alarm). In an odd sort of way it was a good time. There were no evening parties, as the missile threat was greatest after dark; and more particularly everybody around was united in the face of the common external threat, so that the usual quarrelsomeness of life in Israel disappeared. By mid-February we were even able to get out a little at weekends, to view anemones on Mount Carmel or the extraordinary variety of indigenous irises. And the number of missile strikes declined; and before long it was all over.

The presumed tribulations of being under fire earned us a week's extra leave from the authorities, and we took advantage of a bird-watching festival in Eilat from 20-27 March, run by a British-born Israeli called David Yekutieli whom Julian had come across during her week of enforced exile in January. It was the first thing of the kind that we had done, and proved a great success largely through David's expertise and ability to spot large numbers of birds in an apparently empty landscape. The festival was timed to coincide with the annual spring migration northwards from Africa up the Rift Valley to Northern Europe, when literally millions of birds are on the move. Up every morning at 6.30 to catch the dawn activity, taken in our group of 15 or so out into carefully-selected desert areas, we amassed a host of experiences: the haunting three-note call of the hoopoe lark as the early sun spread across the pools and hazy levels of the Arava valley; diving and swooping swifts picking off flying termites on the wing with uncanny accuracy only feet from where we stood; flight after flight of steppe buzzards and eagles circling in the thermals as the day warmed up, and then moving purposefully north; great flocks of storks, black and white, one group estimated at 10,000 and looking exactly like a cloud of midges in the distance; the eerie and unmistakable creaking of cranes flying overhead. We learned the thrill of spotting a desert wheatear or a Caspian tern, a Bonelli's warbler or a pomarine skua. Jeep drives up stony wadis, with pauses to check the

acacia bushes for songbirds. A hike up a rocky ravine, with the fitter and more experienced (us!) pressed into service to help the more infirm or dubious up the scrambles. A final magical evening watching Lichtenstein's sand-grouse come cautiously down to a spring at dusk and go through elaborate courtship dances after drinking their fill. The ochres and rust-colours of desert mountains and the deep blue of the sea. We drove back through the Negev, here and there bright with scarlet tulips, pink and purple rock-roses, green foliage; small groups of storks stood lazily in the moist valleys and flapped lazily away as we approached. Life was good.

But life, generally, also remained earnest. The aftermath of the Gulf War brought a sharper international focus on the need for progress on the central Arab/Israel question. James Baker, the US Secretary of State, was the main driving force, and the eventual Madrid Conference held in October/November 1991 owed much to his persistence and skill. But we all had a stream of visitors over the next few months. Douglas Hogg had replaced William Waldegrave as Minister of State at the FCO, and he made a useful three-day visit in May. His party arrived just as we were welcoming guests to a reception for Sir Yehudi Meuhin, who had been receiving a major Israeli award at a ceremony in the Knesset and had inflamed opinion by speaking strongly in favour of tolerance and a more humane approach to the Palestinians in the occupied territories. He and his wife Diana were charming guests. They were immediately followed by the Director-General of the British Council. His visit brought me an introduction to the remarkable Israeli author Amos Oz, with whom I had been in touch but never met face-to-face, and who gave a brilliant lecture on this occasion, full of political allusion. I noted his analysis of literary tragedy: "... the Shakespearian, in which the stage is littered with bodies but right eventually triumphs, and the Chekhovian, in which everybody ends up thoroughly disillusioned, despondent and gloomy, but still alive; Oz said that in the Israel/Arab conflict he would opt for a Chekhovian outcome." He also described Israelis as suffering all the torments of guilt without any of the pleasures of previous sin.

One of our preoccupations since arriving in Israel had been the state of our official residence. It had for years been suffering a form of planning blight - so clearly inadequate that a replacement needed to be found, but while the search was going on it seemed wrong to waste money on upgrading the old house. An additional factor was political; in the long run, everybody hoped, an Arab/Israel agreement would bring the long-delayed international recognition that Jerusalem was the acknowledged capital of Israel, and all embassies could move up there; was it right, while hope of a solution remained actively alive, to invest more at the Tel Aviv end? At last it was decided to bite on the bullet and spend some money on the Ramat Gan house, and this meant that we had to move out for some months. We found a suitable property to rent in Kfar Shmaryahu, adjacent to the diplomatic area of Herzliya Pituach north of Tel Aviv. An amazing place, I wrote: "... over an acre of garden, with a large swimming pool, terraces, waving palms, an avenue of money-puzzle trees ... illuminated globes on stalks ... marble patios and floors ..." One of the main bedrooms had a huge circular bed, and it gave us some pleasure

a few weeks later to allocate it to a visiting Minister of State from the Department of Trade, travelling with his wife, and to observe their reaction. We moved in at the end of May, in time to prepare for hosting the Queen's Birthday Party in June as usual. (This annual ordeal was of course familiar to us from years in various overseas posts, but acting as hosts is an extra strain. In Tel Aviv embassies tended to be judged partly by their ability to attract the most important Israelis to their national day parties. The US Embassy of course got the top score. The French did very well and produced especially good wine and food, at their fine old house in Jaffa. But we were beginning to do quite well with Cabinet Ministers, as well as the usual crop of guests such as the leading member of the Druze community who came to all the parties and was known as the cocktail Sheikh. There could be embarrassments about standing in the receiving line; one year I greeted an Israeli whose face was certainly familiar, and who from his general demeanour was evidently of some importance, but whom I could not place; the beard didn't help; he perceived my discomfiture and after a moment called my bluff by asking outright whether I remembered his name - then surrendered, and explained that he was the Minister for the Environment, rather an eminent politician with a future on whom I had actually called quite recently, and that the beard was temporary and occasioned by the recent death of a relative which required him to remain unshaven for the traditional mourning month of *sheva*.)

We had four weeks or so in the UK from late June to see Giles graduate from Cambridge (a splendid sight with his long blonde hair mingling with the rabbit-fur of the BA hood, and altogether a happy occasion), to visit parents especially Julian's mother whose health was not so good now, and to enjoy a brief spell exploring some lesser-known parts of the Lake District. We also took a week off in early October for an epic camping trip in the Sinai desert, organised and partly accompanied by David Yekutiel from Eilat: hiring a camel and its Bedouin driver, and another Bedouin as guide, we climbed rocky peaks, scrambled along wadis, swam in ice-cold pools, watched as the evening bread was baked and the meal cooked over a camp-fire, and slept fitfully on the sand as the stars wheeled overhead in the chilly night air; returning, unwashed and unkempt, to the Hilton Hotel at Taba just on the Egyptian side of the Eilat border, whose British manager had promised to show us the local prehistoric rock-drawings, we found it hard to resume our diplomatic *personae*. A memorable experience, I wrote - "the privilege of touching a different civilisation while it still survives, dignified and self-sufficient; we remain alien and incompetent in that world." But these were mere interludes in the unrelentingly hectic pace of normal diplomatic life.

By the New Year of 1992, well into the fourth year of the Israel posting, my thoughts were beginning to turn to the likelihood before too long of a move to another job; but the stream of visitors continued. The newly-appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, arrived across the flooded Jordan (though not walking on water, as some Israelis irreverently commented) on 5 January and required a programme a little different from that of the average visitor, stimulating for us in various ways. A

dozen or so very senior British judges and their spouses were with us on 6 January for dinner, two or three at least future Lord Chief Justices and all most entertaining and erudite company - as were their Israeli counterparts. The Chairman of the British Overseas Trade Board made an official visit shortly after that, and then David Gillmore, Permanent Under-Secretary at the FCO. At the same time our tenancy of the Kfar Shmaryahu mansion came to an end, unfortunately slightly before the work on the Ramat Gan residence was completed, and we had to move out briefly into a very temporary squat in a tiny seaside apartment. In the middle of these major preoccupations Julian was preoccupied with her mother's deteriorating health, and had already arranged to fly back to the UK on 10 January. The urgent summons came a few hours before the flight, and her mother died on 13 January, a few weeks before her 89th birthday.

It was all slightly unreal. And the sense of unreality was heightened by the news, in mid-March shortly after our return to Ramat Gan and all that that involved, of my almost immediate recall to London to take up a senior position in the FCO. I knew that I had earlier been considered for Tokyo as ambassador, but must have been an outside bet (though the most senior available Japanese speaker) as there was a far stronger candidate, also with Far Eastern experience, who got the job. There had been other possibilities. But the list of posts available at the right level was now very thin, and I had been told earlier that my qualifications for a top London job were not right. With the UK's European Union Presidency period due to start on 1 July 1992, and the need for all senior people to be in place by then if at all possible, it was beginning to look as though I had run out of time and would be stuck in Tel Aviv for a while longer. But after all I was to be Deputy Under-Secretary (DUS) for the Middle East and Africa, David Gillmore having expressed the view that Israel experience was as good as any other for the Middle East element of that job (others might well have disagreed). This meant membership of the various FCO boards - management, policy, personnel and so on - and a position akin to that of a main-board director in a commercial company. It was all rather exciting, and above all it meant going home and living in our own house, which we had not dared to expect.

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It was a good time to be moving on. The exhaustion of constant activity, combined with the unusual pressures of the high-tension local environment, was beginning to tell on us. A new man with new ideas would be a good thing. Tom Phillips was well in the saddle as Counsellor for the last two years or so, and had proved enormously inventive as well as highly efficient; he could be relied on to cover a gap and to see a new ambassador into the job. (As it turned out he returned to Israel as Ambassador many years later, by then covered with distinctions). I was ready for a change of focus and eager to be back at the centre of things in London, and neither of us had any regrets about leaving.

At the same time we were conscious that it had been a great privilege to be in Israel, an immensely full and stimulating time. There were so many dimensions to our life over those four years. *Frustrations* of course, over one's inability with so many to pierce the armour of intense suspicion - of the Palestinians, so that even our gardener was so often unable to achieve the crossing from Gaza to come and work at the Ramat Gan house, and no approach to the authorities had any effect; of the Christians, always suspected of trying to convert the Jews and so frequently denied normal rights within Israel; of anything which might be seen as outside pressure, so that criticism however well-founded - for example of the constant ratcheting-up of settlement construction in the West Bank - was interpreted as a demonstration of the perpetual malevolence and anti-Semitism of the outside world. Balancing this, we found immense *kindness*: from the community of British Israelis; from Julian's International Women; from a wider women's organisation in the shape of WIZO, the Women's International Zionist Organisation, whom I found rather terrifying at first but they mellowed towards me; from so many individuals, like the patriarchal figure who sent us a crate of oranges from his farms in the middle of the Gulf War. And there were the *emotional* moments, like our visits to the amazing underground candle-lit vault of Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem; like the great musical performances, from Yitzhak Perlman with the Israeli Philharmonic to British visitors such as the Sixteen; like the sudden spectacle of a field of flowers by the Dead Sea after rain, or a flight of pelicans at Bruria's kibbutz near Caesarea. Some vivid memories are just of *events*: a dinner with the Australian Ambassador attended by the leaders in Jerusalem of five or six major religions or denominations, where the ambassador chickened out and declared his intention of not asking anyone to say Grace (the Armenian Patriarch leaned across to him and growled "wise"); a buffet for forty or so on our terrace in a balmy evening, when Gladys the cook produced delicious hot sweet soufflés for all in a twinkling, and the French Ambassador was heard to comment "I would never have expected this at a British Ambassador's house"; a visit to a United Nations Day party at the UNTSO headquarters in Jerusalem, once the British High Commissioner's Residence during the Mandate and located on an elevation known for historical reasons as the Hill of Evil Counsel, where the combination of arched doorways in massive walls and flaring torches for illumination, the flunkeys and the uniforms, put us forcibly in mind of a French Foreign Legion fortification in the heady days of Beau Geste. Above all there was *conversation*, always stimulating, never boring, frequently argumentative, invariably articulate and well-informed.

It seemed a long time since those first days of learning how to behave as an ambassador. My natural inclination then had been, literally, to take a back seat; to sidle into any gathering, to sit down in a vacant place in a middle row, to remain anonymous. It was soon made clear to me that those people looking anxious at the front were waiting for the British Ambassador and expecting him to march confidently down the aisle and sit in the place of honour, and assumed that the shy individual of vaguely British appearance who had just come in was some underling. Calling at, say, the Chilean Embassy to introduce myself to the Ambassador, I had

tended to ask at the desk (without identifying myself) where his office was, and then run lightly up the stairs to find it rather than waiting soberly for a secretary to take me up in the lift. The fact that Israel is a casual society, so that open-necked shirts and no jackets are the norm for much of the year, compounded my folly and made me even less recognisable as a person of importance and weight. I would never really be that. But after four years I was learning to pretend rather better. In that trivial way, as in so many others, I would never be the same after those Israel years.

XII - MEMBER OF THE BOARD

After a few days staying with friends in Neuchatel in Switzerland, clear and cool and crisp after the intensifying heat of an Israel May, we came back to Wimbledon and were almost immediately in the thick of things again. I was under no illusion that the job as Deputy Under-Secretary of State for the Middle East and Africa would be a rest-cure. Apart from anything else, my responsibilities would cover sixty-odd countries, and I had direct personal experience of only one of them (Israel) throughout my career to date. Julian had the task of re-occupying the Murray Road house after four years of family depredations (the house had been used during our absence by all manner of relations and friends as well as our own offspring, but they had treated it very well), and of coming to terms with the altered pattern of things after her mother's death. But being in our home again, in our own country, was wonderful - and we had it essentially to ourselves, with both boys now embarked on their independent lives. With that firm basis, I could face the complexities of the job with reasonable confidence.

The shape of the FCO hierarchy was still broadly familiar, although a time of change was approaching fast. David Gillmore as PUS, while we were discussing the allocation of responsibilities at DUS level, had said that before very long he wanted to combine Middle East/Africa and Asia/Americas under one DUS covering the wider world outside the Europe/North Atlantic area. So wide a portfolio would inevitably render it impossible for the incumbent to claim much detailed knowledge of the whole range of issues in his parish. He was also keen to develop the Board into an independent strategic body, with its members having a rather looser association with specific geographical and functional areas and more emphasis on creative thinking and broad themes. But for the moment the old pattern remained. Departments reported to an Assistant Under-Secretary (AUS), two or more AUSs reported to a DUS. David Gore-Booth for the Middle East, Anthony Goodenough for Africa, would always be much more deeply involved in detail than I could be - but I should at least be able to keep abreast of developments on all major issues, and deal directly with each of the six departments from time to time. This suited me well.

A high proportion of my time, though, was spent in meetings covering a range of world-wide issues. Political questions other than day-to-day business were handled by the Policy Board, generally on the basis of papers written or commissioned by the Planning Staff. Sometimes these papers looked some way into the future, and we certainly discussed Balkan issues such as Albania and Kosovo, and clouds on the distant horizon such as Afghanistan, well before they became actual. Administrative issues - finance, staffing levels and so on - were handled by the Management Board. Senior personnel appointments were made, subject to the Foreign Secretary's and Prime Minister's approval, by the so-called "No 1 Board". There were other boards meeting less regularly, for matters such as honours, and aid policy. The three main boards were all chaired by the PUS and had the six DUSs (three geographical - the

“Political Director” overseeing Europe; Asia/Americas; and Middle East/Africa: and three functional - the Economic Director; Defence/Intelligence; and the “Chief Clerk” covering all personnel and administrative matters) as permanent members, with appropriate additions depending on the subject. So we saw a good deal of each other, and developed something of a communal feeling, fostered by a monthly sandwich lunch organised by each of us in rotation. And very gradually I came to understand rather better some of the central issues - European Union policy, the G7 economic summits, the United States, defence and intelligence - to discussion of which we were all expected to contribute, but which had never seriously come to me before.

The meat of the job, though, was overseeing our policy towards the Middle East and Africa. The dominant issue on the Middle Eastern side was Iraq, where Saddam Hussein, despite losing the war against the coalition forces led by the US and the UK, remained in power and stubbornly refused to comply with successive UN Security Council resolutions. “Regime change” was not at the time on the agenda of the Western powers, and President Bush (the first) had listened to the advice of the British Government and had decided against a final push to Baghdad in 1991. Presumably the conclusion at that time (I was still in Israel, of course, and in no way involved) had been that there was no easy exit strategy after an occupation of Iraq which would certainly have been problematical - as events a decade later showed. When I came on to the scene in May 1992 the central tasks were to force the Iraqi regime to accept credible UN inspection leading to elimination of any remaining weapons of mass destruction (WMD), in the jargon; to prevent any further Iraqi adventures in the form of attacks on neighbouring countries, by maintaining a pattern of overflights by Western aircraft at least in the areas adjacent to Iraq’s northern and southern borders; and to bring humanitarian aid to the beleaguered Iraqi population. There were other specific concerns - the problem of the Kurdish people who accounted for much of the population of Northern Iraq and spilled over into Turkey and Iran, the search for a credible Iraqi leader for a post-Saddam Iraq, and so on. The breadth and strategic importance of these issues extended beyond the direct responsibility of the Middle Eastern command within the FCO, and it had therefore been for the appropriate DUS - now me - to chair the regular daily meetings which brought together all those concerned in the Office. I also attended meetings in the Cabinet Office which brought in the Ministry of Defence and other interested departments.

The new dimension to work at this level was the interplay with the politicians who carried the ultimate responsibility and whom we were paid to advise. At more junior levels in the civil service one writes analyses and submits recommendations up the line, or adds qualifications to advice submitted from even more junior officials, often without having very much real contact with the Ministers who take the crucial decisions. In Belfast as an under-secretary I had been a good deal involved with Ministers, but not hitherto in the FCO. Now near the top of the hierarchy I was required to see much more of the Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, who as a

former diplomat himself as well as a politician of long experience saw a long way below the surface of most issues. The two Ministers of State covering my area, Douglas Hogg for the Middle East and Lady (Lynda) Chalker for Africa, were also old hands at their respective jobs. All of them listened carefully to the advice given by their officials, raised interesting points, and put in the new element of the political perspective which completed the picture. For Iraq, and one or two other Middle Eastern issues, there was also a significant interest at Prime Ministerial level, and John Major's views - usually put across by his extremely articulate and experienced FCO private secretary, Stephen Wall - imposed a strong direction on our deliberations. When very urgent decisions were required, for example when dealing with the US Administration in a crisis situation, or confronted with a sudden vote in the Security Council, I might find myself dealing late at night with Stephen Wall and Douglas Hurd by telephone before putting in a quick transatlantic call to our missions in New York or Washington. This didn't happen very often, but it was fascinating when it did.

Regular exchanges with the Americans were a feature of the Iraq portfolio. The US Embassy in London (in practice their second-in-command or Minister, the Ambassador being too grand to deal with mere officials) used me as a point of entry for important messages from the US Administration, usually new initiatives which needed careful personal exposition. Very occasionally I flew to Washington for direct talks with those concerned in the State Department and elsewhere in the US Administration, on one occasion at least rather formally as part of a delegation headed by my equivalent in the Cabinet Office and including Ministry of Defence representation; the French were there too with a delegation of similar character. Another time we and the Americans travelled to Ankara for direct exchanges with the Turks about our policing of Iraqi airspace, which necessarily involved the use of an air-base in South-East Turkey - not an easy matter for the Turks who had to cope with their sensitive Kurdish minority concentrated in that area. All this gave me the beginnings of an insight into the constraints on US foreign policy, and the qualities of the professionals who had to steer the Administration's course around them. It was a taste of genuine top-level diplomacy of a kind which I had rarely had in the past.

Generally, though, there was not much substance to my face-to-face diplomatic encounters in the London job. The social side was time-consuming, with invitations to the annual National Day party from each of the sixty-odd London embassies of countries in my area, and a few of the other major international players - it was worth going to some of these events, and useful conversations could take place, but less frequently than when in an overseas post. Ambassadors used to call on me when there were specific issues to raise or visitors to introduce, and they needed the opinion of a top official rather than a Government Minister; but most detailed work of this kind would be done at lower levels in the FCO, where the expert knowledge could be found. Questions relating to Israel were something of an exception, as there I could be presumed to have something approaching expert knowledge. The Israeli Ambassador was of

course a regular contact, and the Israelis were said to have been delighted with my appointment on the grounds that at last they had somebody who understood them heading the Middle East part of the FCO, rather than the traditional Arabist. I don't think it actually made much significant practical difference - the Israelis have always underestimated the ability of British diplomats to be objective. But I enjoyed continuing involvement with the Israeli and British Jewish community, and indeed with the Middle Eastern circuit generally, where Iraq and the Arab-Israel issue were as always the principal subjects of discussion. It was good to be able to broaden my horizons, and for example to hear the Palestinian case put on a more regular basis than I had ever been able to in Tel Aviv.

But the main focus of the work was internal and paper-oriented. There was a mass of telegrams to skim through each morning, on any issue of substance from and to anywhere in my area, and on the main current issues of general interest from elsewhere. I had to be up-to-date on all of this before the PUS's morning meeting at 10.30 every day, when it would be imprudent to be caught unbriefed. To begin with this was hard work, when almost all the African issues were unfamiliar to me, and many of the Middle Eastern ones. The flow of paper generally was considerable but manageable, much of it being for information only, and issues for my decision usually being set out with traditional Foreign Office clarity. When either of my AUSs was away travelling or on leave I had more direct involvement in filtering and approving the major recommendations put up from the various departments, and enjoyed the contact with desk officers which this brought. But the heads of all the departments were senior and experienced, and needed little guidance. The role of a DUS generally was to maintain a lofty and benevolent oversight of the key issues within his area, introducing a new and creative idea occasionally, ensuring that nothing was done which conflicted with the overall strategy of the Office and of the Government, and keeping a sharp look-out for problems ahead and wider concerns which might affect the area but escape the attention of the individual departments.

There were diversions, though. Invitations came in from the City, from the media, from think-tanks and academic institutions. Lunch with senior bankers gave an interestingly different perspective on international issues, and maybe they learned something from what I had to say. The BBC World Service has always maintained a careful distance from the British Government, though the FCO traditionally provided a substantial part of its funding, but its top people were not above an occasional gossipy encounter. Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, had a high reputation for the quality of its lectures and seminars, and talking to its senior people was always well worth while. The Commonwealth as an institution, as distinct from our relations with individual Commonwealth member countries, fell within my responsibilities, and although very little of the detailed work came to me - it was handled by a special department and by Anthony Goodenough as AUS - there were occasional meetings to attend, exchanges with officials of the Commonwealth Secretariat in Marlborough House, and visits to the Commonwealth Institute in Kensington; all of this new to me and different

from the general run of office work. And of course there were flash-backs to my past, contacts with visiting Japanese or Koreans whom I had once known, bibulous occasions involving the Irish, and so on.

None of this amounted to an excessive workload of the kind which can devastate family life. I left Wimbledon reasonably early in the mornings, and social functions sometimes encroached on the evenings, but essentially there was freedom at least at weekends and for occasional holidays. We were able to fit in an annual trip to the Alps - Austria in 1992, the Dolomites in 1993 - and regular walking outings in the UK, including each year a marvellous three-day break in the period between Christmas and the New Year to entrench still further our love for the Lake District. In 1992 it was the Scafell Arms at Rosthwaite in Borrowdale, in 1993 the Bridge at Buttermere, and the delights of the fells and valleys in winter made a deep impression on us both. There were visits to and from family and friends, and re-immersion in the community of Murray Road and our local church St John's. Karin and Bill were well established in their smaller Farthinghoe house Malthus Close, and came to us in Wimbledon sometimes, even I think for Christmas in 1993; and certainly they were with us in March 1994 when we celebrated Karin's 80th birthday with a family dinner at Beoty's Greek restaurant in St Martin's Lane. Justin at Unilever had his own accommodation in North London and later in Brighton, and Giles found somewhere to live near London Bridge Station which was convenient for his work at a press-cuttings agency (he had had to search long and hard before finding even that employment), but both kept in touch. For once we were all in the same country.

For me, though, a home posting at DUS level did not mean insulation from the world of embassies abroad or from foreign travel on official business. Part of the requirement of overseeing sixty-odd overseas posts was to visit at least the more important ones - my AUSs did even more travelling and covered the whole range of posts - and give a London perspective to the heads of mission and their staffs, as well as making my own assessment of local conditions to complement their normal reporting. Every year I also had to make my own "confidential report" on the performance of each senior ambassador/high commissioner, in effect those at my own level or above (the AUSs did the more junior ones). Clearly this was easier if I had actually seen them at work on the ground. There were not so many at this level in the Middle East and Africa - Cairo and Riyadh (our embassy in Tehran was temporarily a smaller establishment for political reasons), Lagos/Abuja, Nairobi and Pretoria/Capetown - and there were many more countries of high political interest that I wanted and needed to see. It was left almost entirely up to me to decide when and where to travel, and my travel costs were met without question. The only constraint was pressure of other business at home and the travel or holiday plans of my immediate juniors who would have to hold the fort.

The diary of countries visited, spaced through the two years of my time as DUS, is a series of highlights and exciting memories. It started in a way even before we left Israel in the spring of 1992, when I was allowed to take advantage of geographical proximity and make my number with the

Jordanians in the context of my new responsibilities. Julian came too, and we were able to add on a couple of days of sight-seeing - wonderful sites like Petra and Jerash, and some of the desert "castles" in Lawrence-of-Arabia country on the eastward road out of Amman. Even when at leisure in this way we were treated as official visitors, as the Petra visit illustrated. I was summoned back to Amman a day earlier than planned because my requested appointment with King Hussein had come up (and driven at breakneck speed from Petra to Amman by the Ambassador's driver in his Range Rover), and Julian was left alone to complete the Petra tour; not as alone as she had thought, though, because at the very end two very smooth Jordanians introduced themselves to her and revealed that they had been watching her - for her protection - throughout. Unaware of this, and in the course of a long hot day wandering among the ruins, she had naturally found the need to take cover at one point behind a rock; so her inevitable comment to the Jordanians "what, *all* the time?" was greeted not only with an affirmative but with something of a knowing smile. - Meanwhile I had been having a stimulating and thoroughly political conversation with the King, an immensely polite and cultivated individual of enormous experience, who unnervingly addressed his male interlocutors as Sir throughout the conversation. Our relationship with the Jordanians has always been slightly special, and the "access" I was given was remarkable - Crown Prince Hassan (very fast-spoken and intellectual) as well as his brother King Hussein, senior ministers and so on. Smart soldiers everywhere, but also Palestinian refugee camps housing the majority of the population whose ancestral homes lay west of the Jordan river. It was strange to be taken up to the site of biblical Mount Nebo, from which Moses saw the Promised Land before his death, and look across the Jordan valley at Jerusalem on its hills many miles away by geography, still farther politically.

South Africa clearly had to be the priority in the African half of my responsibilities, and I set up a first visit there in July 1992. Unfortunately Tony Reeve, the Ambassador, was away. But I was introduced to a wide variety of those engaged in the process of building a post-apartheid South Africa, still at that time a couple of years short of realisation. Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) was clearly the party of the future and the principal partner for de Klerk's Government in negotiation, but there was a complicating element in the shape of the Inkatha Freedom Party under the leadership of the Zulu Chief Buthelezi, bitter rivals of the ANC. There were many other factors - the trade unions, the ANC's military wing, neighbouring states combining in what became the Southern African Development Community. All had their personalities and their acronyms. I could not make any sensible contribution to a process which had occupied the attention of some extremely subtle minds inside and outside South Africa over many years. But I was able to skim over the surface of some of the issues and achieve some realisation of the sincerity and deep commitment of those engaged in it: a young but highly intelligent ANC economist destined for high office, a charming and very liberal negotiator from de Klerk's party (we had an *al fresco* lunch including crocodile steaks, fishy but delicious), members of Johannesburg's white elite talking at a local race meeting (our Consul-

General was a keen horseman) about the future so uncertain for them, were among those whom I met. I was even taken to call on Chief Buthelezi in his Zulu village of *rondavels* in Natal, armed by our thoughtful Consul in Durban with a copy of a recent biography of John Major to present to him, and received in return a purple rug woven in the Rorke's Drift Art and Craft Centre which now adorns our Cumbrian cottage - it was quite a business getting it brought back to England. And there was time for a drive out into the rolling country near Pretoria with a local ornithologist, who demonstrated his skill by mimicking the call of a particular bird - I think a small owl - which had the effect of bringing other birds of many varieties to the spot within a few minutes to find out what was going on.

It made sense to look in on a couple of other countries as part of the South Africa trip. There were alternatives, but I opted to fly by way of Namibia, where there was time for a brief visit to our High Commission and a call on a senior politician (I cannot recall whether it was the President or his deputy), and a meeting with staff in the rather charmingly Germanic capital city of Windhoek surrounded by sandy desert; and on to Luanda in Angola. That country was enjoying a temporary and fragile peace in the middle of the civil war which had been raging for years, and a major election was due later that year. I was able to call both on President dos Santos and on his rival Jonas Savimbi, leader of the rebel UNITA movement, as well as on a senior Foreign Ministry official who was more enlightening than either (and who spoke in beautifully clear Portuguese which I persuaded myself that I could understand). Presidential office and Ministry were much like their counterparts anywhere, but Savimbi was distinctly different - flanked by henchmen, all looking slightly menacing but dominated by the powerful personality of their leader, tall and with an incisive mind and manner. The most revealing part of the visit, though, was the sessions with the Ambassador, John Flynn, and his staff. They had been through some very difficult and frightening times during the civil war, and life was still a very long way from normal. But John Flynn in particular had a sort of large serenity which communicated itself to most of the Embassy staff, who included one or two very effective operators. Angola is resource-rich, though the trade in diamonds was badly hit by the civil war, and British oil companies had a considerable interest in the ongoing exploration and exploitation of offshore oil. I was very glad to have been there - a hugely difficult and important place, with British diplomats clearly coping and well respected.

On the Middle Eastern side, Saudi Arabia was the most important gap in my experience. I flew to Riyadh in November for a couple of days with Alan Munro, Ambassador and one of my predecessors as DUS. A famous Arabist himself, he was under no illusion about my ability to penetrate very far below the surface of the subtle Saudi mind. But he introduced me to the more accessible of the ruling elite, including at least one fairly senior Prince in his cool and luxurious palace, whose sophistication of manner and breadth of understanding were impressive. I must have met one or two less aristocratic officials, but cannot recall the details of any conversations. More lasting are the memories of conversations with

Embassy staff engaged with the major concerns of the defence and arms sales relationship, worth many millions to the UK, and with the oil industry whose significance was of course even higher. At Dhahran on the Persian Gulf I was briefly shown a major oil refinery, and had an interesting exchange with the local governor (also I think a Prince of the ruling family) about the glacial moves towards democracy being realised through the *majlis* or consultative assembly, at which petitions from the people could be heard. Most memorable, though, was the strangeness of the environment for British families, achieving a degree of normality within their residential compounds but obliged outside them to conform with the restrictions especially on women imposed by Saudi society. The *mutawa* or morality police - strictly the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vices - appeared at that time as figures of Orwellian terror. It was a pleasure to escape briefly across the causeway from Dhahran to the separate state of Bahrain where the atmosphere is much more liberal and our Embassy has a significantly easier life. But even the staff in Riyadh had their amusements, and I enjoyed an evening picnic up in the cooler hills some way outside the city with the Munros and several of their diplomatic staff.

My next Middle Eastern venture took a rather different form. The external relations of the European Union, operating collectively, were often handled at that time by the so-called "troika", the three member states occupying the Presidency for the current six-month spell, their predecessors and their successors. Top representatives of these three governments would meet from time to time and even travel to key parts of the world. Denmark held the Presidency in the first half of 1993, and Belgium and the UK were the other troika members. In March a Ministerial team was to visit Israel, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon to talk to the four governments about the Arab-Israel issue. The Danish Foreign Minister took the lead; the Belgians produced a Trade Minister; the British were not able on the dates in question to field either Douglas Hurd or Douglas Hogg (the relevant FCO Minister of State), and I was the next most senior relevant person. Even the journey, by executive jet, was complicated. Relations between Israel and Jordan were not too bad, and we could do Jerusalem first and Amman second without difficulty. The Amman-Damascus leg was not entirely straightforward, as I think the aircraft had to avoid certain border areas. Direct flight between Damascus and Beirut should have been simple enough, with a substantial Syrian military presence in Lebanon and relations obviously extremely close; but our aircraft was required to fly north rather than west out of Damascus, looping round to the north of Lebanon into the Mediterranean and then approaching Beirut from the west, presumably to avoid giving us any glimpse of the Syrian military dispositions along the Syria/Lebanon frontier. I cannot pretend that our conversations in any of the four capitals produced any significant results, although they were amicable enough. We were clearly seeking to find openings for movement out of the diplomatic impasse - Israel at that time had diplomatic relations with none of its three Arab neighbours to the east and north. It didn't help that the Belgian Trade Minister frankly knew very little indeed about the region or the issues, and the Dane, though level-headed and well-briefed, was not really a Middle Eastern expert. Nor

was I, but I knew much more about the subject than either of the others, and although clearly the junior member I could frequently put in a useful word. Most interesting for me was the opportunity of seeing Damascus and Beirut for the first time. Damascus calm, rather attractive and a typical Mediterranean/Arab city, with the Foreign Minister extremely fluent and apparently reasonable; Beirut a city in turmoil, where we were greeted at the airport by the British Ambassador (there was no resident Dane or Belgian) with transport decorated with gun-toting security guards and driven through streets of half-ruined mansions at breakneck speed to our first appointment. It was a pleasure to see how warmly our ambassador, the redoubtable Maeve Fort, was greeted by each of the top Lebanese from the president down, to whom she was clearly a personal friend; and fascinating too to hear the very different perspectives of Christian, Muslim and Druze in that divided city.

Also in March 1993 I responded to a suggestion by John Coles, DUS for Asia and the Americas (and later PUS), who was keen that the major governments in his area should have discussions at top official level on a wider range of subjects than hitherto. India and Japan were the prime candidates, and both had significant interests in the Middle East and Africa. The Tokyo element of the trip was of course full of nostalgia. I stayed a couple of nights with Adrian Thorpe, Minister in our embassy and a friend since the 1960s, and was accompanied on some of my calls by Rosalind Marsden, also a friend and Japanologist of long standing and at that time Head of Chancery. Rosalind pulled something of a fast one on me by setting up an hour-long discussion in Japanese about the Middle East with a group of friendly Diet Members (MPs), something of an ordeal as I had not used my Japanese to that extent for a dozen years - but I enjoyed the challenge. The talks in the Foreign Ministry were as always in English and unremarkable, but I very much enjoyed coming back and meeting some old friends. - Delhi by contrast was completely new to me, and totally fascinating. I stayed with our High Commissioner, Nick Fenn, whom I had known for years but met most frequently when he was Ambassador in Dublin during the latter part of my Belfast years. The Delhi Residence is very grand, with tall, dignified, uniformed flunkies lined up to greet me, and stately apartments, and bottles of purified water for teeth-cleaning. The two very senior officials whom I met, at the level one below the professional head of the Ministry, were of the highest calibre and conversation with them was an intellectual pleasure. One of them had the sort of Oxford mind combined with the Indian love of words which transforms a conversation into a game of verbal tennis, and I think we both enjoyed it - he later sent me a book about Mughal architecture, and suggested that we maintain contact when he next came to London (it never quite worked out, alas). He covered Africa, and his counterpart covered what the Indians for understandable geographical reasons call the Near West. As I flew back over the region, with the white wall of the Himalayas a distant suggestion on the horizon to the north, I felt that it had been an excellent trip, even if no great new policy advances had been achieved.

In April 1993 Julian and I travelled together for the first time on an official trip from London, to Kenya and Ethiopia. We were looked after in Nairobi by Kieran Prendergast, our High Commissioner, and his wife Joan, who kindly saw us through the mildly disorientating experience of arriving at the considerable altitude of Nairobi direct from London. The Nairobi that we saw had parkland and green trees, but we gathered that it was also a place of violence; and certainly President Moi, on whom I called with Kieran, had a history of ruthlessness in achieving his political ambitions which was only imperfectly concealed by the presidential manner. Other meetings revealed the inter-tribal tensions which bedevilled Kenyan politics and complicated the delivery of international aid, so desperately required. But we also saw a tea plantation and a flower exporting enterprise, and took a few days off together to see game and exotic birds in the Masai Mara and by Lake Naivasha, our first experience of African safari tourism - superb scenery, rolling grasslands and grazing herds and immense views in the Mara, lovebirds in the trees and giraffes browsing by Naivasha. Addis Ababa too had the benefits of altitude and a superb British Embassy compound, large enough to boast its own 9-hole golf course and a riding stable, sitting incongruously in a city where ordinary Ethiopians have to combat disease and famine and widespread poverty - Julian was taken to, and much moved by, a camp where the plight in particular of the children was distressingly evident. But the President, Meles Zenawi, was politically astute and rather impressive, and the many resident representatives of international aid organisations were all very active in the country. We would happily have stayed longer to explore what is clearly a dramatic and beautiful country with a long independent history.

By chance I was back in the region in May for the celebration of Eritrean independence from Ethiopia, the final stage to what had been a lengthy and bloody civil war. HMG's official representative was Lady Trumpington, a powerful lady who in her youth had worked at the Bletchley decoding establishment in the 1939-45 war; and I was the FCO part of a small supporting delegation. There was a brief meeting with President Afwerki in the capital Asmara, an attractive city showing clear signs of its Italian colonial past, and then a long ceremony with all the appropriate display of troops marching past, carnival atmosphere, speeches and flags being hauled down and up. Exciting in a way to be present at the birth of a new state.

In June it was the turn of North Africa, and the Maghreb - Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Mediterranean countries with an obvious link to Europe, and part of the original Islamic empire, they counted as Middle East rather than Africa, but I knew very little of them except that they all, and Morocco in particular, had had significant Jewish communities (Morocco still had). I needed to use my French more in those three capitals than ever previously. They each had their special characteristics. Rabat I found more like a charming village of winding streets, a little like some parts of southern Spain, and very different from the commercial capital Casablanca where the biggest mosque in Islam was being constructed. Allan Ramsay, the Ambassador, took me on a drive also to

Volubilis, a late Roman city in a desert area east and north of Rabat, with great quantities of columns in wide avenues but little in the way of identifiable structures. Algiers was much more of a city, and a tense place, with Christopher Battiscombe (old New College friend) and his embassy restricted in their movements by the need for security against a constant and worrying threat, but contriving a pleasant enough life - it was difficult to do much business there and the prospects were uncertain, despite the country's considerable hydrocarbon resources in which Britain had a major interest. The historic link with France was especially evident there. Tunis was much more relaxed, and Michael Tait, another New College man two or three years ahead of me, had a historic palace as his Residence, beautiful thick white-painted walls and a lovely garden. Access to senior Tunisians was a lot easier too. The importance of the region as a whole impressed me, because of its proximity and political volatility as well as its resources - at the other end of Europe it is easy for us to overlook the Maghreb, except as rather a charming tourist destination full of historic sites.

The remaining corner of Africa which I had not touched was the West, specifically Nigeria, most populous state of them all and a constant worry, and Ghana. I went there in September 1993. Ghana was seen as something of a success story among African states, with Kwame Nkrumah and his military successors presiding over a relatively efficient and well-organised economy. Access to the current President was not easy, but David Walker took me to call on some of his principal advisers and on some of those engaged in the British aid effort. The overall impression was of a country which had moved beyond the first stages of growth into a period of consolidation, reassuringly for those who were providing the advice and support. - It was a short visit, though, and my main focus was on Nigeria. Lagos is a large and chaotic city with a crime problem, and life for our High Commission staff was not easy. It was further complicated by the fairly recent formal designation of Abuja, more than three hundred miles north-east of Lagos, as the new federal capital. This had been on the cards for some time, but still required a major building project to create a new High Commission, at a time when all construction workers were also engaged on work for the Nigerian Government's own move. Christopher MacRae, our very senior and experienced High Commissioner, had to operate in both cities and was an admirable host and guide. But Nigeria's problems were immense, with a population divided by race and religion as well as huge distances, and oil wealth only imperfectly harnessed for the good of the national people and economy. One moment I recall with particular clarity was a lunch with a small group of Nigerian businessmen, who spoke fluently and persuasively of their problems and were by no means short of creative ideas, but remained pessimistic about Nigeria's politicians, even to the point of suggesting to me that it would all be a good deal better if the Brits came back and took over again ... That was not meant to be taken too seriously, I was sure. The senior politicians and military figures I met were impressive enough although some of them did not seem especially flexible. I had time for something of a driving tour north of Abuja, to the cities of Kaduna and Kano - the latter with rather splendidly massive mud walls surrounding a thronged

and bustling centre, with an Emir's Palace where I was received to the accompaniment of a line of ululating women. My first ululation. But a Nigerian posting is not everybody's cup of tea. The malaria problem alone - there had been a recent death among the High Commission staff, and the Abuja office had a fully-equipped clinic with a British doctor - is enough to deter most.

The final trip in this busy year was to Yemen in November. My predecessor as DUS had told me that there were two places above all that he had enjoyed on his travels - the Okavango Delta in Southern Africa (which I never reached), and Sana'a in Yemen. There were reasons for going - kidnapping and internal conflict were a constant threat, and it had a strategic position at the foot of the Red Sea and as a neighbour of Saudi Arabia. Julian came too, and we flew first to Aden, capital of what had been the People's Republic of [South] Yemen and now a part of the united country. Formerly a British colony, Aden still had some of the hallmarks of Britishness, and indeed the Royal Yacht Britannia was in port when we arrived - we went on board, and witnessed the Royal Marine band "beating the Retreat" on the quayside, always an emotional spectacle. Douglas Gordon, the Ambassador, was there to meet us with his wife, but almost all his staff operated from Sana'a in the north, and after one night we drove up there. It was a dramatic journey of several hours through some steep country, the hillsides covered with bushes of *qat* or *khat*, whose leaves are chewed especially by Yemeni men as a stimulant drug. Sana'a, when we reached it, is indeed a remarkable city, of great age. Tall buildings of some four or five stories, built apparently of mud with decorative and delicate patterns of white, form the streets of the older areas. Yemeni men tended to walk around with a large scimitar-like curved dagger thrust through the sash at their waists, perhaps illustrative of the underlying violence of the population. The capital itself was relatively safe at that time, but rebel gangs often based in the eastern part of Yemen were able to operate with impunity, and kidnapping was one of their sports - foreign diplomats were not exempt. President Ali Abdallah Saleh enjoyed the support of the army and has contrived to remain in power for many years, and seemed a sophisticated and clear-headed individual, but his position at that time was not unquestioned and there were other powerful factions. Civil war broke out again in the following year, and even during our visit there were some mild alarms, but on the whole it was an easy and enjoyable visit although it is difficult to say that we did a great deal of real business - the atmosphere was far too volatile.

It may not seem so from this account, but much more of my time was spent in London than on travels of this kind. But the London experiences are difficult to disentangle in the memory. Grand events came now and then - Buckingham Palace garden parties and diplomatic receptions, where we were on parade to entertain the ambassadors and others; the Foreign Secretary's own annual banquet for London ambassadors, on one occasion held in the Durbar Court in the old India Office section of the FCO, marble-floored and glass-roofed and with an appallingly bad sound system rendering the speeches unintelligible (for another such occasion

we were sitting under the dinosaurs in the Natural History Museum, vaguely appropriate, and my neighbour was the very ancient Lithuanian Ambassador who had been in his London embassy since the time many decades ago when the Russians took over his country so he was in a sense the longest-serving head of mission). DUSs and their spouses turned up at the Whitehall door of the FCO on Remembrance Sunday when the Queen came to lay a wreath at the Cenotaph just outside, in case she required assistance, and Julian heard her say as she came in after a particularly cold ceremony "it's the knees, you know". There was a breakfast party with the US Ambassador at his grand residence for a visiting delegation, a two-day academic and professional seminar on the future of the Middle East part of which I had to chair, international discussion groups at Wilton Park (the FCO conference centre in Sussex) and Ditchley Park near Oxford, an evening at the theatre with the Lebanese. The Saudi Ambassador gave me dinner on one occasion in his grand apartment, and the main course was a lamb roasted whole and skewered somehow to one of the walls of the dining-room. Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, clearly destined for the top of the ANC and high office even at that time, came to London and I gave him a small private lunch with a couple of advisers on each side. Lord Weidenfeld would include me among those gathered at his Chelsea flat to meet distinguished visiting Israeli politicians. I even had to go up to Birmingham to host an evening reception for delegates to an international aid conference, in place of Lady Chalker who was suddenly unable to attend. It was a kaleidoscope of fleeting impressions.

A couple of general reflections. First - the number and variety of the issues which British diplomats have, or choose, to handle. Departments were required at one point to identify the number of crises in which they were currently involved, "crisis" being defined in some fairly restrictive way. Not every part of the world could boast a crisis. But one of my departments, covering the whole central belt of Africa from the Sahara down to the Southern Africa cone, had *sixteen* - some well-documented like Somalia and Congo and Angola, but all of them involving death and destruction and panic. It is legitimate to ask whether we really had to become involved, apart from protecting British citizens and investments in the areas affected; but so long as we had diplomatic missions in the country (and many serious advanced countries had far fewer overseas missions than we did), and given our historic record, it was actually quite difficult to turn our back on the problems. And sometimes we really were able to help, giving sensible advice to people in the country in a position to use it effectively, facilitating the delivery of aid to the right quarter, working together with representatives of international organisations or other governments. It was not just our people on the ground who had a hard time of it. Bringing all the strings together at the London end, and securing a political decision where necessary to take some significant step forward, meant very hard and concentrated work for a few key individuals in the Office. I came to have a great respect for their abilities and dedication.

The other general thought relates to the domestic British political background. Whitehall and Westminster have always been a maelstrom of frenetic activity. 1992-94 were no exception. John Major's government had to hold together a Conservative party where deep divisions were becoming increasingly obvious after many years in power. Policy towards Europe was extremely difficult and tempers were short. Black Wednesday in September 1992, when the UK was forced to take the pound sterling out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM), was the most dramatic moment. Most of us at the top of the FCO were not at all directly involved, but the tensions and passions were obvious. Douglas Hurd always seemed to be a rock of good sense and balance, especially on anything to do with foreign affairs, but his experience generally was wide and his understanding profound. I had a high respect too for John Major, who had the reputation in the Office of being an admirable and effective chairman of international councils, and whom I always found personally charming and courteous. But the strains were enormous. It was a privilege, for a while, to be close enough to the centre of things in London to see a bit of how it was all managed.

Always in the back of my mind, though, was the thought that this was only my penultimate job - I had to fit in a final overseas posting before reaching 60 in 1999. The options had narrowed. Of the ten or so top jobs I would never have been a credible candidate for more than one - Tokyo. But although I had the language and some of the right experience, I did not have any economic credentials. The days when somebody with the right qualifications and at the end of his career would have the best chance of a top job were passing anyway - younger people were getting the plums ahead of their seniors. In any event, I was far from sure that I wanted a plum. Julian certainly would have hated going back to Tokyo as the ambassador's wife, much as she had enjoyed some things about our time in Japan before - it was an impossible job with enormous strains, for which neither of us was really fitted. The decisive factor was my far-from-stellar performance as a DUS. I had enjoyed it, but not come forward with new ideas or insights, or pushed myself in discussion of wider issues. I was an efficient-enough operator - perhaps even a highly-efficient one - but not really a top person.

Not many second-rank or near-first-rank jobs were coming up in the right time-frame. For those that were, my claim would be based more on general ability and record rather than any specific expertise. But fortunately the matter was taken out of my hands. Andrew Wood, my colleague on the Board as Chief Clerk and head of the FCO Administration, came to me one day at the beginning of 1994 with a difficult message to put across, which he did very well. He was required to say that I was not considered the right man to be our next ambassador to Japan, which most people assumed was my ultimate ambition if not destiny. But the Office wanted to find something attractive for me. Would I consider Norway? It was a sideways rather than an upwards move, but with Norway's candidature for membership of the European Union later that year, as well as the NATO and oil-industry dimensions of the job, it was not without interest. And I had in the past spoken on more than one occasion of

interest in a Scandinavian posting. What is more, he had to say, there was nothing else obviously coming up for the next several months, and a move now would give me about the right spell - four to five years - in the last job before retirement. I put Andrew out of his misery, and said yes at once.

XIII - NORWAY

The process of briefing for my next and final job was familiar, from the pre-Israel experience, and in many ways simpler. There was much less political tension, and rather more substance on the commercial side. Most of the business of acquiring the language could safely be left until we arrived in Oslo, as few Norwegians with whom I would be dealing had less than perfect English, and with some knowledge of Swedish in my family past I could be expected to cope with the written language reasonably soon. Few moments of the between-jobs spell stand out in the memory, perhaps because it was all rather low-key. There was one splendid dinner at the Norwegian Club near Trafalgar Square on 17 May, the Norwegian national day, when Aase Kleveland (Norwegian Minister of Culture, and a famous singer and personality in her own right) was guest of honour and spoke in amazingly comprehensible Norwegian, and Wenche Foss (an even more famous Norwegian actress already of considerable age) gave a bravura performance of which I understood few actual words but the sense of her stories and anecdotes came across with remarkable clarity nevertheless. Even more exciting was my trip by helicopter around fish-farms on the west coast of Scotland, arranged by the commercial concern responsible to show me how vital it was for them and the indigenous population to remain competitive against the supposedly unfair competition from Norway; the Highlands were magnificent from the air, and we even diverted slightly to fly exactly over the summit ridge of the Cuillins in Skye, vertiginous even from that perspective. It was all over soon enough, the family and other farewells completed, and on 3 June 1994 we drove our new Volvo to Harwich and boarded the Gothenburg ferry, thence to drive up the west coast of Sweden and the east coast of the Oslofjord to our new home in Oslo.

Arrival at the Embassy, in the evening of Saturday 4 June, was a little unreal. Passing through high iron gates and negotiating the sweeping drive to an impressive portico where a butler in pinstripes was standing to greet us - it was all so far removed from any previous experience. So was the house. On three floors, with the grand reception rooms on the first floor (kitchens and so on being at ground level), and bedrooms and our own private sitting-room a total of 54 steps up on the second floor, it was a small palace. Enormous lawns swept down towards Oslofjord, with the intervening main road and buildings largely screened behind the fine trees of our garden. Nothing seemed to be on a human scale. Cosiness might be hard to create. But it was good to be surrounded at once by a friendly staff from the north-east of England. Michael Howdon, whom we had appointed as chef, was an old friend from Osmotherley who had visited us in Tel Aviv; Jim the driver was a Geordie and became a good friend too; and Isabel, senior maid and eventually housekeeper, was from Northumberland and proved to be a tower of strength. Even Ian the butler was apparently a Geordie, though he was not to stay with us for all that long.

From Monday 6 June we were into the initial routine; meeting the Embassy office staff, initial calls at the Foreign Ministry, and already on 7

June the presentation of credentials to the King. As always my letter home told the tale - "Donned morning-coat, and taken by the Marshal of the Court in an ancient Packard (bought by King Olav, second-hand, in 1942 for his own use)... We drove past a double rank of Toytown-like soldiers - very tall, plumes on their caps, presenting arms and with two trumpeters blowing a fanfare, but no inspection or anthems - and climbed out at the palace door. An ancient, bemedalled retainer in the vestibule; a uniformed Air Force equerry on the first half-landing; the Chamberlain, a distinguished gentleman in morning-coat, standing formally in front of a single rank of even taller soldiers on the first-floor landing. Into the Bird Room, a chamber with landscape frescoes and be-leafed trellis ornament all round ... Four senior courtiers in another formal row, hands ready to shake, an easy smile and a few words but not an inch of movement from their fixed positions ... At the stroke of 11 I was ushered in for my tête-à-tête. I went through the appropriate sequence of bows and handshake, and said a sentence or two in halting Norwegian, mentioning greetings from the Queen. 'I saw her yesterday' said the King with a smile (he had just returned from the D-day ceremonies)." And then it all turned into a normal sort of conversation, with an element of reminiscence as we had been at Oxford at the same time in the 1960s, and had rather different recollections about the respective achievements of the Balliol and New College eights in which we had rowed.

The sequence of calls continued smoothly and without tension. I enjoyed my first meeting with the Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, whom I described as "a forceful and clear-thinking lady, but not (at least in private conversation) dominating in a Thatcherite way, and with a genuine sensitivity for social and environmental issues in particular". Other Ministers of particular relevance to our interests - Energy, Environment, Fisheries - came early on the list. In the Foreign Ministry I was able to do some early business on the Middle East with the responsible junior Minister, Jan Egeland, who made something of a speciality of conflict resolution (he later moved on to the United Nations) and once told me that at any one time Norway could have become involved with any one of a hundred different conflicts - at that time he had chosen to concentrate on five. Defence and strategic questions were to be a constantly important part of my job, and in the first week we found ourselves at a formal dinner with the departing NATO commander for the area, a British four-star general; indeed I turned out to be the senior guest and required to make the traditional *takk-for-maten* thank-you speech. At the end of June his flag was formally hauled down at the NATO HQ at Kolsås near Oslo, and some NATO restructuring thereafter meant that the four-star appointment continued to be held by a British officer - generally an Air Chief Marshal - but working out of High Wycombe in England, with his three-star Norwegian deputy based in Stavanger.

Even in the first month we were not spared official visitors. Indeed our first came in the first week, but this was no hardship - Tom Richardson, at Oxford in our time and known to us both, had fairly recently become the Assistant Under-Secretary in the FCO for Europe, and took the opportunity to come to Oslo with his wife to stay for a couple of nights. As well as the

inevitable official calls and discussions, we were able to fit in a private dinner à quatre in an old-style restaurant with a magnificent view over Oslo, Frognerseier (on the edge of the national-park type area of Nordmarka which extends for many roadless miles north of Oslo and offers wonderful opportunities for skiing, walking and cycling - it was to be one of our most constant enjoyments). Wonderful clear evening light, I wrote; pike for the ladies, elk for the men, both delicious. - Slightly less relaxed, but still enjoyable in its way, was the visit in the following week by John Gummer, British Minister for the Environment, to attend an international meeting. His initial arrival in the house came a few hours after the arrival of our heavy baggage, so the hall was full of boxes and packages awaiting dispersal about the house. The next day his return from the meeting coincided, even more unfortunately, with the collapse of our butler Ian, who was being carried out of the front door feet-first as the Councillors Against Acid Rain and the press arrived to meet John Gummer ... We overheard his private secretary muttering to him "why is it that you always have this effect on staff?". But we all got on well together, and our traditional schooling enabled us to keep our end up in breakfast-time conversation on abstruse theological matters.

The following day, Wednesday, found me in Lillehammer north of Oslo occupying the British seat at a European (EUREKA) science and technology conference after our London representative had had to leave for a House of Commons vote, and benefiting from some traditional entertainment: "a horse-and-trap ride to the Maihaugen folk village for dinner, with the King as chief guest, reindeer steak and Norwegian rhubarb stewed in birch sap, and menu hand-written on birch-bark. Driven back to Oslo afterwards, leaving at 11.10 when dusk was falling and arriving in dawn light at 0130, although it hadn't really been dark in between. Julian was still unpacking ..." And on the Thursday we had to host the Queen's Birthday Party - for two hours conscious of nothing except the stream of hands to shake, the continuous effort to identify those of importance and to remember those whom we had actually met. It seemed to go well. We spent an hour afterwards in the kitchen with the Residence staff and helpers, eating left-overs and enjoying the family atmosphere.

One of the reasons for the intensity of our first month in Oslo was the need to be well acclimatised before the King's State Visit to the UK at the beginning of July. It is traditional for ambassadors to return to their own country for such occasions, formally as a member of the suite accompanying the visiting head of state. No actual physical accompaniment on this occasion, as King Harald planned naturally to cross the North Sea on his own Royal Yacht, the *Norge*. But we were present at all the state occasions, which unusually took place in Scotland because of the historic connection with Norway. (Much of Scotland had at one time been within the Norwegian sphere of influence, and Orkney and Shetland were "pledged" to the Scottish crown only in 1468/9 as part of the dowry of Margaret, Norwegian bride of James III.) Holyrood House in Edinburgh is much less well equipped than Buckingham Palace for such occasions, having apparently only four guest bedrooms, so most of the Norwegian

and British suites had to stay at the Royal Terrace hotel nearby. Our first arrival at Holyrood, for briefing, was in a Land-Rover driven from the hotel by a sergeant-footman wearing white tie and court tailcoat, somehow typical of the visit. But the most unusual story was of the fire-alarm at the hotel in the early hours of the first morning (before the *Norge* arrived) which precipitated us all into the roadway outside in a chilly Scottish dawn, clad in whatever we could snatch up - a respectable ankle-length Japanese *yukata* for me, the Queen's Private Secretary in a maroon dressing-gown with embroidered gold dragons, but the Lord Steward in a hotel bathrobe, bare feet and apparently no other garment, and the Norwegian Ambassador's wife in a distinctly skimpy yellow sleeveless dress. The Crown Equerry arrived a little later, fully dressed and carrying briefcase and camera, and proceeded to photograph the more arresting members of the party for the Queen's subsequent delectation. She was thrilled ...

But, as I wrote to Karin and Bill, "there was pomp and circumstance as well. Royal Salutes galore, from Highland infantry companies, from Household Cavalry, from the guns on Edinburgh Castle (the last seeming alarmingly close as we passed along Princes Street, and startling some of the horses). Two carriage processions on successive days, with the clinking of cavalry accoutrements, scarlet-clad grooms telling one when to doff one's top hat, all of us feeling like Royalty and waving graciously to the crowds; fitful sunlight on the grey stone of New Town and Old Town, pipe bands at the major intersections, flags, bunting, sounds and smells. The Queen's Company of Archers, with eagles' feathers in their hats and carrying longbows, outside the Palace; the Constables of Holyroodhouse, marshalled by the ascetic-looking Bailie in ermine, had black-cock feathers in their hats and carried long truncheons, and paraded inside the doors. The State Banquet had us all seated at one immensely long table - 80 or so? - with the gold dishes and gold sculptured salt-cellars beautifully aligned all the way along, and towering flower-arrangements in yellows and whites and greens."

There was not much political business, although I was able to introduce the Norwegian Foreign Minister to John Major at the first reception. But the programme had many elements, from lunch with the Lord Provost of Edinburgh to the Glasgow shipyard visit, from the National Museum in Edinburgh to the little wind-swept graveyard in Orkney where the King laid a wreath for Norwegian war dead. The Orkney day altogether was good, although cloud and poor visibility caused us to circle Kirkwall airfield for an hour and nearly aborted the visit (the Queen's Flight aircraft were running out of fuel and time, and one of them had to go over to Northern Ireland to fetch Prince Charles), and we were impressed by St Magnus's Cathedral. Throughout, the atmosphere was relaxed, particularly perhaps at the Norwegian "return banquet" on the *Norge*; space for only 40 to dine at five tables, three simple but beautifully-presented courses, friendly mingling before and after on an awning-covered deck. I found it a little odd, as one's conversational group breaks up, to look around and see that all the other groups have a Royal in them, and that one's own wife is one of three in an animated and probably irreverent group talking to the

Queen. Speeches limited to two short toasts proposed by the two Monarchs to each other: "those are the best speeches I've heard for a long time" said the Duke of Edinburgh audibly, when both were disposed of in under a minute.

A great deal was crammed into those three days. But then it was back to Norway and business for me, while Julian moved to Wimbledon for two extra weeks to help with the arrangements for the wedding there of her younger sister Ursula. Scandinavians in July are essentially on holiday, taking advantage of the short summer, and I had time to explore a little, locally in Oslo, where I took to my bicycle to investigate the delights of the Bygdøy peninsula relatively close to our house, with its country atmosphere and secluded beaches for swimming - it was a hot period; and farther afield, including one sally into the Telemark region on the advice of a chance contact to climb Gaustatoppen, the highest peak in southern Norway at 1880 metres odd (6200 feet), a lovely pyramid with an exposed summit ridge and spectacular views. One surprising trip, after Julian's return, was south along the western coast of the Oslofjord to the town of Arendal to attend a wedding. Andrew Preston, son of Tom and Junko Preston whose own wedding we had attended in Tokyo in 1966 (Tom was an Embassy colleague), had settled in Norway and was marrying a Norwegian girl, and we qualified as almost Preston family members by reason of length of acquaintance. It was a splendid occasion - bilingual church service; dinner in the Town Hall (Rådhus), the second largest wooden structure in Norway, ending after two hours of dancing at 2 am (my neighbour's husband, now 90, had been Mayor of Narvik in 1940 when the Germans invaded); out in motor-boats the next day on the fjord, to swim a little and then picnic off shrimps and white wine near the family's summer-house. An idyllic place on a hot summer's day.

By the second half of August the pace was picking up again. Our most exciting venture was to Bodø in north Norway at the invitation of Arne Solli, then the three-star general commanding the area for NATO but shortly to be promoted to become Chief of Defence. Come and see North Norway, he said; come and see my HQ; but above all, come fishing. It turned out that this last invitation was to a cruise on a converted fishing-boat now owned by the Home Guard and crewed by an assortment of generals, admirals, brigadiers, naval captains and so on, all looking splendidly piratical in sweaters and various headgear. Superb views of the Lofoten Islands and landwards to distant glaciers - sea eagles, isolated fishing communities on small islands - and eventually, having traced a shoal of cod (by echo-sounder, which seemed a shade unfair), stopping the engines and just hauling them aboard on unbaited lines to be gutted and filleted by a particularly bloodthirsty-looking Viking with a large knife, flinging the entrails over his shoulder into the sea (they were generally fielded by the waiting gulls) with a practised flick. The cod were delicious, freshly boiled and accompanied by red wine. - Our hosts looked very different the next day in their HQ, resplendent in uniform with medals and stars; and the HQ itself, inside a hollowed-out mountain, was impressively well equipped.

The diary was filled with variety. A few days after the Bodø trip I was in Stavanger with a British energy minister, Tim Eggar, for the annual trade jamboree run in alternate years in Scotland and Norway by the offshore supplies industry. Many million pounds' worth of potential business, and a significant political dimension also with issues such as taxation and jurisdictional disputes to be debated. In September it was up north again to Tromsø for a meeting of the Barents Council, comprising foreign ministers from the Nordic countries and Russia, with ambassadors from so-called observer countries - the US, Canada, Japan, and some of the major European countries including the UK. A range of environmental, social and economic issues were discussed covering the whole Arctic region, already being seen as one of the remaining areas of undeveloped potential. It was fascinating too to see Tromsø again (I had been there briefly as a hitch-hiking student in 1960) and to begin forming an impression of life in the far north, where the long dark nights and days foster a particular sense of community, and where the looming presence of North Norway's Russian neighbours - Archangelsk is closer than Oslo - was gradually coming to be seen as more of an opportunity and less of the threat that it had been in Soviet days. In October we were in Bergen to call on the local dignitaries and get the western-Norway perspective, including latent resentment of Oslo's role as capital, a strong emphasis on the historical link with Britain, and considerable scepticism about the wisdom of Norway's joining the EU. One of our Bergen days included a remarkable ceremony at Matre, a small village just south of Sognefjord, for the 50th anniversary of one of the main wartime resistance groups which had strong support from the UK; King Harald was there too (I sat next to him at lunch and we had a splendidly irreverent conversation), and one of the events was a performance of the "Hall of the Mountain King" movement from Grieg's *Peer Gynt*, actually held inside the mountain.

There was plenty going on back in Oslo too. We were soon being required to host dinners, for high-level visiting commercial delegations, for the Parliamentary Select Committee on transport (viewing the Oslo car-toll system analogous to what became London's congestion charge), for the Oslo Rugby Club. Michael the chef distinguished himself in all of them especially the last, with a succession of themed courses ending with a magnificent dessert where each portion was a representation of the Welsh flag (Julian helped to cut out the red dragons, a fiddly job, in marzipan). Eminent visitors passed through, some staying with us: Ann Widdecombe, who arrived with the first snow of the winter on 3 October; Neil Kinnock, whose company we much enjoyed, and who turned out to have a magnificent deep bass voice shown to advantage in a rendering of *Old Man River* at dinner in a Norwegian house. I inherited from my predecessors the hosting, in the very beautiful frescoed oval breakfast-room in the Residence, of a regular lunch-club whose membership was limited and extremely distinguished - Arne Brundtland, the Prime Minister's husband and a political commentator of generally conservative leanings (unlike his wife); Jan Petersen, one of the leading lights of the Conservative Party and a future Prime Minister himself; Nils Morten Udgaard, an extremely wise and influential journalist from *Aftenposten*,

the leading daily newspaper; and one or two others. Conversation ranged widely and at a high level, and I learned a lot from it.

One event which recurred each year was the ceremonial felling of the tree to be presented by Oslo to London for erection in Trafalgar Square, a thank-you gift for support during the Second World War. Selected in advance by the experts who controlled the extensive forests in Oslo's hinterland, it was always an enormous and magnificent specimen. The British Ambassador and the Mayor of Oslo traditionally performed the first part of the actual sawing-down, with foresters standing by to administer the *coup de grace* and ensure that the crane was properly placed to manoeuvre the tree carefully into position for transport out of the forest afterwards. The Lord Mayor of Westminster was also invited, and sometimes took a hand with the sawing - but I enjoyed it most when my partner at the other end of the huge cross-cut saw was the female Mayor of Oslo in my first year, who wielded the saw with amazing dexterity considering that her hands were much deformed as a result of thalidomide. One year the tree-felling was featured as part of the BBC's annual Children in Need appeal, so we had Terry Wogan out from London too, an extremely relaxed and easy guest. I seem to recall that his escort had a little difficulty in finding the right way to the tree site through the snow-bound forest - it was sometimes a little remote. But it was always a most enjoyable occasion, with much jollity over the bonfire and refreshments which followed the felling.

Throughout this period one single issue dominated political life in Norway and therefore the attention of diplomats. On 28 November 1994 the people of Norway voted in a referendum on Norway's joining the European Union. Many thousands of hours must have been devoted by us all to analysing the probabilities. Norwegian politicians were deeply divided, with many of the establishment including the Prime Minister campaigning for a yes-vote, but others even in her own party, as well as vocal and powerful factions both to left and right, arguing strongly against. The question to which nobody had an entirely convincing answer was - what specifically would Norway *gain* by membership? given that it was already and would remain a member of the European trading bloc in the shape of the European Economic Area (EEA), that unlike most EU member states its economy was based on primary resources (oil and gas, and fishing), and that as a relatively wealthy country it would almost certainly be a net donor. These factors were even more marked in 1994 than at the time of Norway's earlier rejection of Europe in the 1972 referendum, and it became harder and harder as the weeks passed to see how the yes-campaigners could win over the generally sceptical and independent-minded Norwegian people. It was never going to be easy to prove the over-riding advantages of being inside the European club rather than outside, a proposition which - especially for a country anyhow so clearly part of the Western European tradition as Norway, with its defence already guaranteed by NATO membership and the Russian threat evaporating since the fall of the Soviet Union - was at best rather abstract. A fortnight before the Norwegian vote Sweden voted yes to Europe; diplomatic

opinion in Oslo as to the likely effect of this varied, but Norwegians on 28 November, by a small majority, did the opposite and voted *no*.

So my attendance at an EU Heads of Mission conference in London a month before the vote would not be repeated - except maybe in the margins. A pity, because I had enjoyed being a part of a circle including the great men who headed our missions in Paris, Bonn and Brussels, talking about high European matters which even now I only imperfectly understood. But Norway, and our Oslo Embassy, would never have been more than a bit-player on the European stage. And frankly it was a relief to be spared the flood of arcane telegrams on EU technicalities of the kind discussed interminably in the Brussels corridors. They had never been part of my official life, and I was much happier with the straightforward issues of defence, internal politics and economics, trade, and international conflict resolution which would now form most of my agenda - with the commercial and juridical intricacies of the offshore oil and gas industry to play with from time to time.

Briefly in December too there would be a return to Middle Eastern concerns, with the arrival in Oslo to receive their Nobel Peace Prizes of (in alphabetical order, as the Norwegians carefully put it) Yassir Arafat, Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin. I had of course met them all, and many members of their suites. Bibi Netanyahu, an old sparring-partner, was among the Israeli delegation, with other officials whom we knew. Samir Kafity, Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, and the Archdeacon of Nazareth (who was to succeed him as bishop in 1998), Riah Abu el-Assal, were with Arafat; both were old friends, and indeed greeted me with a tremendous roar of recognition when they spotted me in the Oslo Anglican church on the Sunday nearest to the Peace Prize ceremony (we arrived late, having been seeing Yehudi Menuhin and his wife off at the airport, and were not in our usual place in the choir at the front of the church). The annual presentation of the prize(s) in Oslo City Hall followed a traditional pattern - speeches by all concerned, appropriate musical interludes, reception - but the Middle Eastern year made for a good deal of extra spice and heightened interest, for me at least.

The Christmas season brought the expected round of compulsory jollification, with Embassy staff and children's parties in the Residence (the latter with a Father Christmas arriving across the snowy lawn through the terrace doors, complete with sack of goodies), a gala Norwegian-British Society party also hosted by us with an ambitiously-staged entertainment, a lunch master-minded by Julian for the guild of Anglican church ladies, and so on. But we were allowed a week and more of something more like holiday for Christmas and New Year itself, and in 1994 had the extra pleasure of welcoming Karin and Bill to Oslo. They stayed from 23 December to 3 January, at our insistence because we thought they should see the fireworks on New Year's Eve about which we had been told (and indeed it was good to stand on our balcony in the icy dark and observe displays near and far from all corners of the city). Karin had a nasty and debilitating chesty cough for much of the time, but we managed a couple of drives out of the city centre, and they were able to see us sledging and

skiing down our own lawn and such-like phenomena. It had been a busy and demanding few months, and this was both a good culmination and a good way of winding down.

And then it was the New Year of 1995, with more new experiences many of them involving the snow and plummeting temperatures of the Norwegian winter. We were helped by a Norwegian member of the Embassy staff to find our feet on cross-country skis, beginning gradually on the absolute level of a frozen lake near Oslo and only after a time moving on to the delights of a gentle gradient, where for a while the only secure way of stopping without damage was by falling gracefully into an adjacent snowdrift. Soon enough it was a genuine pleasure to glide along the pre-cut tracks through the forests and over the gentler hills, and we began to learn how to choose the correct wax for the snow conditions. Walking in winter was less of a pleasure; as Julian wrote at the beginning of March - "the melting snow freezes into lethal sheets of ice over the paths, which then become even more slick and lethal with a light covering of melt-water the next day. Or it snows lightly and one has no idea what lurks underfoot. Even crampons don't make one sure-footed, though Norwegians stride confidently where angels would fear to tread. I think they have pads on their feet like flies." Oslo pavements were just as bad, until we learnt the technique of the gliding Norwegian walk with minimum reliance on heels and toes.

The reliably cold winter climate made Norway ideal for military training, and British troops took full advantage. We saw a lot of them. In early February we were at Voss near Bergen, observing a battalion of the Greenjackets coping with opportune blizzard conditions - bivouacking in the snow and building up warmth to avoid frostbite, the onset of which needed some experience to judge; and then, when visibility improved, demonstrating what they had learned about movement and concealment in snowy terrain (and incidentally showing how much less natural and fluent in operating on skis most Brits are than Norwegians). We were allowed to play at some of the training exercises, Julian practising controlled skids at the wheel of a Land-Rover on the skid-pan, while I attempted to steer a *band-vagen* (BV), a smallish Swedish-designed tracked vehicle designed for operating over snow, along a winding track through trees - surprisingly satisfying when one begins to master the controls. Later we were to travel as passengers by BV quite frequently on such exercises and developed a respect for their ability to cope with steep gradients and tricky conditions. We were also impressed by the skill of the helicopter pilots on whom we often relied, in particular on one occasion when navigating along a narrow valley in a near white-out was rendered hazardous by the difficulty of seeing the telephone and other wires stretched across the valley and not reliably indicated on any map; we had to touch down to pause until visibility cleared, and even the process of landing was tricky because it is difficult to judge exactly where the ground is when everything around is white, and the pilot had to throw out a smoke-bomb as an indicator. - A week after the Voss exercise we went a little farther north to Fagernes to meet the Royal Marines detachment training there, deep snow gleaming in the moonlight as we

went across to dinner, and a soft-spoken, academic-looking, but evidently extremely fit Brigadier who spoke with relish and some passion of his experiences in dealing with the IRA. We had planned to do some private cross-country skiing in Fagernes the next day, but were advised by our driver Jim that at -20°C it would be too cold for our inexperienced lungs, so we drove *up* to Beitostølen at 3500 feet where the temperature was only -10° and the snow was wonderful. - And from Voss straight back to Holmenkollen in Oslo for the annual ski-jumping contest, where we were advised to bring foam cushions to reduce the hardship of sitting on snow-packed terraces, and old newspapers for the feet. Another new experience, the thrill of powerful Nordic figures flying on planks out of the sky somewhere over one's left shoulder, to partisan roars from the assembled masses.

There was plenty of more conventional diplomatic activity too. I was pleased to be invited to some of the functions of the annual conference in January of the local businessmen's organisation, the NHO (equivalent to the CBI), where all the keynote speeches were in Norwegian, as one of the ambassadors who could be presumed to cope with the language. The conference speeches were interesting enough, but the fun came later at the very splendid dinner, a buffet with everything the heart could desire including a special room serving only local game (I tried bear one year - rather chewy), and plenty of opportunity for fraternisation with people who mattered. The Bergen Ball in February, another annual event run by the local military establishment so involving the British military on exercises and by extension the British Ambassador, was at the other end of the formality spectrum - white tie and decorations (I could wear my newly-acquired sash and star of the Norwegian Order of Merit, an inevitable consequence of the King's State Visit to Scotland), a stately polonaise down the magnificent mediaeval hall (Håkonshallen) with a splendid array of uniforms, dancing until 2 am followed by "breakfast" of soup and steak tartare in the hotel. Closer to the norm was the brief visit by Douglas Hurd in the following week, the first such bilateral visit to Norway by a British Foreign Secretary for many years and much appreciated. John Gummer and Tim Eggar were both in Oslo in the same week, a repeat visit for both of them, so we had a full hand of British Ministers and indeed could not accommodate them all in our Residence.

Outside most diplomatic experience, though, was our first visit also in February to one of BP's North Sea oil rigs. The helicopter terminal at Stavanger airport is very much like any other terminal, though the destinations are names like *Ekofisk* and *Odin*. One climbs into a rubberised orange survival suit before boarding ("do zip your leg-seams up - otherwise air stays inside and you float head-downwards, which isn't a good idea"). 90 minutes in the air, seats little different from a normal aircraft, 19 passengers. Landing on a platform in fierce winds is no problem, apparently, but passengers have to scuttle rather to get into shelter before being blown into the North Sea. Inside the living module it was rather like a hotel, with lifts, accommodation and offices, conference-rooms, club-rooms and a canteen, as well as operations centres with a wealth of computer displays and production flow charts. It did move

around a tiny bit in the wind ... But walking out to the production and drilling modules was more adventurous, with 50-knot winds whipping the rain into our faces when we ventured away from the lee side, and open metal-work staircases with heaving sea below. It was fascinating to see the 90-metre lengths of pipe being hoisted and thrust vertically down into the sea bed, and to be told about safety precautions like the lifeboats programmed to drop freely a full 30 metres into the sea below - quite an experience, they said.

February ended with a NATO exercise near Trondheim, where I joined rows of four-star generals and other ambassadors as "distinguished visitors". The British element were much admired, including a support battalion demonstrating field distribution of supplies in a small blizzard, with the visitors standing in a foot of snow on a small hill looking into the teeth of the wind. (The Spanish Ambassador, a nattily dressed aristocrat with public-school English, had opted to leave his overcoat behind.) It was fascinating to see how a multi-national force can work together, and to have a few private British moments like the quick helicopter visit with our Naval Attaché to see a demonstration of battle planning on board HMS Fearless, a commando carrier on which I had worked briefly as a Japanese interpreter in 1968.

It had been quite a month. But there was always plenty going on. Even white-tie dinners became quite familiar - for one, the annual dinner at the Palace for the Diplomatic Corps, we were coming downstairs in our finery to set off just as a hundred or so guests were arriving for an International Forum concert in our house, which must have given them a misleading idea of how we really lived. We became used to entertaining generals and dining with captains of industry, to greeting and sending-off members of both Royal Families at the airport. The house was not often as full as it was in May for the 50th anniversary of Norwegian Liberation in 1945, when we had the Duke and Duchess of Kent, Douglas and Judy Hurd, and theoretically also the First Sea Lord, though at the last minute we discovered that the Kents needed *two* of our three spare bedroom suites and the Admiral had to be sent elsewhere. The occasion was splendid, though, with parades of Norwegian and allied veterans - quiet, almost subdued, but full of pride and dignity - and wreath-layings, and a grand dinner in our house and a garden-party and British naval vessels in Oslo and other ports. The British flag flew proudly. Perhaps the most memorable dinner was one we gave for veterans of the Norwegian Resistance and other special operations, a wonderful assemblage of heroes all with stories to tell (some had not been told for 50 years, it was said).

And so spring came at last to Oslo, and we reached the end of our first year. Two events at end-May and in early June marked the culmination. The first was the Bergen Festival, in 1995 having a British flavour with performances of Elgar and a play by David Hare (*Skylight*: we enjoyed meeting the author, and the National Theatre cast). Even more memorable was the performance of *Romeo & Juliet* in a mix of Arabic and Hebrew by a joint theatre company from East and West Jerusalem.

Arabic-speaking Montagues, Hebrew-speaking Capulets, and all the underlying Arab/Jew tension enhancing the familiar plot. (Symbolically, perhaps, Hebrew was used when the two families were speaking to each other.) Not many of the audience knew either language, but an English translation was displayed over the stage.

The other event was a celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the arrival of Christianity in Norway, on the island of Bømlo north of Haugesund. Another letter home. "By good fortune, or through the prayers of the assembled clergy (Cardinal Cassidy from Rome, the Eastern Orthodox Patriarch from Istanbul, our own Bishop of Gibraltar and Europe, and a fine selection of Copts, Orthodox, Lutherans and so on), the sun came out as we arrived and shone fiercely for most of two days while the rest of Norway was under cloud. The local population, stiffened by one or two professionals, put on a splendid Mystery-type play about Olav's arrival and encounter with the sceptical Odin-worshipping villagers: horn trumpets like smaller alpenhorns; shields, axes, halberds; players appearing suddenly on the cliffs which form the amphitheatre's backdrop; local accents, songs, dancing, character parts. Audience including King and Queen, Prime Minister and other political figures, but of the diplomatic corps only ourselves and the Icelanders, as having a direct interest ... A two-hour ecumenical service of which the star was the Patriarch; magnificent address through his beard, with some delicately-phrased taunts about Russian churchmen ... Norwegian girls in all manner of attractive *bunad*, display of tenth-century life and crafts."

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After one year-cycle of a diplomatic posting is complete, there is inevitably some repetition. The letters home become a little less full of detail, the excitement somewhat reduced. Norway's geography is as exciting as most, and we never tired of exploring it, from walking or mountain-bike ventures into the hills and forests around Oslo, to long drives to the fjords of the West or the North. But not every trip merited a purple-prose account. Similarly the multitude of social events staged in our house included some highlights but many of a more routine nature; some of our visitors were stars, many more humdrum; the demands of our diplomatic exchanges with the Norwegian government were sometimes moderately intensive but there were many quiet periods.

Of the major journeys I undertook, a couple of the most exciting were arranged by an organisation called the Norwegian Atlantic Committee, created to give additional strength and purpose to Norway's position in the NATO alliance. Ellmann Ellingsen was the moving spirit, a charming and energetic man who became a good friend but sadly died very young towards the end of our tour. In October 1995 he took my Canadian colleague and me up to the very far north to inspect the short Norwegian border with Russia, once the only direct physical border between NATO and the Soviet Union. We flew to Kirkenes, slept in a traditional-style log-cabin rest-house on the Pasvik river which forms the border, and then had a fascinating day of briefings and helicopter flights and meetings with the

military and civilian officials who control the region. Low conifer forests interspersed with bare rock and moss; no high mountains, but not easy country to move fast over, with gorges and rock-faces and a lot of wet-looking valleys. The windswept final observation post perched on a rock 700 feet above the Barents Sea is NATO's north-eastern corner and the northern end of the (former) Iron Curtain. On the Russian side in 1995 there were still two or three lines of fence, to keep Russians in not Westerners out, and 1500 Russian border guards manned the 200 kilometres of border covered on the Norwegian side by 200 men. But border crossings by the main road were growing much more frequent. A young Russian man drove his BMW up to the border when we were there, and the border demarcation posts were adorned with a nice new Tsarist-style double-headed eagle, although the Russians in the customs queue were carrying old Soviet passports. Thousands of Russian vessels call at ports in North Norway each year, and it was thought that many more made landfall in secluded bays to smuggle alcohol. But there was still a strong naval and military presence on the Russian side, with a huge array of electronic equipment looking westwards from the Rybachiy peninsula. - I went on to Tromsø to deliver a lecture on security issues, the accepted way of payment for the trip, and took the opportunity of visiting the naval base - excavated out of a mountain, with a submarine lurking darkly in the underground basin alongside the brightly-lit quay and workshops.

In April 1996 Ellmann Ellingsen took a few more of us to Jan Mayen, an island about the size of Malta on the mid-Atlantic ridge annexed by Norway in 1922, and the only piece of Norwegian territory not occupied by the Germans in the 1939-45 war. Mountainous - Mount Beerenberg is around 8000 feet - and inhospitable, it has no permanent population but houses a communications and meteorological station manned by 18 personnel. We arrived by Air Force Hercules aircraft (lucky in our weather - cross-winds frequently prevent landing), and had three hours on the island. Decorations in the staff quarters included photographs of members of the staff running naked into the sea to bathe among the visible lumps of ice, and the head of a polar bear shot in a famous episode when it trapped an amateur radio enthusiast in a small hut away from the main group, and he was only able to signal his plight to the adjacent hut complex by sending a message via Portugal and Germany to the Norwegian Ministry of Defence in Oslo. Those who succeed in climbing Mount Beerenberg - an active volcano, ice-clad, and distinctly precipitous - are rewarded with a diploma. Dark green moss, and a little grass and flowers in high summer, are the only vegetation, and there are no trees, but the black-lava and snow panoramas are spectacular. The sea batters constantly against the coasts, and there is no permanent harbour.

Julian was not with us for the Jan Mayen trip, but had her own excitement, representing me (as spectator) at the annual winter sports event for the disabled, held at Beitostølen. She told amazing stories of intrepid descents by skiers and sledgers with fewer and fewer remaining limbs, some of them even blind, these last having to be accompanied by sighted skiers who had a much more alarming time; they could see the obstacles ahead ...

We completed our cycle of Arctic touring with a visit to Spitsbergen (Svalbard), just the two of us this time and not under Ellmann Ellingsen's auspices, in July 1996. Flying in to the capital Longyearbyen revealed a panorama of sharp snow-clad peaks, with black earth lower down relieved by occasional mosses and lichens. The Svalbard archipelago is the size of Belgium and the Netherlands together, but at 80°N it has a permanent population of less than 3000, with a significant Russian minority still engaged in coal-mining. The *Sysselmann* or Governor met us and gave us an hour's tour and some insights into the place, including the unwisdom of going anywhere without a gun to cope with the occasional polar bear. In July conditions it all seemed very pleasant with its brightly-painted houses. Then by helicopter across some kilometres of bare terrain, sighting reindeer and glimpsing the grim-looking Russian settlement of Barentsburg, to join the Norwegian coastguard vessel *Senja*. We had five nights and four days on board, in some comfort - it is a substantial ship. Landing at Bjørnøya (Bear Island), mid-way between Svalbard and the Norwegian mainland, for which we were winched down in a lifeboat-sized dinghy to go ashore as there was too much fog for the helicopter, showed us another isolated community, run by a bearded scientist and occupying a series of well-insulated huts with television and a shop but also the occasional polar bear. From there we sailed east to the *Smutthull*, an area of sea where Norway and Russia dispute fishing rights; suddenly emerging from fog, we saw a fleet of Icelandic trawlers and sent a fisheries inspector on board one to "observe", only to meet problems over collecting him after some hours because the fog had come down again. Happily the weather was clear for our last night at sea, and we saw the midnight sun with beautiful clarity at 74°N 28°E, due north at six minutes past midnight. Then briefly to bed, waking just before 6 am to find North Cape towering ahead of us to the south, 1000 feet of sheer cliff with the coast shading away to east and west, flights of puffins scudding towards us, and a temperature of +15°. It was even warmer when we disembarked at Hammarfest at noon, and we were grateful for beer on a sun-soaked terrace at the viewpoint 200 feet above the town, before catching our flight back to Tromsø and Oslo.

It was genuinely important to visit all parts of the country, to enhance one's credibility as having a serious interest in Norway in all its aspects. But the real work, and almost all the opportunities for useful dialogue, lay in Oslo. One device that we used for attracting interesting people to our dinner-table and developing a future dialogue was the staging of occasional lectures by eminent Britons of whom the Norwegian establishment would have heard. The shape of the evening would be a lecture lasting up to an hour before dinner by our visiting dignitary, followed by dinner at several tables, for around seventy invited guests known to have an interest in the field covered by the talk. Among our speakers for these occasions, at intervals of six months or so, were two former Foreign Secretaries, Geoffrey Howe and (after the 1997 election) Douglas Hurd; Lynda Chalker, former Overseas Development Minister and another of my former political bosses; Sarah Hogg, economist and former political adviser, and married to Douglas Hogg also a former FCO Minister;

Alan Budd of the Bank of England and formerly Treasury; and so on. We really enjoyed their visits, and enjoyed also the very warm and appreciative reception which our Norwegian and diplomatic guests gave to them.

Part of the attraction for Norwegians was our house itself, often praised as being second in grandeur and charm only to the Royal Palace. It made an ideal location for commercial promotions as well as political dinners. We provided a venue for whisky tastings organised by Scottish distillers, and wine tastings by the proprietors of English vineyards (both most enjoyable as well as profitable). We had Jaguar cars, Rover cars, even a large-size model of a British Airways jumbo-jet with the newly-introduced livery (not really a success), parked outside and demonstrated by the salesmen. We helped to launch a new English-Norwegian dictionary. And away from the directly commercial, we found that people of all kinds were thrilled to come to the house; not just the magnates who came to dinner with the head of British Steel, but also the choir of our Anglican church (with whom we sang whenever we could) invited to a Candlemas party in 1998 when we sang a lot of silly songs; not just the generals and their wives invited when our own Chief of Defence Staff came, but also the friends and colleagues who came to our regular St Andrew's Ball for haggis and Scottish dancing. (The haggis was something of a triumph; one year we enlisted the support of the Air Chief Marshal whose NATO command covered Norway and who lived just down the road from us when he was in Oslo; he agreed readily enough to get one of his visiting RAF pilots to bring a load of haggis over for us if we could arrange for the suppliers to deliver it to the RAF base in question, and afterwards told a splendid story about the incredulity of his driver - a Scotsman, as it happened - when ordered to go down and collect the haggis for the British Ambassador to Norway.)

The spring of 1997 brought us and the Residence staff two major challenges. In 1995 we had agreed with our colleagues in the other Nordic posts that an annual meeting of the five ambassadors, in one of the capitals, would be a useful and more intimate supplement to the occasional meetings of European Heads of Mission held in London. A little gentle tourism, over a long weekend, could be included; and spouses would of course come too. Hugh Arbuthnott in Copenhagen was the longest-serving among us, so we all went to him in February 1996, and enjoyed the relaxed charm of the Danes and the marvellous shops in the city, and experienced biting winds by the Øresund strait where chunks of ice from the Baltic were floating past. By 1997 we were the senior in years, and they all came to Oslo in March. The pattern was for an all-day office discussion which included the FCO under-secretary for Europe, also invited; a fairly formal dinner in the Residence including a good mix of interesting Norwegians; and a tourism day ending with dinner in a suitably ethnic local restaurant. It was quite an undertaking for everybody, including Julian who had to look after the spouses for the office day. But everything went very well, apart from one major mishap during the sight-seeing day when our colleague from Helsinki, David Burns, fell on an icy patch and fractured a bone in his leg. I blamed myself entirely for not

foreseeing the problem, as David already had problems which meant that he needed to walk with a stick.

The burden of responsibility for the second event, though, was much greater. By tradition, the King and Queen of Norway accept dinner invitations from only three ambassadors in Oslo, those from countries with which they have particular historical associations - Denmark, Sweden and Britain. It is understood that one such invitation shall be offered during the incumbency of each ambassador. The King's Private Secretary indicates to the ambassador in question, at the appropriate time, that it would now be right to arrange a date. Our time had arrived, and the date was set for 23 April 1997. The guest lists and protocol guidance for the similar functions held by my predecessors were of course available to me, and it was clear that one needed to identify and invite British guests who were both important and interesting enough to join the King and Queen in the Oslo Embassy. It was relevant, also, that no official funds were available for us to pay for their travel or accommodation. It was actually quite fun planning all this. On the day we had round our table, in addition to the four Norwegians (the Royal couple and two aides) and ourselves and two others from the Embassy, sixteen distinguished visitors from the UK. Their backgrounds included government, the academic world, the BBC, business and finance; and more importantly, interests such as sailing, gardens, Viking archaeology and French literature, all of which were likely to strike a chord with King Harald or Queen Sonja. Michael excelled himself in the kitchen, the staff generally were at their best, and it was all much more relaxed and enjoyable than we had feared.

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Meanwhile of course we were in touch with the family back in England, and beginning to look forward to the final escape from diplomatic duties - now not so far away - and living at home again. Justin and his partner Christine Sloman were living in the Murray Road house, and in 1995 had happy news for us. Our first grandchild, Anna, was born in October of that year. We were delighted, as of course were her great-grandparents Karin and Bill. Sadly, Bill did not live long thereafter; he died suddenly (aged 86) at the end of June 1996, while at a parish meeting in the village of Deddington near Farthinghoe, with no warning (though there had of course been minor health worries) and apparently no time at all to be aware of what was happening - a blessing, perhaps, in some ways. Karin coped superbly, and had many of the essentials sorted by the time we arrived from Norway a day later, but it was a terrible blow. We made more frequent visits to her after that, grateful that Norway was so close, but she asked nothing of us and living alone never seemed to cause her any problems. There was another reason for us to travel back more frequently, in the shape of the tiny cottage in High Lorton in the Lake District which we had bought at the end of 1995, and which was to form the core of our future home in an area which both of us had always loved. As retirement came closer - a brief negotiation with the Office brought agreement that I should leave Oslo in September 1998, eight months before my 60th birthday to accommodate the requirements of my

successor - our eyes were turning increasingly to life at home in Britain. The arrival of Justin and Christine's second child, Leo, in July 1998 provided yet another good reason for coming home.

But in April 1997, as we were winding down after our dinner for the King and Queen, we knew only that there could still be a full two years to go. We planned to enjoy them. One of our chief recreations had been travel and physical exercise in Norway's beautiful countryside, and for three years the highlight was the three days in July when we joined Kjell and Birgit Anneling, the Swedish Ambassador and his Norwegian wife, for an extended walk in high country. In 1995 we had walked down Aurlandsdalen, a total of 4000 feet of descent to sea-level through dramatic gorge scenery, spending two nights in walkers' huts, and taken the famous train up from Flåm to Myrdal to join the main Bergen-Oslo line back. In 1996 we went to the Rondane district north of Lillehammer, crossing the main range of mountains whose peaks (which we did not attempt) reach 7000 feet, spending three nights in huts, and being ferried to the start-point and from the point of emergence from the mountains respectively in the British and Swedish ambassadorial cars. For 1997 we decided that it was time to tackle the Jotunheimen district of Norway's highest mountains. It was an epic walk, as the snow was still deep in places. Some sixteen miles of rough country on the first day, rocky paths followed by a snowfield at a fairly steep angle, then rock and snow alternating, with the snow sometimes crumbling suddenly beneath us so that one descended to the water beneath... Five hours up, then five hours down an attractive valley but with many fast-flowing streams to ford or wade through. We were not the first to cross by that route, as a trail of footsteps had shown, but we considered ourselves pretty intrepid - and the hut people advised us against taking a similar route back the next day over another high pass, so we settled for a seven-hour walk down the valley past spectacular waterfalls. One, Vettifossen, has a clear single drop of 275 metres, the highest in Northern Europe. - These were splendid occasions, in good company, stretching physically, and always with magnificent views. Somehow it put the cap on it to be able to return each year just in time for the French national day, and boast of our exploits at the ambassador's party; it did us no harm professionally that the Norwegian establishment liked to think of us as the walking ambassadors.

There were other travels. Shell's new rig on the Troll gas-field was exciting, the largest concrete structure ever built at 472 metres high and standing in over 300 metres of water - we went down to the sea-bed by lift, and looked up at a ceiling (the mid-point of the structure) some 200 metres above our heads. Visiting our honorary consuls at the various ports was always a pleasure, as they were without exception charming Norwegian businessmen usually in charge of substantial concerns; we came to know the Bergen and Stavanger consuls well, and were quite often also in Tromsø (where our man ran the local brewery, a distinct bonus) and Kristiansand, but remember also with particular pleasure being driven by Jim through spectacular mountain and fjord country to Ålesund on the west coast, a delightful town entirely in *art nouveau* style.

Our hotel, a converted warehouse, was especially welcoming and comfortable - "bars closed for the May Day holiday, of course; but if you would like a glass of draught beer from our stock behind the reception desk..." - and our consul had his own family shipping firm. Trondheim we also saw quite often, enjoyed the company of the Mayor who was a fan of Winston Churchill, and went more than once to the cathedral which is the oldest in Norway. On one occasion we were in the cathedral with Prince Charles, visiting for the joint 60th birthday celebrations of King Harald and Queen Sonja in 1997; a splendid affair, with four kings, a ruling queen and four queen consorts, two crown princes and an assortment of other highnesses at the top table, mostly related to each other through Queen Victoria. Prince Charles must have won some Norwegian hearts by taking the trouble to talk to the gathered crowds, outside the cathedral form which they had been temporarily excluded for his visit - rather a last-minute business, slotted in at his request after he had looked in on the university to present a couple of scholarships on our behalf.

In 1998 we were twice in Sweden, the first time in March at Roger Bone's invitation for the Nordic ambassadors' conference in Stockholm (it was his turn). A lovely house, not quite so grand as ours, and Stockholm is a beautiful and impressive city. As always we enjoyed both company and environment, and improved the visit by driving there and back from Oslo and discovering a little more of the Swedish countryside on the way. We came back to Sweden privately for a long weekend at the end of July, staying at Tällberg on Lake Siljan in Dalarna. As my grandmother came from Falun in Dalarna, and had always spoken of Siljan as the most beautiful area in Sweden, we clearly had to go there at least once. We did our duty by Falun, having seen a little of Uppsala (Lillymor's university, where Giles had also spent some time in his year-away during the Cambridge university years) on the way back from Stockholm in March, and felt that family honour was satisfied. But the gentle scenery of Lake Siljan was also a real pleasure.

In Oslo, the succession of visitors continued. We had the Royal Ballet, and Westminster Abbey Choir with Martin Neary (they sang most beautifully in our dining-room), and the King's Consort with James Bowman, and a Welsh choir. Katharine Whitehorn and her husband Gavin Lyall came to stay and were extremely stimulating company. David Butler, renowned psephologist, and his wife Marilyn, Rector of Exeter College, also stayed, an evening of quick-fire Oxford conversation - they were in Oslo for an Oxford dinner which the King attended. Clare Short was one of our most rewarding Ministerial guests from London, as Overseas Development minister; at dinner in our house she organised brilliantly a round-table conversation with her Norwegian opposite number and the other guests all with something useful to say. Michael Meacher, Environment minister, looked in, and business chat was diluted with reminiscence about Oxford days - he was a year ahead of me at New College. I met Peter Mandelson in a hotel lobby, to pass on a message, and was rather impressed. There was the usual host of passing generals and colonels.

The first half of 1998 brought an increase in the office load with the UK's Presidency of the European Union, and the requirement for me to organise briefings and other events. EU business generally had been an interesting dimension of the job, with my European colleagues having a great variety of experience and talent. The Nordic ambassadors were all rather distinguished, as one would expect, and the Frenchman (who, unusually, had been at school in England for some years and was effectively bilingual) was extremely good too. But there were some interesting people among the candidate countries too, the Baltic states and the central Europeans, whom we had to include in many of our gatherings. European ambassadorial lunches were always good value, and our dining-room was big enough to accommodate all existing and future members with some ease. The new Foreign Minister was as it happens an old friend, having been a diplomat himself and known to us through another younger Norwegian diplomat of great distinction, Wegger Strømme, who had been in their Tel Aviv embassy in our time - he was a natural guest for one of our lunches.

Our Presidency chores were due to end on 30 June, but little work is done in Norwegian officialdom around Midsummer's Day. We anticipated a little, and set off on 13 June for one last extended tour of North Norway. Jim had for some time been telling us about earlier ambassadors who had promised to have him drive them to the far north, but never carried out their promise, and we were determined to do better. It was a marvellous final flourish, for a whole two weeks. Jim drove us to Bodø, where we boarded the *hurtigrute* coastal ship for the two-day trip to Hammerfest while he drove on to meet us. Two days with the *Sami* (Lapp) community and administration in Karasjok and Kautokeino, including an interview on local radio (in Norwegian, translated into *samisk*); south to Harstad and Narvik, and onwards via Bodø again, keeping this time to the coastal route with its bridges and ferries, eventually reaching Trondheim and the relative familiarity of the main road to Oslo. There was just enough official business to do to keep us in countenance, and even showing a British face in those remote communities had its own value. I met all the relevant mayors and British consuls, and visited the major museums and other historic sites (some of them, like the prehistoric carvings in Alta in Finnmark, absolutely fascinating). Jim considerably enhanced the British reputation for both wisdom and friendliness among the locals gathered in a bar one evening at Fauske near Bodø, by accurately predicting a Norwegian victory in the World Cup football match against Brazil, at a stage of the game when it seemed hopeless. But essentially it was a tourist trip. Dramatic peaks on the Lofoten islands, brightly-painted wooden houses perched on piles driven into the water, and racks of drying fish; the midnight sun full in our eyes as we emerged from a steep-sided channel barely wide enough for the ship, heading due north; black rock and white glaciers to the east, seen dimly through grey mizzle; in Finnmark, Sami in their regional costumes, mostly red and yellow, and performances of their *joik* chants; lakes and rivers everywhere, and low empty hills; then mountain and glacier country on the coast (one mountain known as the Arctic Matterhorn, an unbelievable shape), views over the fjords, snipe drumming, curlews calling, long-tailed ducks; even

more birds farther south, golden and ring plover, eider, oyster-catchers in courting ritual, and we woke one morning to the sound of cuckoos; the original *maelstrøm* eddying and foaming and tumbling through a narrow channel; south of Bodø an amazing panorama of smooth-rock pinnacles all around 1000 metres in height, with the Lofotens to the west rearing out of milky seas.

There would be many memories. Walking home after a late dinner in the Oslo midwinter, ice-crystals on eyebrows and eyelashes and one's breath freezing on the outside of the necessary scarf, temperature at -20° or so. Accepting the challenge to fire a machine-gun, with the British Special Forces on winter exercises, and instinctively spread-eagling myself on the snow in the approved position distantly remembered from national service. Steering a Norwegian fast patrol boat at 32 knots on Oslofjord. Skiing with the Army at Hovden near Stavanger, a panorama of snow-fields and peaks with one romantic cut trail looping down away across hill and dale. Crayfish with a Norwegian ship owning millionaire; *rakfisk* and aquavit with the Ellingsens; swimming from the Strømmens' *hytte* near Larvik, perched on a rocky islet with little vegetation. The United Nations Day food event staged by the International Forum, and Julian on the British stall serving Stilton from our Keswick cheese-man to eager Norwegians (we gave the King some when he came to dinner). Sitting in the cockpit of the Eurofighter (Typhoon) we were trying to sell to the Norwegians, and then (having disembarked) seeing it take off and climb vertically into the sky. Singing with our church choir in the little Anglican church at Balestrand on the Sognefjord, and then at dinner starting my speech to the assembled dignitaries in Kvikne's Hotel with a reference to my parents' stay at that same hotel in mid-August 1938, a date maybe not unconnected with my own birth in mid-May 1939. So it had all come full circle.

We left Oslo, by ferry to Hirtshals in northern Denmark, in the evening of Saturday 5 September 1998. I would remain on the Foreign Office books, strictly, until my sixtieth birthday the following May. But my career was over. I had no regrets.

XIV - REFLECTIONS

It is becoming a commonplace among our friends to say it, but we are an extraordinarily lucky generation. Born when we all were, we have avoided involvement in world wars, benefited from the welfare state, had our further education paid for largely by the state without incurring significant debt, and generally managed to buy a home with only a manageable burden of mortgage borrowing. Finding a job was not as hard for us as it has since become, and those jobs were frequently for life if one wanted it that way. Technological advancement has come in time to give us pleasure rather than pain, and climatic change seems unlikely to wreak havoc within our natural lifetime. Our children and grand-children may not be so fortunate.

Within that generation, I count myself extraordinarily lucky. The accident of birth to parents with education and a sufficient income gave me a stimulating and comfortable childhood. Good fortune and good teachers won me scholarships to school and university when they were needed. The choice of career was not a problem, the entry requirements were such as to suit me particularly well, and within that career I was singularly fortunate both in the seniors for whom I had to work and in the postings which came my way. Very little of this was the result of outstanding merit, and much of it frankly came to me through old-fashioned elitism. In my generation Eton and Oxford gave one a head start in certain circles, and it is always easier to maintain a reputation, once acquired rightly or wrongly, than to create one.

Looking back, one is bound to ask whether the choices one made were right. It was natural for me to think of the Foreign Office, with a family background full of linguistic and bureaucratic achievement, and an early delight in foreign travel. The letters home, and the many pages of reminiscence above, are full of ecstatic descriptions of scenes and sights abroad as well as at home. There was constant variety - human as well as natural. We were privileged to meet many remarkable people and some very famous ones. I could not have foreseen much of what came to me, and some of it was exceptional even for a British diplomat, but most diplomatic careers are rewarding in a variety of ways even if not crowned with great success.

There are perhaps two specific ways in which my career brought special rewards, opportunities which were particularly exciting for me. One was the opportunity of outdoor activity, not especially in any sporting arena but just in the open air and in wonderful countryside. Even over-crowded Japan had its delights - Mount Fuji, hill-walking generally, the traditionally agricultural areas, the gardens. Cyprus gave us more open landscape, mountains, wild-flowers, camping, swimming, the first attempts at skiing. Northern Ireland provided moments of escape into exciting coastal and hill scenery. Israel was a naturalist's paradise, with desert and Mediterranean flora, amazing rock formations, our first experience of bird-watching with an expert at the time of the incredible spring migrations. In Norway it seemed almost more important in building one's local reputation to be

active outdoors - walking, skiing, bicycling - than in the more traditional diplomatic recreations such as the arts. We took full advantage of all these, and they made tolerable the occasionally taxing requirements of office life. Tropical postings might have had different excitements, but our concentration on the temperate parts of the world suited us very well and certainly made for an easier life. And there are few first-world countries which have as many rewards for the outdoor-loving person as those to which we were posted.

The other excitement was involvement in conflict situations. The chapters above on Cyprus, Northern Ireland and Israel describe the tensions on the ground. Even during my London spells there were conflict issues which came my way, although my role then was at long distance without a physical risk. Fast-moving situations create a particular need for rapid assessment, for maintaining calm in a tense environment. I found that this suited me well. Analysis of any political situation always appealed to me, as essentially a back-room person, a thinker rather than a doer or talker. Much of the enjoyment of the Foreign Office job as a whole lay in its immediacy, in the fact that one was required to produce answers quickly and concisely rather than deliberate over days and weeks - that suited the journalist in me. The Cyprus problem, Arab/Israel, Northern Ireland - all of these were complex in their different ways, often of high importance, and sometimes exceptionally fast-moving. They represented the sort of challenge which I enjoyed meeting.

A postscript, perhaps, on language. Learning a new language was always an exciting challenge for me, even though I did not always get very far. Languages with a different script provided an additional dimension to this excitement, and it was my good fortune to have Russian, Japanese, Greek and Hebrew at different levels and periods in my portfolio. One can win plaudits even by trying, but the satisfaction of reaching a level of real competence is infinitely greater. For me that competence never extended to the level of complete mastery of any language, certainly not the "could pass for a native" level of popular fiction; and mostly I was a very long way below that. But it was fun trying, and outside diplomatic service there are few such opportunities for indulging that particular hobby.

To set against all that, there were some obvious ways in which I was not well suited to the diplomatic life or it to me. Ideally diplomats should be outgoing, confident socially, easy of manner. The really successful ones, as in many careers, have an extra quality of toughness of intellect which can cut through problems and dominate adversaries. Frankly, I have never been notable for any of these qualities. Quiet and perhaps rapid assessment, on paper and sometimes by word of mouth, I could manage; and I can make complex issues seem more comprehensible, not necessarily losing too much of the inner subtleties in the process; but this is some way short of an intellectual break-through or real problem-solving. A reasonable degree of conversational fluency is within my reach when in the right mood, but cannot be guaranteed and does not last indefinitely even when I attain it. A good second-class mind, as a colleague once described me, and definitely not an A-type personality. Of

course there is a place in the world for people like that, but not naturally at the top of any diplomatic service. That I came so near to the top was due to my usual mix of good fortune and bluff. It would not have been comfortable, and could well have been disastrous, if I had ended up in a really grand and busy post.

A specific aspect of this fundamental unsuitability relates to family life. We were pretty lucky in this area too, during the career. Not just in our marriage and in our children - this is hardly the place to talk about that. But in that no posting was so busy as to cut really seriously into day-to-day family life, in the sense of imposing punishingly long office hours for an extended period. Even in the busiest London jobs I was able to be at home for a normal evening meal, except when a social engagement interfered - and that was not too often even at the highest level I reached. In overseas postings there was a much higher intensity of social commitments, but less fiercely so than in the major European cities or other top diplomatic centres. We still had a private life. Despite this relative good fortune, though, the strains were considerable. Living abroad is in itself a strain, and increasingly so the older one gets. Julian felt the separation from the family back in the UK with especial strength, having to cope while abroad with everything from childbirth to the illness and death of close relations. She also had to bear the burden of responsibility for staff welfare during my last four foreign postings, as wife first of the "Head of Chancery" and then of the ambassador; and to play her own unpaid diplomatic role alone in many other respects, as well as sharing all the business of the hospitality which we gave or received jointly. She achieved wonders in this area, and was immensely popular as being a real person with none of the stuffer qualities traditionally associated with diplomatic wives. But it was very hard on her, and neither of us would have found it easy to take more of it. A humdrum life back in the UK would in some ways perhaps have suited us better, with foreign holidays providing the excitement.

My own reckoning of the balance of advantage and disadvantage in choosing the Foreign Office would come out positive - it was in many ways a good life, and after all we got through substantially unscarred. Julian's might well be different. But there is another question: did we do any good to the world? Is diplomacy worth the effort, in the way that it has been practised during our official lifetime?

The role of embassies has changed in recent years, especially perhaps since my retirement in 1998. Even so I think that there is still a place for resident diplomats to oil the wheels of business between countries, by personal knowledge of the issues and persons involved. Direct contact between political leaders, whether electronic or face-to-face, can resolve problems; but there is always groundwork to be done first. This may apply particularly where there are tensions which may be aggravated by misunderstanding - the "conflict situations" I mention above fall into this category. Simon Schama, writing about Isaiah Berlin, has a passage which strikes me as tailor-made in its application to conflict situations: "there [are] indeed a multitude of evils which ... [are] not open to

resolution since arguments of persuasively equal validity could be made for each side. Hello Belfast, hello Jerusalem The job of statecraft [is] not to liquidate those differences (for that would seldom happen), but to contain them; to find a space in which *acceptance* of irreconcilability would not require mutual annihilation." The rights and wrongs of international disputes are rarely clear-cut, and a diplomat's role is as often as not a matter of pointing out patiently the fallacies of each side's extreme position. The trick is not to lose credibility with either side. And indeed one has to retain credibility with one's own government; too clear a comprehension and exposition of the arguments of the other side may seem very like agreeing with them. As in human affairs generally, arguments are frequently just swept under the carpet rather than eliminated altogether.

There is a danger in showing too much tolerance and understanding which goes beyond that of being misunderstood by one's own bosses back home. I recognise it as a failing in me that I am too prone to see good in everybody. One so rarely meets a person who is wholly unsympathetic, and I cannot recall having had dealings with anyone who struck me as positively bad - unscrupulous maybe, devious and deceitful certainly, but not actually wicked. Of course one deals mostly with underlings, not with the Hitlers themselves. But maybe this is a fault, a sign of softness. It is arguable that one should be on the look-out for the real malice beneath the smooth surface. It would be difficult in that event to maintain the façade of easy and natural converse, but diplomats are after all required for much of the time to act the part of something they are not.

Whether or not it is a fault, seeing good in people does make for a happier life - and possibly also for easier diplomatic relations. We made good friends during our time abroad, and no enemies that I can recall. The posts in which we served were generally happy places, kept sufficiently busy by circumstance but not for long seriously threatened. British embassies and diplomats tend to have a higher local reputation than they might objectively merit, because Britain has historically "punched above its weight" in international matters. The English language is a prime cause of this, and we can still manipulate it better than most. But British diplomats also have a capacity for stepping back from the issues and producing compromise, for seeing the way out of difficulty when a more passionately engaged person would not. Maybe I was in the right job after all, in some ways; and maybe embassies and their staff do contribute to the advancement of international understanding.

All that becomes rapidly irrelevant with the passage of time, and I found it easy to subside into a relatively inactive retirement with little involvement in the diplomatic world. For some the passions of the career are never stilled - not for me. There was plenty to enjoy in Britain, always to us the country which had most to offer. Home in the Lake District has become an ever greater delight. British attitudes, with all their faults, are familiar and comfortable. It is good to have gained some understanding of other countries, to be able to pronounce foreign words and names, to visualise so many of the places which are making the world's news. It was

stimulating and rewarding to mix with educated and interesting people from a wide variety of different cultures, and find that so many of our reactions are similar; the pleasure of being quickly on the same wavelength as somebody in casual conversation, where each strikes sparks off the other (not sure about that mixing of metaphors), has always been strong and continues to this day. Some themes have been constant over the years - the love of countryside, of classical music, of language properly used whether written or spoken. Curiously perhaps, I have always remained an optimist about the future, whether it be personal, national or international. That may be a consequence of seeing the good in people rather than only the bad; or it may just be blind faith. It may be a terrible mistake. But it does make for a happy life.