

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

Sir Brian James Proetel Fall, GCVO 1994, KCMG 1992 (CMG 1984)

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**BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME****RECOLLECTIONS OF SIR BRIAN FALL GCVO KCMG****RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY CATHERINE MANNING**

*This is 23 January 2017 and I am Catherine Manning recording an interview with Sir Brian Fall for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme.*

CM: Brian, the obvious first question: why did you think about joining the Foreign Office?

BF: When I was doing my undergraduate degree in law the idea was that I should go to the Bar. After graduating from Oxford, I went to the University of Michigan Law School, and spent a year there with the emphasis on International Law, under the supervision of the then editor of the American Journal of International Law. That got me thinking about work in the international field, and I went to the World Bank to see what the job prospects were. They said that they'd like to see me again when I'd had some experience at the English Bar. I went back to London and spent two or three weeks starting a crammer course for Part Two of the Bar. Then my father, who owned a small produce-broking business in the City, was asked by an American client of his to go over to Geneva and open the European headquarters of Burger and Plate. As my mother was Swiss and the idea of buying a chalet to retire to was strongly appealing, they very much wanted to do that, except that meant that somebody had to look after the business, so that it would still be there when my father came back. My brother was five years younger and still at university, so I was the obvious volunteer. I spent a year on the London Corn Exchange. I think now that spending some time doing a job which is not going to be your long-term one is a good idea, because there are frustrations common to all jobs, and you don't want to blame your serious candidate for all of them. I shared a flat in South Kensington, advertised in the flat-sharers register, with people who were strangers but became good friends. I had a certain amount of money, because my father paid me a tolerable salary, and a commission arrangement, based on the assumption that people who'd been to university would have no practical nous. In the event, his business friends loyally supported me in his absence, so I was doing quite well on commissions, and I found that doing what would by then have had to be a correspondence course in the evenings to do Bar finals was not the way to enjoy London. I knew that I would not want to carry on as a produce broker after my father came back, and started thinking of the options. I had the international background from my studies at Michigan, I'd been a fairly active member of the

Eastern Europe Society at Oxford and two very good friends at Magdalen, Michael Burton and John Coles, had both by then passed into the Foreign Office. So the exam was there as a sort of Everest challenge. I took it and passed and there we are. If you passed, you didn't really ask yourself whether or why you wanted to join.

CM: I must anchor this to a date. What year was it that you joined the Foreign Office?

BF: I joined the Foreign Office in 1962. '61-'62 would have been B and M Fall Ltd, and '60-'61 the University of Michigan, after leaving Oxford in '60.

CM: What was the training for new entrants in 1962?

### **United Nations Department, 1962**

BF: There was a New Entrants' Course; I think the whole thing was about six weeks, for A Branch Foreign Office and CRO (Commonwealth Relations Office) which was still separate then. We also had a rather glamorous lady from the Jamaican High Commission in London. I'm trying to think if there was some other Commonwealth person, but nobody who rings a bell. John Weston was on the same course. He passed in top that year and I second. Apparently following tradition, the two of us were sent off to New York, as part of the British delegation to the UN General Assembly, as reporting officers. Our overseas posts, who would have received instructions to lobby their clients before the General Assembly, were keen to find out what would have happened on the night, so quite long telegrams, which must have gone saving to most recipients, were produced on the work of the two Political Committees of the General Assembly, the First Committee and the Special Political. If the First Secretaries of the Permanent delegation had spent their time doing that, they couldn't be using their knowledge of the issues and the cast of characters in New York to help in the task of lobbying and the serious diplomatic work. So it was useful to have a couple of willing mules come over to do the routine chore of staying awake and taking notes and producing telegrams, which then got signed off by somebody more senior in the mission. That was basically what we did. Except that in that particular year, because it was the Cuba Crisis, the First Committee and the Special Political Committee spent quite a lot of time not meeting, to allow delegations to follow what was happening in the Security Council. I spent quite a lot of time in the gallery of the Security Council, seeing what was happening.

CM: How did the Cuba Crisis play out in the UN?

BF: I, of course, was new and had no UN experience at all. I remember watching the great Stevenson-Zorin confrontation and there were photographs, which Stevenson showed, of missiles in Cuba. They looked like giant cigars, still in their cigar tubes. There was no proof that there were cigars inside, but nobody tried to argue that they were dummies. (Adlai Stevenson, US Ambassador to the UN and Valerian A. Zorin, Soviet Ambassador to the UN. 25 October 1962.) I thought it was great theatre but, perhaps because it was great theatre, I got a bit of an impression that theatre was what it was, so it didn't make the real-world impact on me which it certainly should have done. The mini real-world impact which I remember was that the University of Michigan was having its Homecoming Weekend at that time, and I was invited to go back to Ann Arbor by friends still there at the Law School. I found that getting a plane out of New York, heading towards Ann Arbor, was uncommonly difficult, because quite a lot of New Yorkers were sending their wives and children somewhere safer in the Mid-West.

I met my wife Delmar in New York at the beginning of the General Assembly; we were married at its end, and sailed off the next day on the Queen Mary ... the ship that had brought me and other visiting members of the General Assembly delegation out to New York three months before. It was, incidentally, the last time that the delegation to the Assembly went out by ship. They invented airplanes shortly afterwards.

CM: For once it looks as if POD was quite sensible in its posting. It put you into the UN Department.

BF: Both John and I. The Assistant Head of Department, John Powell-Jones, had a reputation as a real stickler for time keeping, which translated in those days into not arriving in the office after ten or leaving before six, or taking more than two hours for lunch. The difficult bit was the two hours for lunch, because we didn't have much money. We'd go out in a small group and take it in turns from day to day to buy something.

CM: Quite a few people I've spoken to have said that their first job in the Office was rather a waste of time. They felt that their skills were underused and they weren't really trained very much. Was your time in UN Department rather more positive than that?

BF: I would say, yes. I was on the Specialised Agencies Desk. You would jump from Agency to Agency, depending on who was having an executive board meeting, or their general assembly equivalent, and there would be briefs to write and a foreign policy angle to

contribute. That was good practise. And you got to work with people in the Home departments with particular responsibility for the Agency in question.

CM: Specialised Agencies? That covered the whole spectrum of UN agencies?

BF: The whole spectrum except for the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank, which were covered by the economic side of the Office. UN department was also involved in the two annual meetings of ECOSOC (United Nations Economic and Social Council). Spring ECOSOC was in New York, which meant that we were back there almost before we had left, which was lovely for Delmar as nobody was expecting to see her ever again. That was a three or four-week meeting. Then there was the much longer summer ECOSOC, in Geneva. By that time I had particular subjects to follow, and the work involved lobbying as well as reporting.

CM: Did you feel that after having tried out the law and business, that this was it. You'd found the thing that you wanted to do?

BF: Yes, I think that's right. And being legally trained was a help on drafting and on the nitpicking side of agreeing texts, which was basically what we were doing. They were important to us at the time.

I think that I spent the whole of 1963 in UN Department, moving at some time in '64 to the Treasury Centre for Administrative Studies. The TCAS has been rather airbrushed out of history, having been replaced by the no doubt worthy but less impressive Civil Service College. I don't know whose initiative it was to set up the TCAS, but someone in government must have decided that it would be a good idea if some of the highest-flying home civil servants knew a bit more economics than they might have picked up reading Classics at university. Leading lights of the economics profession agreed, and came very willingly to lecture and run courses. I was on the second course, and the first and the second courses came together on an economic extension designed to offer greater depth. Kit McMahon was an inspired choice as our Course Director, and I remember also Wynne Godley and Roger Opie as outstanding professionals with an instinct for dealing with young civil servants who wanted to learn, but not to be treated like undergraduates.

The TCAS, in a building off Regents Park, was a very British sort of thing, and it is perhaps not surprising that we set up a cricket team. The Mandarin's Cricket Club exists to this day.

Peter Jay was on the first course; he joined us for the economic extension. Robin Butler was on my course. There were many of the big names from that generation of civil servants. I think people had pushed quite hard to get on to the first courses. John Weston and I just fetched up there. Personnel Department had two people they had no postings for and it seemed ideal.

CM: The next stage was the Russian language training, which was the foundation of a central thread of your career. Were you assessed to see if you had an aptitude for a hard language, or did you volunteer?

BF: I can't remember volunteering, but it was made fairly clear that new entrants did hard languages. The need to avoid Thai and Amharic seemed fairly obvious to me, and I was not drawn to Arabic. John Weston applied to do Chinese, I applied to do Russian, and Personnel Department came back with the opposite: I was given Chinese and John was given Russian. Delmar was alarmed, partly because she thought it would be very difficult for her mother to come to visit in Peking and also because she knew enough about Chinese to know that my tone-deafness was not going to be very helpful in trying to learn it. That was the argument that proved useful. John and I talked it over in the Third Room and thought that we should take it up with Personnel Department. The old soldier in the Third Room was a female old soldier and she said, 'No, I wouldn't do that if I were you. They will have a plan.' We decided to go anyway, and I think that we caught Ewen Fergusson on more or less his first day in Personnel Department. We both talked at once, and he said, 'If I understand this right, if I gave you Russian instead of Chinese, and you Chinese instead of Russian, would you both be happy?' We said yes and he said, 'This job's going to be easier than I thought.' So that was that. Huge guilt when the Cultural Revolution happened, catching John and his newly married wife inside the besieged Embassy compound, but I really couldn't have done Chinese, and a language assessment would no doubt have demonstrated that.

The whole of Russian teaching in the Foreign Office seemed rather amateur then. I think they had at one stage tried sending people on the Army course, but they found it too expensive both in time and money. What we had was a charming émigré teacher, and our group of four students, working in the basement of the Foreign Office. The four of us had completely different academic backgrounds, but the course proceeded at the pace of the group. In retrospect, I should have taken the tutor to one side and asked for some extra this

and extra that, but at the time I was happy with not too much pressure, and with a bit of unpaid moonlighting at the National Institute of Economic and Social Research.

Then we went to Paris, to stay with different White Russian families. In theory, that should have brought six weeks of more or less total immersion in Russian. In practice, my charming landlady, Nina Petrovna Knaz'eva, had two or three other Anglophone students in the house, and the immersion proved rather less than total. But the Knaz'evs were a splendid introduction to the eccentricities of émigré life.

CM: It sounds as if the time in Paris doing your Russian language practice was quite fun. What was your Russian like when you emerged?

BF: Delmar's view was that I might know the Russian for 'non-proliferation', but not the Russian for 'carrots', and carrots were what was immediately wanted. What I did with Nina Petrovna was that I would read in Russian while she was cooking. She was very good at soups. I would read *Robinson Crusoe* in Russian translation, which was full of useful words but not, apparently, 'carrots'. When my accent, or my choice of syllable to emphasise, became too embarrassingly wrong, she would correct it. I also used to go by bicycle a few stops down the line from Asnières to Becon les Bruyères, where there was a Jewish lady from Odessa, Zenaida Zapol'skaya, who was not in the Knaz'ev social set, but who was known to them as a good teacher. The poor thing had got so fat that I am not sure that she could get out of the apartment, and she certainly didn't go out regularly. So a visiting student was doubly welcome: for the money, and for some conversation. I would read more serious things aloud for Zenaida, like the magazine *Novy Mir*, and try my hand at translation.

All in all, that was probably not too bad a grounding, if the purpose was no more than to be able to do what you were likely to be doing as a secretary in Chancery in those days: reading *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, and talking to people mainly when travelling outside Moscow. The Intermediate exam was enough, and on the basis of that I passed the Higher on my next posting. So Training Department probably reckoned that it had done all right. My view is that it could have done better, perhaps by asking some of the better Russian speakers in the Office to do some progress-chasing, but it is not clear how far higher standards could have been put to good use in the Moscow of the 1960s. Probably more on the commercial and cultural sides of the Embassy than in the Chancery.

## **Moscow, 1965-1968**

CM: Brian, we are now in 1965 and this is really your first full posting, as opposed to the visits to New York and Geneva. This is Moscow.

BF: We got there about September, I think, September '65. Over my career as it developed I was involved in Russia or Russia-watching much of the time, and Moscow was the only focus. Now that the Soviet Union is no more, there are all sorts of choices: do you want to be Minister in Moscow, or Ambassador in Kiev? Previously, you went to Moscow, and returned there for one or two further postings. And so did some of your contacts in the US, French, German and other Western foreign services, whom you would have worked with also in capitals, at NATO and at the UN. It was one of the acknowledged diplomatic mafias: not quite the Camel Corps, perhaps, but influential nevertheless. Ex-Muscovites got a lot of good jobs, and did well.

CM: You moved there with Delmar and Meredith and the nanny. Where were you living? What was life like on the domestic front?

BF: The Embassy, which is a fine 19<sup>th</sup> century merchant's house, had two wings up front and, round the back, had a typical mews arrangement. The mews was used as garages and commissariat on the ground floor, but above were mews flats, in a recognizable London way. They were popular because they weren't those awful big tower blocks, and because you looked out on a park at the back and on the tennis court and the Embassy garden on the other side. By local standards, it was a nice place to live. There was one flat in the mews for a married private secretary, so Delmar and I followed Michael and Traute Alexander there; at the other end of the mews there was a flat which could cope with three bachelors. There were two families in between, chosen so that the technical side of the Embassy could work on in an emergency, drawing on people living in the compound. We had a maid who could cook, who arrived absolutely terrified, because she had been working for the Canadians and Mrs Canada was a Brazilian with demanding standards and quite a temper. She wanted her maids in white gloves, and poor old Alla, who was not the white-glove shape, was much better off working for us.

Junior diplomats nowadays are not great ones for giving dinner parties. In those days, you practised, or pretended. Third and second secretaries would have dinner parties, and do their best to get the table plan right. After a while, if you were invited to the Ruritians, you

knew pretty much who else was going to be there, because you knew how big their table was. You also knew pretty much what you were going to eat, because the Diplomatic Gastronom had just opened up, to Hoover up some of the hard currency which had previously gone into ordering supplies from Helsinki. If it had got hold of a large consignment of Tunisian shrimp, you could guess that you were in for a tasteful Ruritarianisation of the frozen shrimp. One of my memories of the Diplomatic Gastronom in those days was that electronic calculators were there for the checkout lady, who would then make sure that all was well by using her abacus.

Going to the Bolshoi was one of the treats, but you were only told on the day itself whether you had got the tickets that you'd applied for (I suppose because if a Mongolian trade union delegation had come unexpectedly into town, the theatre would have had to find tickets for them and their Soviet hosts). So you couldn't say to somebody, 'No, I'm sorry, we can't come to dinner because we're going to the ballet.' So you protected your potential theatre visit by arranging to go with another couple, which would allow you to say 'Sorry, but we've got people coming to dinner.'

CM: Your first year was spent as Private Secretary to the Ambassador and the second working in the Chancery. You arrived in '65 and that was just a year after Khrushchev was removed, the first dictator who was overthrown and given a flat and a dacha in retirement.

BF: There was a real sense of transition, which was less apparent to me because I hadn't known the previous thing. But when Khrushchev was around, ambassadors turned up at Kremlin receptions tolerably sober, because you never knew whether Khrushchev was going to form up and start a conversation. That completely disappeared when he went, and it clearly wasn't Brezhnev's style. Also when Humphrey Trevelyan was still Ambassador, Britain and the Soviet Union were Co-Chairs of a Conference on Indo-China which had started in Geneva and involved continuing work, so the British Ambassador in Moscow got to know quite a lot about Indo-China, and had a regular point of contact with the Russians. Bryan Cartledge was the person who supported Humphrey Trevelyan on that, and that's basically what he did as the senior First Secretary in Chancery. When the Co-Chair business came to an end, there was a real sense of having lost an important part of the political work of the Embassy.

We had transition also at home, with the Labour Government elected in 1964. In my two years in Moscow, we had visits from Prime Minister Wilson twice, from Foreign Secretary

George Brown at least once, and from Michael Stewart twice. High level visitors were not put up in the Embassy, which didn't have enough bedrooms, but were looked after by their Soviet hosts in a large and no doubt well-bugged villa on the Sparrow Hills. All this gave me plenty of practice in the mechanics of high-level visits.

For the first Wilson visit, the Russians fielded their top-level troika: President Podgorny, Prime Minister Kosygin and General Secretary Brezhnev. We should have known that it was going to be the General Secretary who ended up on top, but this was not then regarded as automatic. Before meeting the Russians, we went down into the safe-speech room and the Prime Minister said, 'Well, now, what are we going to talk to the Russians about?' My jaw dropped. I thought the people from London might have worked that out before leaving home.

Then there was the question of what should we talk to Podgorny about. (Nikolai Viktorovich Podgorny, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet). Frank Cousins, the Trades Union leader, was on the delegation for Labour Party reasons, and he said, 'Oh, Prime Minister, I think we should talk to him about freedom from hunger.' Everybody gave supercilious little smiles, but, in retrospect, I've always thought it was a good idea: if we had actually done that, Podgorny would have had an opening, and might have tried to get involved in the subject.

I was rung up during the visit from the North Vietnamese Embassy, who we didn't recognise, to propose a bilateral contact with the visiting delegation. A senior member of the Prime Minister's party followed up, but I'm not sure that anything came of it. Certainly not an opening for mediation by Britain, which Harold Wilson was thought to be angling for ... not least by President Johnson, who was said to be furious.

At the Kremlin dinner during the first Wilson visit, somebody on the Russian side didn't show up, and I was fished up by the Head of Protocol to fill the empty seat on top table "as an interpreter". It turned out that the empty seat was one between two members of the British team, so the interpreting was not too much of a problem, and I was able to listen in while Suslov, the great Politburo ideologist, explained the frescoes in the Kremlin banqueting hall to Lady Harrison. She knew her Bible stories at least as well as Suslov did, but it was striking that the nearest he could get to small talk was to expound someone else's ideology. The Secretary of the Cabinet, Burke Trend, was one of the visiting party, and was engaged with one of the Russians in a conversation about salmon. He thought at one stage that I was in danger of getting him presented with a salmon, but we got over that without mishap. Getting

behind the scenes to this extent was a function of the Private Secretary rather than the Chancery role.

One of the Private Secretary's jobs in Chancery was Embassy travel. You had to ask permission to travel out of Moscow, and even the forty-kilometre circle around Moscow had huge chunks that you couldn't go to. The Russians always denied that you had to ask for permission; they said you just had to register your travel plan. Sometimes it would turn out that the travel plan "did not register itself" (the reflexive construction was standard, but served to imply that the fault lay with the travel plan, and not with the Soviet authorities). It was the Private Secretary's job each week to collect the Embassy travel bids, to put them in and then to phone up Protocol Department to find out what had happened. You'd usually be told on Friday for weekend travel, and you normally just accepted that if the trip had not registered itself, that was the end of that. Sometimes, particularly if it was a senior member of the Embassy who was turned down, I knew that they would ask me why, so I would ask my contact in Protocol Department. Usually, they just said, 'Because ...' The most helpful reply was when they said, 'There are no hotels there'. You knew that wasn't the literal truth, but you knew also that there was an element of a different sort of truth in that. But my prize reply was when I was told that a particular trip did not register itself because 'the North is temporarily closed'.

One of the great escapes from the Moscow routine was travel, which we were encouraged to do. There was a sort of middle band of places where you could go. Very touristic destinations were difficult, as the Ambassador and other senior staff and their wives would have them pretty well covered. And then there were the extensive bits where the Russians wouldn't let you go ... but there was quite a lot of country in between. You had to go escorted by somebody else, not necessarily from the British Embassy: NATO, Old Commonwealth, someone with the same views about security. And if you travelled with, say, an Australian, the British tax payer was only hit for half the journey. Destinations varied, but usually provided a chance to get through and learn a little bit more of the way that the Soviet Union was working.

I remember a trip with Martin Nicholson to Almaty and Frunze, now Bishkek. They're quite close together, and we visited a factory in each place. In those days, Soviet factories had their plan and were encouraged to over-fulfil it. They also had 'socialist obligations', a sort of boy scout, do good for the community sort of business. These would be inspected, not

from Moscow, but from some reasonably local source. In Frunze and Almaty, the two factories had arranged to inspect each others' socialist obligations, and they pointed out to us that there was a very good restaurant about half-way along the road ...

On another occasion, we went in a group of four, Australia, Canada, Chile and me. We asked to call on the Mayor of Stalingrad, and he, although quite grand, must have felt that he couldn't be rude to all these four countries at the same time, so we got in to see him, which was quite a coup. Then we fetched up in Baku, and the Canadian, who was Jewish, kept asking taxis to take us to number 13 Something or other Street. No response, and we were wasting time, so I said to our Intourist guide, 'We've enjoyed seeing the cathedral and the mosque, but is there a synagogue in Baku?' She said, 'Yes,' (they were trained always to start with yes) 'but it is in Tbilisi.'

In Ufa, on a trip with Andrew Wood, we went to the mosque, took our shoes off, and found the carpets on the wet side of damp. We walked round outside to get warm again and somebody said, 'You've come to see the British engineers?' We hadn't thought to ask for a brief from the Commercial Section, and had no idea that there were British engineers there. So we said 'Yes, yes, but we've lost the way. We've forgotten where they are.' We were steered in the right direction, and ended up in the engineers' mess, playing darts and drinking beer. We asked whether there were any issues which we should be reporting when we got back to Moscow. The major complaint was a financial one. They were getting two or three times their normal salary paid straight into their bank at home, and had a *per diem* in roubles to cover expenses in Ufa. The problem was that they weren't able to convert into sterling and repatriate the savings they were making on the *per diem*.

I went with the Australian counsellor on a trip intended to cover Archangel and Murmansk. We got to Archangel, looked around and admired the wooden churches, then headed for the station to get to Murmansk. It turned out that we had hugely underestimated the time that would be involved, so we had to forget about Murmansk and go back to Leningrad without anywhere to spend the night. We went to the big hotel and they said no they were full. They happily changed their mind on that when they heard us discussing the possibility of going out and knocking on a few doors to see if we could persuade somebody to give us a bed.

Travelling was when you did most of your Russian speaking. I went to Samarkand and Bukhara with the Ambassador and Lady Harrison, and I got myself arrested. I had thought it

was worth taking a camera on the trip, and I'd never owned one. I was there in the street and saw a nice scene of an Uzbek on a donkey, so I thought, great, I'll practice. I took the snap, but unfortunately, behind the Uzbek and the donkey, was a row of trees and behind that was a barracks wall: a military objective. I was got hold of and taken to the nearest non-military indoors, which was an Uzbek barber's shop. The barber was at first was very sympathetic to this poor man who was being pushed around by the police, but then he got increasingly frustrated because the affair went on and on, and he was losing customers with a shop full of fuzz.

They told me that I was under arrest. I said that I wasn't, because I had diplomatic immunity. They said that I didn't have diplomatic immunity because I was under arrest. Finally, they said, 'Hand over your camera.' I said, 'No, I can't do that, because if I hand over the camera, you're going to take really awful pictures and claim that I had taken them.' Finally, I said, 'I have to have the film. Then you can have the camera.' They said, 'All right then, take the film out.' But I didn't know how to do that, and I wound away without pushing the appropriate button. That turned out to be the diplomatic solution, because they were able to explain the lack of evidence in their report by saying that the spy had deliberately let the light in to wreck the film.

This had been going on and on, and I was meant to have been on the afternoon walk, ready to do some interpreting for the Harrisons. When I got back to the hotel, they had left ages ago. I went up to my room, feeling a bit miserable. I was then summoned by the manager of the hotel, and 'summoned' is exactly the word. He said, 'I wish they had told me earlier and then all this wouldn't have happened'. In other words, he was quite senior in the KGB and could have pulled rank on my investigators ...

There was usually some sort of story on a trip. Martin Nicholson and I were told that we couldn't have dinner in our own hotel in Frunze because they were expecting a delegation. The delegation turned out to be from the Western press corps in Moscow, most of whom we knew quite well. But we had to go off and eat at the station buffet. We were joined there by a Russian officer in uniform who had just been seeing his mother-in-law off. He was obviously glad to have got rid of her, he needed a drink, and as you can't have a drink without eating, he joined our table and started getting quite expansive. He said that his wife did nothing but complain about this place, although when he first met her in Moscow 'they were living like pigs.' It was very strange that he would do this, so we made a point of

making it clear that we were English. It helped that Martin had cigarettes in one of those bright red Benson and Hedges tins. At some stage, he gave the impression that he recognised Martin as English, but not me. Then, realising that he might have caused offense to Martin, he said, 'No, no, you speak much better Russian than he does (pointing at me) but this place is full of half-castes,' (pointing at the band).

What else was there in Moscow? First of all, remarkably little traffic. Delmar and I could go in winter to the Bolshoi in our car and park so near to the front steps that we didn't need coats. And it was very useful not to need coats, because if you had them you had to queue up for ages at the cloakroom. But if you paid 25 kopeks for a little opera glass, which didn't magnify anything, you could then go to the front of the queue to return the opera glass ... and get your coats back at the same time.

We went quite often to restaurants. You booked and there would be a queue outside of people who had not booked and were hoping to get in. So you could only get in with body language, to the effect of 'I'm a foreigner, and I'm going to the front'. I'm sure that was done deliberately. You'd knock on the door and eventually somebody would come and let you in. Service was enormously slow, but the Russian customers didn't mind, because they were there for the evening. They were celebrating. It had taken them huge trouble to get there in the first place and they were going to eat, drink and dance until closing time. Fast service would have been seen as a sign that people were trying to get rid of them.

There was a restaurant a little bit out of town near the American dacha which served very good Georgian food. It was a lovely place to go, and full of doctors from the nearby hospital. The restaurants in Moscow varied. The Berlin (the pre-revolutionary Savoy) near D'etsky Mir, had a good reputation, and we'd go there quite often, but always in a group. We also had the Embassy dacha for recreation, walking in the summer and cross-country skiing in the winter ... and as a venue for parties.

The 1966 Final of the World Cup was a memorable Moscow experience. A lovely warm summer evening; all the windows in the apartment blocks were open, and when England won there were huge cheers from all around. Next day, the Embassy switchboard was swamped with people phoning to congratulate us, which I suspect was more anti-German than pro-British, but anyhow we briefly rode high.

We couldn't really claim Russian friends, or visit Russian houses, but there was Professor Akhmanova, the then power behind the Smirnov English-Russian dictionary. She had been married to Smirnov, and some say had denounced him to the authorities. Anyhow she took over the dictionary and she would adopt a young couple from the British Embassy, and we were the young couple of the time. That got us in to a Soviet apartment, and quite an impressive one. She said that it had belonged to the family, and we assumed that it had then been turned into a cooperative, but I can't remember seeing members of the family or of the cooperative. The walls of the large drawing room were papered with photographs cut out from American magazines of glamorous ladies in gorgeous gowns, some of which Delmar recognised as advertisements for Modess. We would also be invited to her dacha, not too far out of Moscow, where members of the English faculty at Moscow University were roped in to help entertain. The job of filleting a rather noxious brand of canned fish was reserved for whoever was most in disfavour at the time.

Information gathering, beyond what could be gleaned from the Soviet press and from the better informed foreign journalists, depended very much on contacts with other Embassies, especially if they had just had a high level visit. The wife of the Finnish Ambassador was reputed to have political contacts of her own, and stories would come down to us from her via the Danish Ambassador. There were relatively few African embassies at that time, but two very interesting ambassadors: a Ghanaian who left when N'kruma fell and was succeeded by somebody less political but more sociable, and the Nigerian, an impressive-looking Ibo. They gave parties and were happy to include Secretaries in Chancery from friendly western Embassies. I had quite good contacts in a number of African embassies, and that was one of the ways you did the job.

The year I was in the Chancery, it rather emptied out, I'm not quite sure why, so I was covering much of the foreign policy field. The Six Day War in '67 was an important test of what we could find out, and good contacts in the American Embassy were crucial. I would go to call on Walter Smith, the senior First Secretary in the American Embassy who covered the Middle East. I can remember at one stage something had cropped up and we had a telegram ready to go. Anthony Williams, the Head of Chancery, said, 'the telegram's fine, but let's not send it yet, because it would be quite worth while checking with the Dutch Ambassador this evening' (the Dutch looked after Israel in Moscow in those days) 'when we see him at the Canadian National Day.' Except that we didn't, because it seems that he

hadn't been invited: a lapse which the rumour mill was quick to pin on the Brazilian wife of the host.

I should add something about another striking feature of the Canadian Embassy in Moscow, which was George Costaki, the senior locally engaged person in their Administration Section. His older brother, Nick, did the same job in the British Embassy and had done it throughout the war and then on. George was the one with the fantastic collection of paintings. Camilla Gray's book *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863-1922* had recently come out, so we knew a little more than we had learned at school about Tatlin, Malevich, Popova, Goncharova and Kandinsky. They were nowhere to be seen in the Moscow gallery of Russian art, because it wasn't Socialist Realism or ancient history. It was presumably locked away in a basement somewhere. But where you could see quite a lot of it, if you could make an appointment to visit George Costaki in his flat in Moscow, was there. He had a small flat, self-contained; the walls were Modernist, papered with striking pictures. The ceiling was papered with icons, which weren't bad either. I remember taking the Harrisons there, and George, I think, must have sensed that Lady Harrison didn't regard black squares and red triangles as quite her thing, so in a memorable, but rather condescending gesture he reached down under his son's bed and pulled out a Utrillo in a rather grubby frame.

CM: Did you learn how he had acquired these Modernist paintings?

BF: I think he knew the painters. He appreciated their work, and he was good company. He may have had some money, I don't know, and been able to pay for things that weren't yet big on the market. During our time in Moscow, George's wife needed an operation and she went to Stockholm for that. Their's was a slightly privileged society, obviously. While she was lying in her hospital bed in Stockholm, she received a hand-painted Get Well Soon card from Chagall, which paid for the operation, as it was intended to do. That shows a strong personal connection with at least one of the artists. When George left the Soviet Union, I think that some of the paintings went to the authorities, but some of them didn't. There was said to have been a fire at the dacha and I've no idea whether it was a genuine fire or not, but that could have been a convenient explanation for the paintings that no longer remained in the Soviet Union.

### **UKMis Geneva, 1968-1970**

CM: We are starting again after a short pause. Brian we are now in 1968. You were cross-posted to UKMis Geneva, this time with Delmar and three children.

BF: Not a cross-posting, because we went back to London first and Delmar produced the twins. 1967 was being celebrated in Moscow as the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 'Great October', everyone was being urged to over-fulfil their norms, and we evidently fell for it. Then it was off to the United Kingdom Mission to the United Nations in Geneva.

To start with, I was back with the Specialised Agencies. Seeing the ILO in conference mode, with its extraordinary tripartite structure (governments, employers and workers) was quite an experience. And the British, perhaps to fool the foreigners, had a plain Mr leading the government delegation, a Knight (from the CBI) leading the employers and a Trade Unionist Lord leading the workers. The WHO (World Health Organisation) looked more normal in comparison, but they had an Executive Board on which people sat, nominally at least, in a personal rather than a governmental capacity. Sir George Godber was no doubt governmental at home, as Chief Medical Officer for England and Wales, but would remind me of his personal capacity on the Executive Board when I tried to persuade him, in the end successfully, that the fact that germs knew no frontiers was not sufficient reason for recognising the GDR.

The mechanics varied from Agency to Agency, but the role of the person from the UK Mission was to try to keep budgets within reason, and to deal with any political points which might crop up. Worth doing, no doubt, but one annual cycle was enough. I was lucky there, first of all because the Economic Commission for Europe, which was in my portfolio, had some interesting subjects on its agenda; and then because I was able to inherit a major concentration on UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development). UNCTAD had just had its second major conference, in New Delhi on this occasion. Peter Marshall, a Counsellor on the economic side of UKMIS, had found UNCTAD fascinating in the run-up to and during the New Delhi conference, but found it rather less interesting when the caravan returned to Geneva, and I was able to leave the Specialised Agencies behind (someone else was posted out to fill the slot) and to move on to what I thought was much more interesting work.

In retrospect, this gave me a good deal of negotiating experience. UNCTAD had main Committees on Manufactures, on Commodities, on Development Aid and on Shipping. They met regularly, and would then report to meetings of the Trade and Development Board, where the British delegation would be led by an excellent senior official from the DTI (then still the Board of Trade) who seemed happy to have me as a member of his team. This was encouraged also by my Ambassador in Geneva, Sir Eugene Melville, who was keen that his young people should be given some of the negotiating work to do.

The UNCTAD routine tended to be that a Committee, say that on Manufactures, would have a three week meeting in Geneva. A senior Indian or Brazilian politician would come over in order to push things forward. After two and a half of the three weeks, they realised that things weren't going very far, and that they needed a bit of a nudge. My American colleague and I, and the Japanese, would meet at our level with a little group from other Permanent Missions in Geneva: Brazilians and Indians and often Nigerians, to see what we could do. The point I would make was that if the developing countries ('the Group of 77') produced a text that we would have to vote against, it would go through, but it wouldn't cut much ice in London, because the Treasury would see no reason to be helpful about a resolution that we had voted against. So it was to everybody's interest to try to find something that all could agree to.

At that time, the Generalised Scheme of Preferences was a bright new idea, and work was just beginning. The western developed member states (known as Group B when in UNCTAD mode) would meet at the OECD in Paris to try to work out a negotiating position for Geneva. I was able to go to Paris for these meetings, Ambassador Melville having kindly signed a piece of paper required by someone in London, to certify that it was essential in the national interest that I should do so. That was fine, until it turned out one day that I couldn't make it. I forget what it was that needed to be done in Geneva, and it was certainly something important, but there was a huge row. The London view was simple: 'If it's essential in the national interest, why wasn't he there?'

The coordination in Paris worked well; the negotiations in Geneva moved slowly forward, the Generalised Scheme of Preferences emerged and a special decision in the GATT was taken to allow it. The trouble was that apart from the Brazilians and the Indians and one or two other industrially quite advanced developing countries, hoi polloi in the Group of 77 were not in a position to get much immediate benefit out of the Scheme.

The Shipping Committee was a case apart, where some developing countries regarded themselves as being ill-served by the Conference Line system, and where the United Kingdom and Norway were the countries most affected in Group B. One Saturday morning I was sitting in an ad hoc group or committee with the Norwegian Counsellor, a vastly experienced senior colleague. We worked well together and we reckoned by the end of the morning that we had agreed a text with the Group of 77 representatives which pretty much settled the problem of shipping for UNCTAD's contribution to the Second Development Decade. By Monday morning, both my Norwegian colleague and I had been disowned by our respective capitals. The tom-toms must have been beaten very quickly, and the two shipping industries were quick off the mark. Embarrassing, but in retrospect, a helpful reminder that what we were negotiating in Geneva did have some impact in the real world. But I suspect that the Shipping Committee brief would have been carried by someone from London from then on.

Geneva was a rather special working environment. You didn't work with the people in your own mission very much, because you were in the Palais des Nations in some committee or other most of the week. Then, if you went to a Geneva cocktail party, you found little groups talking earnestly about Article 4B of the draft. I don't like cocktail parties very much as a social thing, but as a business thing, it was a quick way of whizzing around and seeing if there was any chance of making progress here, there or anywhere.

The place was also full of spies, with a bit of an edge at that time, because '68 was the Prague Spring and the Soviet invasion. The spookery were working pretty hard, and we also had a disarmament delegation at the other end of the office corridor. The nice man who was the Head of the Disarmament Delegation, Ian Cromartie, felt that there should be more of a sense of family between the two ends of the corridor, but the problem lay in the time-tables. One end of the corridor might be ready for a bit of socialising, while the other end was working flat out.

Ian Cromartie invited me early on to a disarmament cocktail party, where I met the Romanian Counsellor who said how nice it was for him to meet Michael Duncan's successor. I said, 'It's very nice to meet you, but actually I am not Michael Duncan's successor. First of all, he was in the Disarmament delegation and I'm in the UN Mission, and secondly he left Geneva weeks before.' We chatted a bit more and when we had finished chatting, on his way out, he said, 'Very nice to meet Michael Duncan's successor.' I then discovered what was going

on. I had, in order to keep up my Russian, ordered either *Pravda* or *Izvestia* from the Swiss newsagent in, I think, Winterthur, who was in charge of subscriptions to the Soviet press. The previous UK-based diplomat who had ordered a Russian newspaper from Winterthur was Michael Duncan and the Russian spooks had let their Romanian colleague in on this great secret.

I was invited out to lunch early on by two rather beefy Russians. They knew that I was covering the Economic Commission for Europe, and in particular the trade committee. They said, 'We do the Economic Commission for Europe too.' I asked them what committees they looked after, and I got a couple of committee or sub-committee names from each of them. A bit later on there was a great budget exercise sparked off from London, where the Treasury thought that the Economic Commission for Europe was costing far too much. I was delegated to find out how many subsidiary bodies it had, to which the answer then was 194. I went in to the nice Czech or Pole who looked after these things in the Secretariat, and explained that we were getting into trouble with London over the numbers. He said that we could relax, because many of the bodies on the list were dormant. So I asked him whether he would kindly put a D for dormant against the appropriate bodies on the list. He agreed, asked for a couple of minutes, and came back with the answers. No prizes for guessing that all the groups that my Russian friends claimed to be following were on the dormant list.

### **Course Director, Civil Service College, 1970**

CM: After Geneva it was the Civil Service College, and you were Course Director.

BF: I was pleased with the posting, because I had had such a good experience and memory of the Treasury Centre. What had happened in the interim is that there was the Fulton Report, commissioned by the new Labour government, which recommended that civil servants should be chosen from relevant disciplines. The reaction against that, and the eventual compromise, was that you would continue to recruit roughly as before, but everybody would have a compulsory year's training on economics and social administration on joining the service. It was then decided that the year was an academic year of 40 weeks, divided into two courses, the first lasting 15 weeks and the second 25.

The fact that all this was compulsory left no room for volunteering, and bright young people with good degrees starting out in the world of work found themselves back at school without much if any experience of working in their Departments. That was not hugely good for

morale. And the government seemed not to have been able to decide whether the newly established Civil Service College should be run by academics or by civil servants. The top man was an academic, Professor Grebenik, but then you had two separate pyramids on the way down, with academics and civil servants each on their rung of the two different ladders. Hugely wasteful,

The long course was not without merit, and work done in groups and on visits out of London was particularly worthwhile. But there is something dispiriting about being told that the objective of the exercise is to fill 25 weeks.

I was also involved in shorter courses, aimed at Home Civil Service Principals, which were more fun to direct. Each would take people out of their Departments for three weeks, and able people were very keen to get on them. And, if they were able to organise the time away from their desks, they could do more than one course over a few months. The menu included Macro-economics, Micro-economics and Trade, and the combination would provide a good covering of the waterfront. These were stimulating courses, and the visiting academics seemed to like teaching at the Principal level: volunteers, and people with hands on experience of Whitehall.

On the whole, it was disappointing and one year was quite enough. One Long Course and some of the three-weekers, made a good diet, but starting again with another Long Course would not have been attractive.

*Today is 13 February 2017. This is Catherine Manning recording the second interview with Sir Brian Fall for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme.*

### **Head of Soviet Foreign Policy Section, Eastern Europe and Soviet Department, 1971-75**

CM: Brian, when we finished our last session we were talking about your quite short time, a year I think, at the Civil Service College. Then you went back to the Foreign Office and you were given the posting as Head of the Soviet Foreign Policy Section in the old EESD, Eastern European and Soviet Department. Can you tell us a bit about your work at that stage when you first went back?

BF: The Department was headed by Julian Bullard, I'm not sure whether right from the beginning, but for most of my time there, and he didn't have assistant heads of

department. There were four sections of the Department, two on the Soviet side, two split Eastern Europe between them, and the four Heads of Section worked directly to the Head of Department. At the beginning all the headlines were for the Soviet Internal Section, because September 1971, was when the 105 Soviet agents were thrown out. Actually, it was ninety plus fifteen: ninety who were in England at the time, plus fifteen who were not allowed to come back. That was a huge business. George Walden, the head of the Soviet Internal Section, was the person who did the serious work with Julian. We'd reached the stage where it was almost impossible to police the wrong-uns in the Soviet establishment in London, because if we threw somebody out, the Russians would throw somebody out of our Embassy in Moscow and, as we had a vastly smaller embassy, the damage was proportionally greater. So something more drastic had to be done; Ministers were persuaded, and done it was.

On the Soviet Foreign Policy side there was plenty of work to do. The Current Intelligence Group met weekly and there was usually a Soviet angle or two to be analysed. There were briefs to write for people attending various meetings. We had *Communist Policy and Tactics*, a monthly collection of articles about Soviet and East European affairs, which was edited in the Foreign Policy Section. And we had time to attend seminars on Russian questions at one or other centre of the University of London, and I remember going down to the Royal Naval College at Greenwich to lecture to the Lieutenants' Course on Soviet Foreign Policy.

At the end of 1971, the idea of a European Security Conference, which had been something that the Soviet Union had been pushing for years, suddenly became something that needed to be looked at more seriously. At first, the Russians had been trying for a conference on European Security without the United States and Canada. Then they agreed to US and Canadian participation, but pressed for an early start to secure quick recognition of East Germany. But by 1970, the year of the Federal Republic's Moscow and Warsaw Treaties, the key frontiers had been recognised as part of Chancellor Brandt's Ostpolitik, and the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin followed in 1971. So the earlier obstacles to western agreement to a conference had disappeared, and it was time to assess on the merits whether we should be saying yes or no.

Rodric Braithwaite and I - Rodric was Assistant Head of Western Organisations Department at the time, and we had been friends from Moscow - settled down to write a paper with our analysis of the pros and cons and the policy options. It was still very much a draft when word came down from the office of the Permanent Under Secretary, Denis Greenhill, that he had

somebody calling on him, who wanted to talk about the European Security Conference: what was it, and did we have anything on it? So the draft went whizzing up to the Permanent Under Secretary, Denis Greenhill thought it was fine, so in a way we short-circuited the system and had a quasi-policy fairly early on.

Then the UK started taking part in the political cooperation machinery of the EEC, I think in February 1972. Tom Brimelow went over to a meeting of Political Directors, and I was the first desk-level person to follow, leading a delegation to a meeting of a group thinking about policy towards a European Security Conference. I remember going in to see Tom Brimelow before going to this first meeting, and one of my questions was what language should we speak? Tom said, 'You can talk English, don't worry, and if anybody questions that, you can mention the Beaumarchais-Brimelow Agreement.' (Beaumarchais was the then French political director).

At the meeting I went to, I had somebody from the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) with me, because there were economic and trade questions on the agenda. He said, 'I hope it's not going to be all in French.' As it happened, the first afternoon was a bit of politics and procedure, so I explained to him that I'd do that in French as a courtesy, and that next day we'd talk English when we were onto the trade agenda. Basically, it was Economic Commission for Europe stuff, which we assumed would be brought across into what became the CSCE, (Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe), and we had to work out how we would deal with the trickier points that the Eastern Europeans were likely to press for.

So that was the deal. I spoke French the first afternoon, and the German delegate at the end, a lovely troll-like figure, actually called Von Groll - troll with a g - came up and said he was glad that I had spoken French, because he had instructions to speak German the minute I spoke English. He tried the same thing on Rodric Braithwaite a couple of weeks later. It wasn't really true because I did speak English the next day, without provoking a flood of German. Von Groll's informal explanation to me, when he took me aside later, was that the speaking French point was very important, because if German home civil servants got the idea that they could use their own language, they'd come to all the meetings and there would be no jobs left for diplomats.

CM: The Beaumarchais-Brimelow Agreement, what did it say?

BF: I suspect that there was nothing in writing, but the basic understanding was that English and French were to be the languages of Political Cooperation. And so it worked out, with great credit due to the Germans for putting their weight behind a system which allowed Political Cooperation meetings to take place without interpretation. And so the planning went on, and we decided that the balance of advantage was to agree to a Conference. To say no, when you were professing interest in détente, would have been a public relations disaster, and there was also the opportunity to show what the West meant by détente: something of benefit to ordinary people. It was very clear that the Russians wanted the preparatory talks, if there had to be preparatory talks, to last a week and a half, to agree the agenda, date, and place for the conference proper, and then to go for it. We were arguing that we wouldn't go to a conference unless we had reasonable expectation that there would be scope for detailed discussion of the subjects we thought important, and the prospect of worthwhile conclusions. So we drafted terms of reference for each of what were to become the main committees, and which were known at the time, and subsequently, as 'baskets', because to talk of committees might have implied premature agreement to a conference. (The fact that the baskets were given numbers rather than names was again tactically important to the western cause: names would have allowed the Russians to claim that the agenda had already been agreed, so what were we waiting for?)

The first Soviet reaction to the idea of terms of reference was wholly negative, and they applied a lot of diplomatic effort during the first session of the MPT (Multilateral Preparatory Talks) to trying to split the western camp, and in particular the EEC Nine. They saw the French as the great prize, but we and the French had worked very closely together in all the preliminary work in the Political Cooperation machinery, and that continued throughout the first session of the MPT. Then the great question over the Christmas break was whether the French were going to turn the other way and prioritise good relations with Russia, so that the solidarity of the Nine would break down. But no, the French remained absolutely committed to the preparatory work we had all done together. It helped that we were 'Great Britain' as we sat around the conference table at Helsinki. I remember at the beginning of the MPT coming in a couple of days late, walking into the conference hall and saying to Crispin Tickell, 'My goodness, you've given away Northern Ireland. That's a good start.' But that was apparently the way we were on the Finnish Diplomatic List, and it had the huge advantage in the MPT that we and the French sat next to one another.

CM: Let me just get this straight. The Russians were hoping for a Conference to begin straightaway, but in fact the Conference proper didn't actually start until 1973 and the Final Act wasn't until 1975.

BF: The Multilateral Preparatory Talks (MPT) in Helsinki went from November '72 through to June '73. The first stage of the Conference proper was in July '73 also in Helsinki and then the long second stage of the Conference proper went to Geneva, which was better equipped with committee rooms and all the UN infrastructure. There again, the Russians were saying that this stage had to go quickly, and confirm agreement to a concluding Summit. A strong indication that it was going to take longer than that was when we discovered that the head of the Finnish delegation had brought his horse with him from Helsinki to Geneva. I don't know about the horse, but the second stage of the CSCE was in Geneva for about two years and the Final Act was in Helsinki in summer '75.

Time working in Helsinki during the MPT was fascinating because we were breaking absolutely new ground, and the Nine hung together particularly well. There were four sessions of the MPT, and between sessions we would be back in capitals, with time for coordination at a more senior level in the Political Committee of the EEC and in NATO. At the end of session in Helsinki I would draft a telegram for the Ambassador, Anthony Elliott, reporting on the main points of the session and pinpointing where we would need instructions for the next one. Then I would be back at my desk in EESD/WOD, drafting an answer to the telegram from Helsinki. An interesting way of running a conference.

At the beginning of the MPT, with the Russians hard at work trying to split off members of the Nine and of NATO, they were still seeing us, post the expulsion of the 105, as prime candidates for the doghouse. They were hoping to do the business without the Brits, but gradually realised that that wasn't working, thanks to the cohesion of the Nine, who remained conscious that the positions we were defending in Helsinki were the ones we had elaborated together in preparation for the event. Having accepted that the Nine were the people who needed dealing with, and that we and the French were working together in the Nine, the Russians turned realistic and Anthony Elliott received an invitation from his Soviet opposite number to come to lunch with two or three members of his delegation. Anthony unfortunately contracted a bad cold and couldn't go to the lunch, but the Russians said they'd have it anyway. So we had three Soviet Ambassadors, the resident one, Maltsev, who became a Deputy Foreign Minister, and Mendelevich, who was my great sparring partner,

and Zorin. The three of them sat down opposite three British First Secretaries, without giving any impression of protocol angst. I thought that was a great credit to them: there was a job to be done, and you dealt with the people who came with the job. Mendelevich was the one who would be looking for ways to get things moving forward. Zorin was an unexpected western secret weapon. Things at one stage were going very slowly, and the idea that the terms of reference proposed by the Nine were asking for too much was beginning to gain ground. Then Zorin came and made a speech of such unrelenting Stalinist bloody-mindedness that solidarity among delegations of the Nine and NATO, and the sympathy of key neutrals, was restored without the need for premature drafting concessions.

The need for terms of reference, and quite detailed ones, became accepted, and then Brezhnev got impatient to launch the Conference which he still thought of as his baby, and instructions came from Moscow that the Soviet and Warsaw Pact delegations should stop haggling and simply settle for what was on the table. The East European who had been given a serious negotiating role was the East German, who was in charge of the Eastern team on Basket Three, particularly human contacts and information. There was one sentence in our draft terms of reference which I think most people in the Nine would have accepted had a little bit of negotiating fat in it: it called for the 'freer and wider dissemination of information of all kinds.' There was a vague feeling that perhaps you could drop a word or two here or there without cutting into muscle, but then the word came from Moscow to say that that was it.

I went into plenary, as acting head of delegation, to 'register' the result of the negotiations in committee, and I wanted George Walden with me, because he had been the person who had been doing the negotiating on Basket Three. I looked round to find him in a terrible fight with the Irish delegate, John Campbell, who had been very close to us all the way through. I couldn't think what was happening, so we had a little time out and it turned out that John Campbell had also concluded that there was a bit of negotiating fat in 'freer and wider and of all kinds.' His plan, as soon as something had dropped out, was to send a telegram to Dublin, saying that they needn't worry about the birth control information problem because it was now all right. So when the whole text went through he found himself in a mess, because he hadn't reported any of this and it was more than he reckoned that his authorities would wear. We were wondering what on earth we should do when Monsignor Silvestrini, the senior representative of the Holy See, who hadn't been seen in the conference chamber for ages, came into the room, insisted on jumping the speakers' queue, and said it was a great pleasure

for him to be able to withdraw the Holy See proposal on religious information (which we had all forgotten about) because the current text on information was splendid and covered the point admirably, without the need for a separate reference to religious information. The text having been so enthusiastically endorsed by the Holy See, John Campbell reckoned that maybe Dublin would be able to wear it too. That was the only Act of God I can remember in my Foreign Office career, and it certainly came as an extraordinary relief.

Apart from the East German, few East Europeans made much of a mark. In the first session, the Poles fielded a first class diplomat from their Planning Staff, but he quickly realised that the Russians wouldn't give him work of any interest, so he didn't come back after the Christmas break. The Romanian, the brother of the pianist Dinu Lipatti, spoke beautiful French and did his best to spread the idea that the Romanians were different and more civilised than their Soviet and East European colleagues. But their 'initiatives' were soon recognised as only marginally early deployments of established Warsaw Pact fallback positions, and when it came to information and human contacts, they were harder line than most.

Having respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms included as one of the ten "principles of primary significance guiding the mutual relations of the participating States" was one of the key negotiating points for the western delegations, but the focus in Basket Three was freedom of movement and freedom of information. The texts there, and throughout the MPT and the conference proper, were deliberately not in legal form. We were going for a political text and we were avoiding legal language, partly to avoid it all looking like an ersatz peace treaty, and partly because we knew that legal texts on freedom of movement and information would have generated escape clauses on sovereignty, law and customs, the Soviet interpretation of which would have excluded any hope of practical progress. Much better, therefore, to have best endeavours language, without the blanket qualifications, and with a system for checking on progress from time to time.

CM: Brian, I just want to draw attention here to the fact that you were doing this as Head of Section in EESD, which we've spoken about, but at a certain point you also took on the role of Assistant Head of Western Organisations Department.

BF: That was purely a CSCE role, and two able first secretaries from WOD would box and cox, coming out to Helsinki in support. The Assistant Head business was important in making me a credible Deputy Head of Delegation in Helsinki. When I was in London, I sat

at my desk in EESD: I didn't have a separate one in WOD, but I was there on paper, working to Crispin Tickell, as well as to Julian Bullard. Crispin had arranged for WOD to be the CSCE department, but he was busy doing lots of other things, so that's where I fitted in.

A nice footnote to the MPT from the British point of view is that in November 1973, Alec Douglas-Home was invited to pay an official visit to Moscow: quite something, still relatively soon after the expulsions. The Douglas-Home charm seemed to work a little on Gromyko, so that the official talks in Moscow went well. Then we all went up to Leningrad by train, and Michael Alexander, Rodric Braithwaite and I shared a compartment with Rogov from the Second European Department and Viktor Sukhodriev, the star Soviet English language interpreter, who had hit the top at an early age by interpreting for Khrushchev during his visit to the United States. We shared a bottle of whisky and we found that there were things that you could gossip about on foreign ministry practice, like both Alec Douglas-Home and Gromyko sending out instructions to say that incoming telegrams were getting too frequent and too long, and finding their efforts ignored.

We arrived in Leningrad, got into a line of cars and found all of a sudden that it had stopped and that everyone was rushing across the road to a subway station. We rushed too, and got on to the train. I was sitting in a carriage facing the Soviet Ambassador in London, Lunkov, when walking into our carriage from one side came Michael Alexander, with the carefree look of a Private Secretary who is sure the other Private Secretary is looking after the boss; and, from the other side, came Antony Acland, with much the same sort of carefree look. Neither of them was with the boss, and neither of them knew where he was. Great shock horror, much enjoyed by Lunkov. Alec Douglas-Home was driving the train.

Then we decanted, and went with very little time to spare to pay our respects to the Hermitage. Not a source of pride, but I suspect that the delegation must share the British All-comers record for the tour of the museum: nineteen and a half minutes, including four and a half minutes for a temporary exhibition of Scythian gold.

In 1974 I remained heavily engaged on the CSCE, but from the London end, working on briefing and instructions for the much larger delegation to the second stage of the conference in Geneva, which I visited only from time to time.

### **British Trade and Investment Office, New York, 1975**

CM: In 1975 you moved to the British Trade and Investment Office in New York. Were you sorry to leave the CSCE work?

BF: I was ready for a change, because one could see that the CSCE was heading in the right direction in Geneva, but that it was going to take time. I was ready for something new. At that time in the FCO, the importance of commercial work was impressed on us all, and a very good commercial job, which had been done first by Ewen Fergusson and then by Christopher Mallaby, came up in New York, which coordinated export promotion and inward investment work for the whole of the United States. So there was plenty of travel, major trade shows to attend and useful work to be done. But I thought that too much of the nuts and bolts of export promotion was being done on the assumption that we were competing with other foreign companies, while Americans were actually buying 95% of what they bought from other Americans. I tried and failed to get people thinking about the idea we might have European Community trade offices, so as to be able to deploy them in more places in the United States, leaving the Embassy and consular posts to concentrate on the major contracts, where the competition really was from EU partners or other foreigners, and on inward investment.

### **Sabbatical, Harvard Center for International Affairs, 1976**

CM: This seemed to have been a period when you were taking on a new job every year, Brian. How long were you in New York?

BF: A year and a half, after which I was lucky enough to be sent on promotion to spend a sabbatical year at the Harvard Center for International Affairs (CFIA). That was fantastic. But it was tough on Delmar, who was enjoying being back in New York, and the idea of moving with two children at day school and all our heavy luggage for nine months was not immediately appealing. But we settled down quickly, found a nice house in Cambridge, and an excellent school for the twins, and Delmar found that she was allowed to audit practically any Harvard course that she wanted to: plenty of lectures and seminars, and no exams ...

For me, writing a paper was pretty much compulsory. I think that at the end of the year they put them on a shelf, so that they could count papers and remember how many people had been on the programme. I started off wanting to write a paper about the Asian-ness of the

Soviet Union: how far having so much of the country in Asia affected policy and decision-making in Moscow. I made a lot of calls, did some work in the library, and decided, rightly I think, that this was far too big a project: if it could be done at all, it would have required much more time than I was able to put to it. So I fell back on producing a paper about the CSCE, which was not too difficult for me and may have made a worthwhile addition to CFIA records.

Then there were Harvard seminars on Russia to go to. And Roger Fisher, a professor at Harvard Law School, ran what he called a Devising Seminar, trying to find ways towards the solution of stubborn international problems. He was well-regarded, and also well funded and able to offer dinner, so the seminar was a great attraction on the Harvard scene. He wasn't very keen on having a British diplomat involved, but the CFIA persuaded him to let me in. The agenda for the year covered the Middle East, South Africa and Northern Ireland, and Fisher had the funds to invite three "Conflict Fellows" to provide local colour: Walid Khalidi, a Palestinian who was at Harvard anyway; Alex Boraine, a former head of the Methodist Church in South Africa, and a member of Helen Suzman's party in the South African Parliament; and John Hume of the SDLP to cover Northern Ireland. John, having very probably left Northern Ireland for some weeks of peace and quiet up there in New England, must have found it a bit strange to find himself sharing an office with a British diplomat (an idea of the CFIA administration), but he recovered from the shock and Delmar and I got on with him well. He was not convinced by Roger Fisher's conflict-resolving ideas, however, and Alex Boraine and I would have to take him for a recuperative drink after a couple of these seminars.

Nuclear arms control and disarmament was another major Harvard focus, and I used to attend seminars at the Programme for Science in International Affairs (PSIA) run by Paul Doty. This was at the height of the theory of ensuring stability through Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), and I can remember a talk given by General Millstein, visiting from Moscow, who was asked about the network of underground tunnels to which it was thought that the Soviet top brass would have access when the alarm sounded. As MAD theory considered perfect defence to be aggressive, as allowing for a first strike to be launched with impunity, Millstein was being pressed on this, and he said that it was a terrible exaggeration, and that he, for instance, had never been told what the signal was and where to go. There was a giggle at the back of the room, and I went to the gigglers after the meeting to ask what that had been about. 'Oh,' they said, 'that was Ann Klein; she said, "He must be Jewish."'

### Counsellor, Moscow, 1977-79

CM: In 1977 you left Cambridge Massachusetts and were posted to Moscow where this time you were Head of Chancery and the Ambassador was Howard Smith.

BF: The interesting thing was how much change there had been since the mid-60s, and how much the Helsinki Final Act, the monitoring groups set up in the Soviet Union and the dissidents, fed into the system. You didn't have to do a huge amount of discovering on your own at the beginning, because two American journalists, Hedrick Smith and Robert Kaiser, had each produced very readable paperbacks, pointing out that you could now do this and do that. By the time we arrived in September '77 the immediate post-Helsinki excitement had calmed down a bit, and the journalistic successors had less news to report. Nevertheless, there were things that struck us as new. For example, we were living in a flat in Skatertny Pereulok near to a large block inhabited by Soviet priviligentsia. Catherine and Melanie, who stayed with us for the first year, were able to play what, as little Americans by then, they would call 'dress up,' but their Russian friends would call 'playing princess.' We had a good trunk-full of princess clothes to draw on, and social contact was all a bit more flexible. And then we met a choreographer, Vera Boccadora, who told us that she was working on a new ballet for the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Revolution, based on the Shakespeare play: *Love for Love*. Delmar and I thought *Love for Love*? Neither of us knew it. She was not surprised. 'What it really is,' she said, 'is *Much Ado About Nothing*, and we had the poster all ready in draft, saying *In Honour of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Great October: Much Ado About Nothing*. And we said, "Uh-oh!" So they decided that *Love for Love* was a perfectly Shakespearean thing to call it ... and much safer.

The International Women's Club was founded at that time, as an initiative of diplomats' wives. The Foreign Ministry was in two minds, but didn't close it down, and Maris Liepa, a star dancer from the Bolshoi, was one of the early guest speakers. He would also come occasionally to our flat, so that too was bit more open.

We also had a wonderful early reminder of how not everything had changed. When David Owen came out as Foreign Secretary in October '77, he had wanted an official agreement to sign with the Soviet side. We had decided in the Embassy that a very useful agreement, aimed to help British engineers out in the boonies, rather like the Ufa group, would be to provide an emergency visa procedure, for use if somebody suddenly got seriously ill, and there was a need to get back home quickly, without the endless waiting for the routine exit

formalities. Second European Department didn't say no; they saw that there was good sense in that. Then a week before David Owen was due to arrive, we were told by the Russian side that it was impossible, it simply couldn't be done. We asked why not, and were told informally that the Foreign Ministry had had to consult 'other government departments' and that 'other government departments' were opposed. Oh, dear. 'But,' they said, 'do you think your Foreign Minister would like to sign an Anglo-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Accidental Nuclear War?' Preparation time: two and a half minutes, because the Americans had already got one. Huge signing ceremony, Owen-Gromyko, with Brezhnev standing behind, and having a good talk with David Owen beforehand. Happy Foreign Secretary.

Another positive change was that in the '60s, if you went into the Foreign Ministry, you went into the Second European Department. This time round you could say that you wanted to call on, say, the Fourth African Department, to talk about developments in their bailiwick. If something important was happening there at the time, they would say that they were too busy, but you'd get in there afterwards, and, if you did it in Russian and they hadn't been forewarned, you'd get a little bit longer than you might otherwise have done, because they would have timed the call to include interpretation. And you could go to some of the Institutes of the Academy of Sciences: I remember going to the Oriental Institute and having a long call on Primakov, who reappears later. So there again, I think Helsinki helped. It also helped that you were able to table or pass to Second European Department lists of personal cases that you hoped they would be able to do something to help over. They didn't always help, but at least they were no longer able to say that this was none of our business: Helsinki Rules OK.

1978 was the year of Howard Smith's farewell call on Gromyko. Howard had said that British Ambassadors to Moscow had been changing around far too quickly, and that he was going to stay until his retirement, making a four-year posting. 1978 was half way through and he was being called back to London by Prime Minister Callaghan to take over MI5, because there was a feeling in Labour party circles that MI5 was getting a little bit out of control as far as dealing with the Labour leadership was concerned. Howard Smith agreed to take on the job, but said that he would only do it if he was given authority to explain to Gromyko why he was leaving early. There was tooth-sucking in London, but it was finally accepted that the Soviet Union was probably able to work out who the head of MI5 was, so that it wouldn't be a complete disaster for national security to agree to what Howard Smith was asking. The next step was to get a call on Gromyko without saying what it was going to

be about. I asked Howard how we should handle that. He said, if they ask, tell them that I've been in government service for many years, that I've never wasted a minister's time, and that I don't propose to start now. Howard Smith's stature in Moscow was sufficient to carry this off. I then had to persuade Robert Wade-Gery, who was the Minister, that he was too grand for the bag-carrying job of accompanying the Ambassador.

When we got to Second European Department, the Head of Department, Suslov, was there, with Viktor Sukhodriev as the designated interpreter. Suslov said that the call on Gromyko was firm, we'd just walk down the corridor in a couple of minutes, and could we now tell him what this was all about. So Howard told them, and Suslov reached down to his bottom right-hand drawer to fish out a bottle of whisky. The call on Gromyko turned out very well: he was always complaining about people talking to the Soviet Union in language which he thought unsuitable for addressing a Great Power, and Howard's decision was clearly recognised as an example of the right way to go about it.

So then Curtis Keeble came out, and by early '79 he was well plugged in in Moscow and thinking that it was time for him to pay his introductory calls on the Foreign Ministers of Georgia and Armenia: not because they had much, if any, claim to policy initiative, but because it was a way of getting round the Soviet Union, meeting some new people and getting a feel for the periphery. I remember going into Curtis's office, I forget why, and he was on the phone to his driver, Constantin, asking him to meet him at Tbilisi railway station with the Rolls, and giving him I think five days for the journey. I said, 'Ambassador, I think six would be safer.' 'If you say so, Brian.' I then continued standing there and he said, 'Is there anything else?' And I said, 'Yes, I'd like a week's leave, please.'

So Delmar and I put ourselves in the back of the Rolls and off we went with a pineapple, which we delivered to some British engineers on the way down: not only a pineapple, but that was what seemed to impress the crowd peering in. That first night, we stayed in Kharkov, and there was a price list posted in our hotel room: rent of car with driver, 3X (I've forgotten the actual price); rent of car without driver, 13X (because they'd need extra money to pay for the tail cars); and 'visit to the relatives, 33X' (because things were beginning to change in the Soviet Union.)

This was right at the end of April, and we were told that the Georgian Military Highway was still closed for climate reasons, so we went via Rostov on Don, where a very lively restaurant band was playing *Ra-Ra-Rasputin, Lover of the Russian Queen*. More change ...

Constantin would eat with us, and would change into something he called his leisure suit for the occasion. Then, when we needed to get in somewhere, he would turn up the lapel and show a badge which he had there. I asked him what it was and he said, 'It's my Master of Sport badge.' Which may well have been true.

We then had a night in Sochi and a night in Sukhumi. The First of May found us in Gori, opposite the Museum to Stalin, and with the car jammed in a procession celebrating the great proletarian holiday, hoping that no *Daily Mail* correspondent was in the offing to observe the company being kept by the Embassy Rolls. It turned out all right, we got ourselves safely to Tbilisi, the Keebles came and took over the car and Delmar and I flew back to Moscow.

The Duke of Edinburgh visited Moscow in '79, as Head of the International Equestrian Federation. Nigel Sheinwald was appointed his Embassy gofer and interpreter and found himself, as I certainly would have done, a little short of the necessary equine vocabulary, for which the Russian words were not included in our language training.

Another 1979 visitor, just after the June elections in the UK, was Margaret Thatcher, stopping over to refuel on her way to the G7 Summit in Tokyo. Kosygin came out to do the honours, looking as if he had come from a rather good summer holiday, in a nice dark blue suit and a suntan. This was the first Thatcher exposure to Moscow. She was very new and the Russians were curious.

### **Head of Energy, Science and Space Department, FCO, 1979-80**

Then I went back to London to become Head of something called Energy, Science and Space Department.

CM: It's nice to know that the Foreign Office once had real ambition and aspiration, taking on Space as well as everything else.

BF: That's a nice reaction, but the explanation is slightly different. There used to be a department in the Foreign Office called Oil Department, which was becoming regarded as yet another way that Arabists could be given nice-sounding jobs in the Office. They closed Oil Department in 1972, just before the 1973 oil shock. They then realised that a few more Arabists might be useful, but you couldn't reinstate Oil Department without suggesting that the Foreign Office had made a mistake, which of course it never did. So they had Energy, Science and Space Department instead, picking up Science and Space from one of the other

functional departments in the FCO. The Science and Space sides were keeping an FCO brief on European programmes in which we were by then involved, and the Energy side, surprise, surprise, was mainly oil (there was a separate Unit in the Office dealing with nuclear.)

There was another oil shock in '79 and there was then quite a lot of diplomacy engaged in working out how western economies could be protected from oil shortages. The International Energy Authority, which is related to the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) was working on one side of the institutional fence, and the EEC was working in parallel. The objectives were important: we were trying to put in place systems for energy sharing in an emergency, and for providing for the compulsory maintenance of stocks. For once, there was inter-sessional work between G7 summits. Normally, these go from summit to summit, with nothing in between except for Sherpas preparing the next summit: but in this case there was an Energy Group, under strong American impulse, which would meet to think about policy. As the next summit was to be in Italy, we would meet in Rome, which was a very pleasant and reasonably effective thing to be doing. The subsequent Venice Summit communiqué had an important chunk about energy, but I had moved on by then.

Another ESSD memory is of a senior official in the Department of Energy who had been very well-regarded by Tony Benn as Secretary of State. It was widely thought that he would find it difficult to make the transition from Benn to Thatcher, but in fact not at all, because Prime Minister Thatcher had very similar views to Secretary of State Benn about foreigners getting hold of our oil. In those days, it was part of my job to submit to the Foreign Secretary when the British National Oil Company (BNOC) wanted to raise its prices: there really was that degree of government oversight. Nicholas Ridley, who was the Minister of State to whom my Department reported, told me when I paid my introductory call on him that all this was a nonsense, and that we shouldn't be bothering with it. He saw my face drop and said, 'Don't put any of that in your submissions, because they'll just cross it out.'

### **Head of Eastern European and Soviet Department, FCO, 1980-81**

At some stage in 1980 I moved back into East European and Soviet Department as the Head of Department. I was invited, shortly after taking over, to give a lecture on Soviet Foreign Policy at Greenwich, this time to something called the Senior Officers' War Course. I phoned Geoff Murrell in the Research Department, and said, 'I don't want anybody doing

any drafting, but if you have off the peg anything on Soviet foreign policy that would be useful for me to read before I cobble together this lecture ...' Next morning in my in-tray I found a copy of a speech I'd made to the Lieutenants' Course ten years earlier. Geoff was quite right: there had been changes, but not in Soviet foreign policy.

Then Lord Carrington went to pay an official visit to Hungary and Poland. I remember getting the briefs together, when somebody from Protocol Department came and asked whether he could show me the presents they'd got for Lord Carrington to give to his opposite numbers. I said that we should stick to established procedure: I would do the briefs, Protocol Department would do the presents. But he really wanted me to see them. What had happened was that on a previous overseas visit by the Foreign Secretary, Protocol Department had bought a malachite box from Asprey's for Lord Carrington to give to his opposite number. Carrington thought it ludicrously expensive, and the country concerned was in any case one with its own malachite, so he went off in the lunch hour and bought an antique map of the country he was going to visit. As happens in bureaucracies, the word went round Protocol Department that what the new boss does is to give antique maps when he goes on visits. They were quite right to show them to me, because the antique map to be given the Hungarian Foreign Minister included at least half of Romania, and that for the foreign minister of Poland, although it had the frontiers absolutely right, was overprinted in large black letters: PARS GERMANIAE. The moral is that there are countries to whose Foreign Ministers you can give antique maps, but not that many of them.

I went on that visit. George Walden was still Private Secretary and that was my first close involvement with the Private Office. Hungary had a Stalinist foreign minister, but the country was economically more lively; Poland was in an interesting period. They were both good visits, and Carrington handled them extremely well.

Before I took over as Private Secretary, we had the Ceausescu visit to London, and I remember being asked to cast a political eye on a draft speech to be made by the Lord Mayor at a City banquet for Ceausescu. I had a friend, a former Army officer, who worked for the Lord Mayor on the protocol side, and the draft was so sycophantic and smarmy that I phoned my friend up and asked him where the draft had come from: was it something from the Romanian Embassy? He said, no, it was from his boss, the Rear Admiral ...

More generally on the Eastern Europe side there were beginning to be economic issues, not about giving aid, but about the possibility of greater western involvement and whether the IMF should be there. I remember doing a meeting in the Cabinet Office fighting, at the time successfully, with the Treasury, and being warned to be careful afterwards by Robert Wade-Gery, who had been in the Chair. I had an Assistant Head of Department who was able to run with these economic issues, but the amount of work being generated by Eastern Europe was far more than it had been in the Bullard days, and the idea of splitting the Department became more and more obviously what should be done. That was indeed what happened shortly after I left EESD.

### **Principal Private Secretary to Secretary of State, FCO, 1981-84**

Early in 1981 I became Principal Private Secretary in succession to George Walden.

CM: We are starting again after a short break. Brian, shall we start by talking about Lord Carrington as Secretary of State and as a boss.

BF: Carrington as a boss develops as I got to know him better and better. The first family fan was Delmar, because Lord Carrington came with a Chatham House delegation, headed by Lord Harlech, to Moscow in our middle time there, probably 1978. Delmar sat next to Carrington at dinner and decided that this was the way politicians ought to be. When I was Head of Energy, Science and Space Department, I used to go in occasionally to talk oil to him; he knew a lot more about oil than I did, but he was always supportive and encouraging and very nice, even in that artificial circumstance. Clearly, the Foreign Office was the job he wanted to do, and George Walden was an excellent Private Secretary. I suspect that our handover had been half-plotted during the visit to Poland. Anyhow, joining the Carrington Private Office was just the beginning of a relationship which continued after the Foreign Office with NATO, which was in a way closer because we were both on the same posting abroad together. He was just a wonderfully easy person to work for, demanding because he wanted quality, but with a great sense of humour and an important maxim: no equality of misery. If somebody had to write a speech, it meant that somebody else needn't. In NATO, when we were with him on a visit to an alliance member country, he would ask about the speech at the evening's dinner, 'Is it two great countries, hand in hand?' If you answered yes, he would say, 'Don't bother to write anything. I think I can do that.' Marc Grossman, the outstanding American who joined us as the number two in the Private Office in NATO, got

angry once in Washington when one of his State Department colleagues said, 'Oh, how lucky you are. It all goes by magic; there's no real hard work involved.' Marc explained that we had just spent an hour with Lord C, asking difficult questions to prepare for a press conference; the work might not show on the surface, but it was there all right. Carrington had great charm, and a great ability to establish good working relations with people he was visiting or meeting with. If you drafted a speech for him, he wouldn't necessarily change it on paper, but he'd improve it on delivery. He had a way of making sure that a beta plus speech was alpha by the time it came out. I think he now looks on me, and on Delmar, as good friends, and we keep in touch. In career terms, the Private Office job was a breakthrough, much better than being head of department. And it was also a relationship bringing me knowledge about the way the world works which I couldn't have got in any other way. If I had one memory of what was best about the Foreign Office, it would be related to Lord Carrington.

At first, this all began quite slowly, because we hardly knew each other. What would happen in the morning meeting was that he would open the red box at his desk, with the private secretaries sitting around. He would hold up a piece of paper which you couldn't quite identify, because the writing was facing him and not you, and he would say, 'I don't think this is quite right, do you?' But it was all done in a very good tempered way and if he did ask for clarification, or extra work, it was always spot on. He had the experience, the intelligence, and the right instincts.

And then it was July, and the UK took the rotating presidency of the EEC, who had by then decided that we needed to make a collective demarche in Moscow, to explain to Gromyko just how badly we thought that the Soviet Union was behaving over Afghanistan. Having taken this brave decision, our partners decided, perhaps a little less bravely, that they'd wait until the British presidency and have Carrington do it. He, before setting off, organised what was meant to be a confidential overnight meeting with Genscher and Cheysson at Chevening, to sound them out on how best to handle a tricky piece of business. The meeting was a good idea, but Genscher then leaked at least the fact of its having taken place *à trois* to the German press, and the Italians were furious.

We flew to Moscow, with a good number of British correspondents with us on the plane. Carrington did his stuff with Gromyko, and Gromyko said that the Afghans were all very happy and contented, and had never been better off. Carrington asked why, then, were there

over a million Afghan refugees in Iran, and another five hundred thousand in Pakistan. Gromyko, without batting an eyelid, said, 'The Afghans have always been a nomadic people.'

After the meeting with Gromyko we went back to the British Embassy, and had a nice dinner with drinks on the balcony overlooking the Kremlin. We then flew from there straight to Rome to do some apologising to Signor Colombo, with the plane full of the British journalists who had come out with us to Moscow. The Embassy in Rome rose to the occasion, found an out of town trattoria which could take the whole of the flower of British scribblery, while Colombo had us to a second dinner on the terrace of the Palazzo Madama. That must have been one of the best-reported apologies ever.

For the rest of the year, what sticks in the mind is not major foreign policy issues, but some major foreign policy travelling. We had the G7 Summit in Canada at the end of July. This was the first one I had attended, and I discovered that as a private secretary, if you armed yourself with something that looked like a message, they would let you through into a room where the great men – and Mrs Thatcher - were talking. I came in and was able to see that Reagan was busy writing on one of those yellow legal pads. I thought that was pretty impressive note-taking, until I was able to look over his shoulder and see that he was doing drawings of rugged-jawed cowboys with their hats on, slightly in profile. At Montebello, delegations were each allocated spokes in the same log cabin, said to be the biggest in the world. There was some discussion of the Middle East and Arab-Israel, and a draft communiqué emerged talking about the conflict between Israel and the Arab states (ie, forgetting about the Palestinians). I could see this was wrong, and whizzed out towards the spoke of the log cabin where the Americans were. Larry Eagleburger was standing at the door, and when he saw me coming he said, 'You're the first.' He knew exactly what they'd done, and that it wasn't going to hold.

Then we had Cancun, a great north-south Summit, very much like UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), blown up to a higher level, so I knew some of the issues from old. Foreign Ministers went to a preparatory meeting in Cancun in August and I went with Carrington there. We had a bilateral with Al Haig, and I can remember taking notes, which seemed fine at the time. Then I got back to our delegation office, and found that I couldn't make head or tail of it. That was an early sign that Lord Carrington had a rather special American opposite number. Then Cancun moved to summit level in October, with

Foreign Ministers in attendance, so I was back there with Lord Carrington, supporting a Prime Minister perhaps not wholly in her element ...

Then there was a Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting (CHOGM) in Melbourne, in late September, early October. There was something at the UN that Carrington had to do first, and we flew from New York to Los Angeles or San Francisco and picked up the Air New Zealand flight that took us across the ocean. We stopped for a day or two in Wellington, where the High Commissioner was a former Carrington Private Secretary, and over the weekend Lord Carrington came in to tell us that we were going to have to look after ourselves that evening, because the Prime Minister of New Zealand had asked him to come round for dinner. It turned out to be a dinner which, weekend or not, featured the whole of the New Zealand cabinet. If the idea had not occurred to us before, we knew that we were dealing with somebody a bit special as a foreign minister.

We stopped off on the South Island to pick up Lee Kwan Yew, and then headed for the Melbourne CHOGM, where Carrington found himself with nothing to do. The previous CHOGM, before my Private Office time, was all Lancaster House, Zimbabwe/Rhodesia and keeping Margaret Thatcher focussed, so there was a great deal of diplomacy to be done, some with foreigners and some closer to home. But there was really nothing at the Melbourne CHOGM to involve Carrington, who was getting bored until the Heads went off for their traditional weekend, and he could spend some time with old friends. A day or two before the exodus, an African, a dapper figure in a well-cut grey suit, looking immaculately Saville Row, came up to Carrington, said what an honour it was to meet him, introduced himself as the King of Swaziland and asked whether he could have a photograph taken with Lord Carrington the next day. This was agreed, as were the time and place, and the same figure duly reappeared, but having changed into a light mauve silk leotard. Not quite the photograph we had envisioned, but the good will remained constant.

The next year, 1982, started with a decision to do something about the fact that British Ministers never seemed to bother to visit the ASEAN countries. Carrington decided that we could do them all in one trip, in ten days or so. Malaysia was the difficult one, because Prime Minister Mahathir was running his 'Buy British Last' campaign at the time. There were no such major problems elsewhere on the trip, but it was clear that a bit of high-level attention was both overdue and welcome. Delmar was encouraged to come along, and saw herself partly in an informal lady in waiting role for Lady Carrington, and partly, given her

membership of the Committee of the Diplomatic Spouses Association, as an equally informal visiting trade unionist. There were British businessmen and journalists paying their way in the back of the plane, and nobody asked about what Delmar was doing there until halfway round the circuit, when we were joined by our first woman journalist, who went straight up to Delmar and asked her how much she was paying for her ticket. The answer was: exactly the same as the journalists who had signed on for the whole trip.

It was an extraordinary experience, seeing lots of places which we would otherwise never have seen, and wonderful practice for Delmar and me for other postings later on, being able to observe at close quarters what ambassadors and high commissioners and their wives were doing right and doing less right in the eyes of an experienced couple of visitors.

In the Philippines they'd just had a film festival, and the guest house was said still to have George Harrison (not the Beatle but a well-known American actor) staying in it, so that was a good reason for staying with the British Ambassador, which we did. Lady Carrington was briefed to say nice things about the architecture of the guest house when she called on Imelda Marcos, with the Ambassador's wife and Delmar in support. Iona Carrington said her piece about how nice she thought the architecture of the guest house pavilion was, but was unprepared for the reply. 'Ah, yes,' said Imelda Marcos. 'I'm not surprised that you should like it. I'm on my fifteenth karma. Me and Indira Gandhi are the only two people who have reached that number, and in an earlier incarnation I was the architect who designed the Pyramids.' Lady Carrington did talk a bit slowly anyway, but you could see extra time being taken for the response to that.

In Bangkok we went to call on the King, which meant getting in a plane out of Bangkok, up to Chiang Mai. The businessmen were all in smart suits, but they were their only smart suits in Chiang Mai, so by the time they'd been on a rather sweaty airplane the trousers were looking a bit rumpled. When the hotel sent somebody to offer pressing, they all volunteered. So all the trousers went off to be ironed, leading to an occasion when Delmar, differently dressed, was the only person able to go down the hotel corridor and commandeer support for all these rather grand businessmen, standing in their suit jackets and their knickers, hoping not to miss the bus for the call on the King. That was a necessary courtesy from our side and a nice one from the King's side.

Even Malaysia was just about all right, because the Foreign Minister was a reasonable person and Mahathir just wanted to say his piece. I don't think that the Buy British Last business stopped immediately, but you were allowed to buy British, if you could show that you'd tried elsewhere first, so there was perhaps no enormous damage done.

Indonesia as I remember it seemed to be run entirely by Air Marshals (you have to be able to fly quickly from island to island if you want to maintain an effective central government) and their attractive wives managed to balance being served by staff who came in on their knees with being proud of their degrees from the LSE.

Then back to the real world with the trip to Israel, which was difficult because the Conservative Friends of Israel thought that Carrington was a typical Foreign Office, anti-Israel, camel-corps sort of person, who should have been much quicker off the mark in visiting Israel. The fact that the Israeli government at the time was headed by Begin and Shamir, both of whom had established reputations for blowing up British soldiers, didn't seem to weigh very heavily on the Conservative Friends, and the visit was not a happy occasion ... quite apart from the fact that bad news was coming out of the South Atlantic and that the landing on South Georgia had already happened. We were getting telegrams suggesting that other things weren't going too well either, and I'm almost sure that the visit was cut short.

We were back in London when the Falklands War proper broke out. All sorts of factors can be said to share the blame in retrospect, but the fact that the British Government was not prepared to pay to keep *HMS Endurance* on, other than through the FCO budget, is a clear example of the failure of the Overseas and Defence Committee of the Cabinet to command, and where necessary reallocate, the resources necessary to sustain a policy based on national rather than departmental priorities. This should have been one of the key lessons of the Falklands.

On 6<sup>th</sup> April Lord Carrington resigned. I hoped at the time that he wouldn't, and I certainly wouldn't have minded John Nott resigning. After all, he had seen all the relevant Intelligence reports, and his Ministry was responsible for the military defence of the islands. They hadn't even bothered to mine the runway, so that it could be blown up in an emergency. Anyhow, that's water under the bridge. There was a foul leading article in the Times on the Monday morning, but I think Carrington had decided anyway. He thought that you shouldn't ask

people to go to war without any of the politicians concerned thinking about their position. In retrospect, it was the right decision, and he emerged the stronger for it.

Francis Pym took over as Secretary of State. Within the first two months, I think he made eight speeches in the House of Commons. Eight foreign minister speeches in the House of Commons would normally last you three or four years. He did it very well, because he had a real feel for the centre of the House. Mrs Thatcher underappreciated what he was doing; or perhaps it encouraged her to think that he was dangerously positioning himself for the succession, which a little bit of her may well have done. Then there were two trips to Washington on Falklands business. On the first one we had an official plane and a big delegation, including the Chief Legal Adviser, for a major exchange of views with the Americans. The next time it was British Airways, Francis Pym and me. We picked up our support from the Embassy in Washington, and from Ambassador Henderson in particular. That was the time when Paul Foot was running the idea that the *Belgrano* had been sunk in order to scupper the Peruvian peace plan. I have felt all along that this was rubbish, because I knew that Haig was very interested in his chance of a Nobel Prize over the Falklands conflict, and if there had been a Peruvian peace plan of any substance he would never have let Pym leave Washington without addressing it. We would have been sat down in front of the Peruvian plan, and any nightmares Margaret Thatcher might have had about Pym coming back from Washington with a piece of paper saying Peace In Our Time would have become more vivid. Instead of which, the Washington talks came to an unexciting end, and as Francis Pym had never met the Secretary General of the UN, I thought it was probably an ideal time to do that, so we went up to New York and had a meeting with Perez de Cuellar. None of that would have happened had Haig thought there was even a quarter of a Peruvian peace plan waiting there to be improved.

Then back to England. There were Pym Foreign Secretary visits to Jordan and Syria and the Spanish Foreign Minister in London, so a bit of normal Foreign Office business was going on. The G7 Summit was in Paris in 1982, with a grand dinner in Versailles which Margaret Thatcher left quite quickly. I saw her going and followed, but some of the grander members of the British delegation didn't, or were in serious talks with their opposite numbers. So we had a number of Foreign Office knights stranded in France in dinner jackets, and the *sauve qui peut* group on the helicopter.

CM: It was Julian Bullard and Tom Bridges and two others, who had to get the train and the ferry overnight (because there was no Eurostar in those days) in evening dress and medals in order to get back to London for work the following morning. Apparently Mrs Thatcher realised what had happened and said, 'We've lost the Foreign Office. Take off.'

BF: I suspect there was a feeling that Fall should have been able to do something about it, but there was no way.

That was the 1982 Summit. The Brezhnev funeral was in November 1982. Margaret Thatcher didn't go to that, so it was Foreign Minister's business. We arrived in Moscow at a time when the official lying in state had ended. I said to Francis Pym that this was something not to be missed, so we asked if we could have it extended. We got permission to go in, just the two of us. There was what I thought was Muzak playing, but when we got nearer we discovered it wasn't Muzak; it was cadaverous human musicians in full evening dress, who looked as if they'd been there for three or four days solid. You went up the stairs and saw a bank of poinsettia type things, then there was a bank of Brezhnev's medals and then there were the eyebrows. Very Hollywood House of Horrors. I had arrived carrying the official red box, and thinking, damn they're not going to let me up, I'm going to miss this. But they were entirely relaxed, so I walked up, red box and all, and we no doubt signed the book. It was a striking picture, and one that stayed in the memory much more than the funeral itself.

In February 1983 the Royal Yacht was positioned off the west coast of Mexico, and the Queen and Prince Philip paid a part-official, part-holiday visit to the Pacific coast of Mexico, then up to Los Angeles and San Francisco, and to the Yosemite National Park. Francis Pym was Minister in Attendance for the governmental parts of the trip, and I went with him. He was anxious not to look as if he was ducking out of work, so we flew all the way back to London from Puerto Vallarta, had a couple of days in London, and rejoined *Britannia* in Los Angeles, where there was a grand lunch at Twentieth Century Fox. There was only one American at the high table, Holmes Tuttle, who had paid for the lunch. All the rest were Hollywood Brits, which inevitably attracted a lot of bad publicity, of the "Brits too snotty" kind. The Press Secretary had a difficult time, not least because he couldn't put out the real reason, which was that President Reagan, when consulted about the arrangements, couldn't decide between his actor friends and his political friends. That evening, there was a great event on board *Britannia*, and next day the weather turned so foul that it was decided to abandon the plan of the Queen sailing up to San Francisco and going in under the Golden

Gate Bridge. So we flew up on Airforce One, stayed in a hotel and had what may have been the Queen's first experience of dining at Trader Vic's, which the resourceful Mike Deaver had managed to empty out for the occasion.

The next big thing was the G7 Summit, which the Americans hosted in Historic Williamsburg. It took place in May, rather earlier than other G7 summits have been, because Margaret Thatcher had sent a message to President Reagan the year before, saying, without saying why, that later dates would be very difficult for her. In retrospect, it seems clear that she must have been considering election dates.

The Williamsburg summit provides two clear working memories that I have of Margaret Thatcher, one very positive and one less so. The Americans had wired up the conference room so that you could see from the delegation offices what was happening. The Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robert Armstrong, who has a beautiful Italic hand, was in the conference room taking notes, and we could see from the delegation offices pretty much what he was writing. It looked as if they were about to agree to something about intermediate range nuclear weapons in language which our experts, who had no reason to be at a G7 summit, would have been unhappy about: one of those points which were hugely important at the time, but which I can't now remember. Anyhow, I could see that something was going wrong, there was nobody on the delegation who knew the subject, so I whizzed down to the conference room with the 'message' which I had learned was the way to get in. When I got down there, I found that Mrs T already had the floor, but I decided to take the risk and knelt by her side, and I suppose she assumed that I wasn't completely mad and wouldn't do that for no reason, so she stopped talking for a second and turned round to ask me what it was. I explained quickly and she immediately took the point and asked for a little break in the proceedings. She had been, indeed everybody had been, on the verge of taking a Canadian formulation which would have been regarded as wet, and perhaps worse, by the NATO orthodox. So we had the break, and Kohl asked Genscher what this was all about. Genscher hadn't the faintest idea, and called me over. I explained, they saw the point, but as soon as the meeting started up again, instead of settling for a neutral formula which could easily have been done, Mrs T decided that this was the time to make Trudeau sign up to a firmer line than he would have wished. That was unnecessary, and wasted a certain amount of time, as there was no reason why the G7 should have been doing that. The Prime Minister left the Summit early, to get on with election business, and Francis Pym took over the top seat, leaving me

sitting around and twiddling my thumbs with a better class of private secretary. On the flight back it was Pym and Howe, and John Kerr and me.

Then there was the election. Both the assistant private secretaries were younger and had children at home; ours were in boarding school, so I volunteered to do the whole three weeks when the Foreign Office Private Office was transported to the constituency and to the eaves of a tea-room on the banks of the Cam. Valerie Pym was an effective election agent; she really organised the campaigning and was absolutely in her element there. I asked a different Foreign Office PA to come up each week, so that no-one had to stay there the whole time. We had the FCO car (because it wasn't to be used for party political purposes) and checked in with the boss at lunch time and in the evening, wherever Francis was speaking. I would hand over bits from the box, talk a bit of FCO business, and then the PA and I would sit back and listen to the speech and questions. Then one night he had to go down to Ipswich for a television appearance; that was a long and difficult drive, so I decided on security grounds that the car and driver should go with the boss, and that the PA and I would find our own way back to the hotel. Once there, we got a drink, went up to one of our rooms, switched on the television and saw Francis Pym saying, 'We don't want too big a majority you know.' That's what chief whips and former chief whips think, because too big majorities are trouble for chief whips, but it wasn't what Prime Ministers expect to hear from their cabinet colleagues on national television in the middle of an election campaign. It wasn't the cause of her dropping him, but it gave her a lovely pretext. Geoffrey Howe took over as Foreign Secretary.

CM: Thinking of your three foreign secretaries, how did they compare in their working methods?

BF: One way of answering that is to look at Conservative Party conferences, because I went to one with each. Some home civil servants I spoke to seemed to think that this was strange or improper, or something between the two, because civil servants should keep out of domestic politics. I would argue that the Foreign Secretary remained Foreign Secretary throughout the election campaign, that he had to have a working link with the Foreign Office and that it was therefore entirely proper that I should be there. With Carrington, all this didn't need arguing out. He was entirely relaxed. The Foreign Secretary makes a speech to Conference that he or his Private Secretary has brought up with him; it gets tinkered with a bit, because interested delegates will come up and say do, please, say this or that; and at 2

o'clock in the morning, or thereabouts, you're sitting there putting the speech together again. I don't know what the rule book says, but the speech has to reflect government policy, and foreigners, mainly via the media, are obviously part of the audience, so there are occasional circles to square, and I had my PA there to help. The next year, with Francis Pym, I was able to say that that was the practice. Valerie Pym was doubtful. There were bits of the speech she wanted to rewrite, and she wasn't sure that I was needed for that. The result, I think, was that it was later by the time the room had emptied and I was able to put everything together for delivery. Then there was Geoffrey Howe. He shrewdly observed that I didn't seem to be getting on terribly well with the then senior PA in the Private Office (the successor to Jane Pearey) and asked whether I would mind if he brought his political PA, who loved party conferences, instead. That duly happened, and events seemed to be following the routine. Once the room had emptied out, I asked Amanda to come over and bring her book. 'BOOK', she said, 'I don't do SHORTHAND'. I thought to myself that this was going to be a long night, but actually it wasn't, because she typed at lightning speed and I was able to dictate straight on to the machine.

Less controversial fixtures on the Private Secretary's note-taking agenda, in which I was involved each year in much the same way with all three ministerial bosses, were the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in early September, and the NATO Ministerials in May and December.

The first week of UNGA was a great public occasion. The Secretary of State's speech was important, and so were the press briefings before and after. There was the opportunity for contact with fellow Permanent Members of the Security Council, but also a chance to have bilateral meetings with the foreign ministers of countries who were not in NATO or the EU, and therefore rather harder to keep in personal touch with. Geographical departments in the FCO were keen to get their candidates on the list, so the list of runners for these meetings, which took place in the Secretary of State's hotel suite, was always crowded. All that was required for it all to go smoothly was for each of the invited foreign ministers to arrive on time and to leave on time, and for the hotel staff to be equally punctual in their bringing and taking away of coffee. In short, it would take only the mildest attack of Murphy's Law to tilt the board in the direction of a Feydeau farce. And then, of course, there were the points for the boss to make, and the points to include shortly after in a reporting telegram.

The NATO Ministerial meetings were important in themselves, and the reporting of proceedings in the Council chamber was a matter for the UK delegation. But there was also the Berlin Dinner, prepared for beforehand by a meeting of officials from France, Germany, UK and US, who would then report to the four foreign ministers on points of concern arising out of their politically sensitive parish. This was a worthwhile exercise, but would perhaps not so regularly have attracted ministerial attention if it were not for the fact that the four ministers would then go on over dinner, and without the Berlin experts, to talk in confidence about current issues in East-West relations. Ministers in dinner mode would be accompanied by their Political Directors and Private Secretaries, in our case by Julian Bullard and me. Julian, with typical generosity, would share the note-taking and telegram drafting with me; but it was also his view that one shouldn't go to bed with notes waiting to be written up, so these tended not to be early nights.

And then there were the morning meetings in the FCO. I've already mentioned the Carrington approach. Francis Pym was immensely hard-working, though his reputation was otherwise. He used to go through the box very carefully and we used to discuss what needed to be done. Within a week or two I found if any minute came out from the Private Office of more than three paragraphs, it was assumed that this was Fall getting ideas above his station and inventing things that couldn't possibly have come from Francis Pym, which was quite wrong.

The Pym-Thatcher relationship made things difficult, and John Coles (the foreign affairs Private Secretary at No 10) and I were trying to schedule a working bilateral which might make things look a bit more normal. For a long time, nothing; and then there was a last minute summons, at the shortest of short notice. I scribbled some points down on a piece of paper, and off went Francis Pym. When he got back, either the meeting was already known about, or I went to tell Antony Acland, the PUS, that it had happened. He asked what had been done about a brief. What I should have said was that there just wasn't time for briefs. Instead of which, like a fool, I said, 'Oh, that's all right, I wrote one.' A Rumpelstiltskin explosion, followed by 'You're not in charge here, you know.' If you were working for Francis Pym and dealing with No. 10, you didn't really need reminding that you weren't in charge, but that all blew over and Antony Acland remained a good friend.

Morning meetings with Geoffrey Howe were punctuated by reflections which suggested that he must have listened to the news on the hour almost every hour through the night, and post-

meeting follow-up involved learning to decipher the marginal notes he would have sprinkled quite generously over the contents of the box. When the box included briefing for a meeting, which it often did, Geoffrey would almost invariably ask for more - probably typical of a hard-working barrister. On bad days, it looked as if one paper would go in to the box, and then three more would be asked for, and the Foreign Office was beginning to feel that this was too much. Then the Secretary of State was summoned before the Public Accounts Committee. I went with him, and I'd got the papers for the meeting in some sort of order. When he got into the Committee Room, he immediately changed the papers around, and I thought that if he asked me for something I wouldn't be able to find it. But in fact he handled it beautifully, and I was able at the PUS's morning meeting the next day to say, 'Please tell your departments that the Secretary of State used every piece of paper that he had asked for at the right time and in the right way.' I hope that did some good, but I'm not wholly sure.

Geoffrey Howe was very keen on the EU side of the business, and when CHOGM came around again, in New Delhi this time, he had something in Brussels that he really wanted to do, but he didn't want to miss CHOGM, so he and I flew all the way from London to Delhi for a day and a half and then all the way back again. I don't think there was a huge contribution to Commonwealth affairs as a result, but nobody could say that the Secretary of State hadn't bothered to go to a Commonwealth summit meeting.

EU summits were of course much more frequent. I went to one or two when Carrington was there in support of Margaret Thatcher, but there was nothing very much to do for the Foreign Office Private Secretary, except to develop working relations with the EU experts in the other ministerial offices who would be there. It therefore made much better sense that the Assistant Private Secretary who was dealing with the EU departments should go, rather than me, and that is the way we arranged it, both for EU summits and for the much more frequent meetings of Foreign Ministers.

The Andropov funeral was in February 1984, and that was the funeral which Mrs Thatcher went to. I can remember sitting with her in the Embassy, seeing Chernenko on television and wondering whether we should just stay there and wait for the next funeral. She held herself beautifully on a seriously cold day, and got good Moscow marks for that. And then there was the flight back, with her and Geoffrey Howe, and with Dennis Healey and David Owen as the Labour and SDP representatives. Good Thatcher-Healey interchange over lunch.

Geoffrey Howe, whose handwriting was almost impossible to decipher, also talked very quietly. The Head of the CIA, Bill Casey, came in for a getting-to-know-you meeting. Geoffrey greeted him in the rather quiet way that was his, and then Casey replied, decibels lower. Geoffrey obviously thought that this might be a reprimand, suggesting something not far short of a security breach, so he dropped a few decibels in his turn. The American note-taker and I looked at each other and put away our note books, so whatever transpired is lost, to official history at least.

### **Director, Cabinet, Sec. Gen. of NATO, 1984-86**

CM: Brian, we are now in 1984 and the next move is out of the Foreign Office. Can you tell us how that came about?

BF: There was talk about Carrington as a likely Secretary General of NATO, or maybe it had gone further than that and it was clear that he was going to be. I can remember being at Bledlow for a social lunch, and saying, 'If you'd have me, I'd be very happy to come over and help you in the NATO Private Office.' Carrington seemed pleased; Antony Acland was entirely supportive of the idea, and Geoffrey Howe had no objection. So I left the Foreign Office Private Office, and did a bit of preliminary travelling with the Secretary-General-to-be. I can't say exactly when the arrival in NATO was, but there was a NATO Ministerial meeting in Brussels in May, and that was the Luns valedictory. Carrington must have arrived shortly after. The place was asleep. Luns had stayed far too long. I remember during the first week of the new regime that the Executive Secretary came to me and asked 'What does the Secretary General want on the agenda of the Council next week?' I said that the Secretary General was rather hoping that the Executive Secretary would tell me that. He looked back at me, and if you think that there's no such thing as a happy Turk you should have been there. From then on, the Executive Secretary was able to get on with his job, which included preparing draft agendas for Council meetings, with the full support of the Secretary General. The various departments of the organisation would be sounded out first, and you could see things beginning to wake up. There were serious issues to discuss, and we would have meetings in the Secretary General's office if there was something important that needed input from different parts of the secretariat. Not rocket science, but a marked change from the immediate past.

The Permanent Representatives of the member countries also saw that changes were being made, and it was something that they appreciated. They were also keen that the new Secretary General should visit their national capitals, and make a speech setting out his ideas. These became pretty soon a matter of public record, but if you want the Ruritarians to take notice, there is no substitute for going to Ruritania.

The public record point was not as easy as it may sound, because there wasn't an effective press department at NATO headquarters. There was a senior German diplomat who was Head of Information and Press, with no very apparent sense that they were different jobs. The Information business was being handled reasonably well, but there was no professional focus on the Press. We recruited a former *Daily Express* correspondent whom I'd known from Moscow, with some inevitable grumbling about Brits hiring Brits, and the senior German left in practise with only the Information side of his portfolio. But at least we now had someone whose expertise the journalists recognised, and who was able to deal effectively with them.

I had assumed from the outside that speech-writing was not going to be a problem, because we had two counsellor-level Foreign Office people seconded to the NATO political section, David Johnson and David Miller, and I had visions of them alternating the job of drafting the Secretary General's speeches. Then I discovered that the speeches arrived on my desk the day before they were due to be delivered, and in no condition to be submitted to the Secretary General. The fault lay not with the two Davids, but with the fact that they were required to submit their drafts to their superiors in the Secretariat. So the drafts would go first to a somewhat reactionary American, who was keen to keep in good standing with the Republican Party, and then from him to the German Assistant Secretary General, who was keen to keep in with Foreign Minister Genscher. I'm told that, in the course of arguing over the draft speech, they would go back to their respective national Missions to read the latest telegrams, and they found that the only language they could agree to was what they could fish out of recent NATO communiqués. Clearly, Carrington was not going to stand up after dinner and read out something that sounded like a NATO communiqué, so I came to the conclusion that if I was going to have a lot of speech-writing to do, I would rather do it in my own time than have to do it as a rewrite job on the night before. So I ended up writing speech after speech. Perhaps the main difficulty was that the basic message remained pretty much the same, but you had to try to make it sufficiently different to take account of the various countries that

you were in, and so that their Excellencies on the NATO Council didn't think that we were simply recycling.

Some of the speeches and the occasional newspaper article were used to address important current issues. A case in point was the tricky issues surrounding President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) and its compatibility or otherwise with the ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty. Margaret Thatcher had gone to Camp David to talk about this with President Reagan, and Charles Powell and John Kerr had got together in the margins to produce a form of words, the four points, which the Prime Minister was able to put to the President, and to which he agreed. That defused the issue to a considerable extent, because it talked about negotiation before deployment and the aim to strengthen detente and not replace it. It was a skilful and well-timed piece of paper, but it was not at first widely enough known about among NATO members. An article by the Secretary General in the *Los Angeles Times*, was an important part of the answer.

The Americans were in fact being very good at keeping their allies informed. Richard Perle would come from the Department of Defense, and Richard Burt from the State Department, to offer high level, classified briefings.

CM: This was the period when there was considerable protest about the deployment of Pershing missiles, with protests at Greenham Common in this country, for example.

BF: Protests were inevitably concentrated in the countries that were going to deploy. Pershing was only scheduled for Germany. Cruise missiles were for UK, Italy, Germany, and I'm not quite sure about Belgium. Deployment was June '84, so that was why the briefings from Richard Perle and Richard Burt were so important and they did work very well. NATO has a Nuclear Planning Group, and the senior member of the Secretariat who supported it was always an American, on secondment from the US Government. Deployment was clearly a big issue, with a lot of Soviet propaganda aimed at the population of the countries primarily concerned, so that improving the general public perception of NATO was crucial. Luns had been bad at this, allowing the impression to gain ground that NATO was for right wing governments and right wing political parties. Carrington saw this as a serious weakness, to be addressed as a matter of priority. Johnny Graham, the UK Permanent Representative, reported after Carrington's first year on a new atmosphere, and on the Alliance having been brought into the public eye in a more sympathetic manner.

What had been brought home to me from the CSCE was that the Austrians, the Swedes and Swiss were overwhelmingly western countries, and Lord Carrington was able to use his international prestige to make a major speech in each of them. A first, I suspect, for a NATO Secretary General. The Swiss sent an invitation readily enough, but then didn't seem to know quite how to handle the visit. In Sweden, it was lunch with Prime Minister Palme. He asked whether Lord Carrington would like a big government lunch or a small family occasion. No prizes for guessing that Lord C went for the small family occasion, at which the Prime Minister ate nothing but boiled rice. He said, 'Secretary General, you know that question I put to you through our people about whether you wanted a grand lunch or a quiet family affair. I was asked exactly the same question on a recent trip to India by Rajiv Gandhi, so, of course, I answered the way you answered. I ended up having a small family lunch and I have been eating boiled rice ever since.'

CM: Did you visit all the NATO countries?

BF: Oh, yes. That was an essential part of the job, and the Secretary General is also expected, not necessarily to wave, but to be seen to be visiting the three land borders between NATO and the Soviet Union. There are two of those in Turkey, one on the Black Sea coast and one up in the mountains further east. We did both of those, and then there was the north of Norway. We did that on midsummer night's eve. We sailed gently up the coast in a Norwegian frigate and dropped fishing lines over the stern; there is a wonderful photograph of Delmar at one end of a line and a fish at the other, both looking equally amazed. Then we landed, were flown low over the tundra and ended up in the far north at the Norwegian army base at Kirkenes, where it was twenty-four hour daylight, and everybody was madly trying to soak up enough of it to last them for the winter.

There was a new government in Spain; Felipe Gonzalez had come in, and the question was whether he would maintain the NATO membership agreed to by the previous administration. Carrington went down to Madrid very early in January, and he and I were invited to lunch to talk it over with Prime Minister Gonzalez and Javier Solana, then regarded as the left-winger who would need to be persuaded. Felipe Gonzalez was happy to remain an ally, but wanted a bit of a special relationship; he wanted to be a bit French about it. The official line of the NATO military was that you should be fully in, or out. Carrington explained to General Rogers, the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), that he saw the Secretary General as in a sense the inn-keeper: of course, he would rather everybody

took the set menu, but if a guest insisted on à la carte, à la carte was how it would go. And that is how it did go: a problem solved which wouldn't have been if there had been no flexibility.

Bernie Rogers was an excellent Supreme Allied Commander, and he and Carrington worked very well together. The senior NATO commanders, SACEUR, SACLANT (Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic), CINCHAN (Commander in Chief Channel) and the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee would meet together with the Secretary General, I think twice a year. At first, each brought their own note-taker, a full colonel equivalent. Bernie Rogers put a stop to that, by saying that he would rather that I took the note for everybody. I think that probably helped, because everybody would have to work off the same piece of paper.

Those relations with the military and Ministerial meetings of the Defence Committee and of the Nuclear Planning Group were an important part of the job, and Carrington, as a former Secretary of State for Defence, handled it very well. He got on very well with the military. I can remember once in Washington we were invited to a meeting in 'the tank', a safe speech room of great size, with the Chiefs of the four armed services, chaired by US Army General Jack Vessey, who was then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. The most junior person in the room, apart from Marc Grossman and me, was an American full colonel as a note-taker. Carrington looked around and said how impressive it was for him, a mere former major, to find himself surrounded by so much top brass. Vessey made a point of pretending to look around, and said, 'Secretary General, we are all former majors here ...'

Visits to individual allied countries were an important part of the cement that held the alliance together, and if the political side of the house had not been gently woken up during those years that Carrington was in charge, it would have been in no position to face the important changes that were happening in the world. President Reagan had his first meeting with Gorbachev in Geneva in November '85, and then he came to debrief the NATO Council at summit level the way home. It was getting later and later, and we ended up with Carrington having to say that the assembled heads of state or government were each going to have to confine their comments or questions to a minute and a half. We all thought 'Ho, hum, President Mitterrand, a minute and a half?' But he did exactly that, setting an example which everyone else realised that they should follow.

### **AUS (Defence), FCO, 1987**

In late 1986 Timothy Daunt, previously Minister in the UK delegation to NATO, was serving as AUS (Defence) in the FCO, hoping soon to be posted as HM Ambassador to Turkey. Geoffrey Howe said that he wouldn't let him go unless somebody could be found who was up to speed on the arms control and disarmament issues that the job was all about. No prizes for guessing what the Secretary of State was after, so Timothy went to Ankara and I came back to fill the AUS slot and was in London for the whole of 1987. The INF (Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces) Treaty was signed at the end of the year, on the basis of the zero option (neither side would have any weapons in this category). That was bad news for the strategy wonks, for whom it was important that there should be a ladder of escalation, with a full complement of rungs. The one technical advantage of zero-zero is that it makes verification easier: if you are allowed sixteen and then somebody photographs one, it's hard to prove that it isn't one of the sixteen; if it's zero, and you see one, the case is clear. From the public relations point of view, there was much more to be said for zero-zero, and it gave Reagan a negotiating success much less alarming to the NATO orthodox than some of the ideas he had been toying with.

### **Minister, Washington, 1988-89**

CM: This is Catherine Manning recording the third interview with Sir Brian Fall for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme on 6 March 2017. Brian, we are starting again in 1988. In January of that year you moved to Washington as Minister and Deputy Head of Mission. Antony Acland was the Ambassador. Let's go on from there.

BF: Minister in Washington was a job I'd always wanted and I'd put a marker down prematurely, in the hope that they'd take note of that when the time came. It was great working for Antony because, as a former PUS, he didn't have any Brownie points to earn as a senior foreign office official. He'd just remarried and there was a lot of travelling around the United States to do, so it was almost like working for a political appointee with a very, very good knowledge of diplomacy and the Foreign Office. It was an ideal combination. I had quite a lot of time as *chargé*. In a way the easy bits were when the Aclands were out of the country, because then you signed telegrams with your own name and it was entirely up to you to decide whether to be a bit risky or not. The more difficult thing was when Antony might have been in Texas or California, so that the telegrams were still signed 'Acland,' so you had

two questions to keep in mind: what was the right answer, and how would Antony have put it, if he'd been there. Anyhow, it was fun being in charge of a major Embassy, however briefly. And, even when not in charge, access to the top levels of the State Department, Department of Defense and National Security Council bureaucracies was very good. Taking people out to lunch was an important and enjoyable part of the job.

We had a ranch-style house on Nebraska Avenue, very nice for a family, not right for a deputy head of mission, who would have to entertain and lodge official guests. My predecessor was said to have spent a lot of time trying to change houses, and it hadn't worked, so Delmar and I decided that we'd spend a bit of time trying to fix it up, but that we'd be there for the duration. Andrew Wood, who succeeded me, got the house changed for something very much more sensible, a sort of mini-Residence. I was able to indulge my property-dealing bug by persuading London that we should buy the former New Zealand chancery, partly to provide more office space but also to protect our embassy perimeter.

The limitations of the Nebraska Avenue house were most apparent during the summer break, when the Aclands were on leave and the Residence was shut down to give the staff a chance to breathe. So the Speaker of the House of Commons and Mrs Weatherill had to make the best of a much smaller ship, which they did with charm and good will. As did the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Tom Foley, when he came to a dinner which we gave for the Weatherills.

1988 was an election year, and when I went down to the Democratic Convention in Atlanta in July, the polls were showing Dukakis with a 17% lead. The Democrats were understandably very bullish at the time, but things changed over the summer and early autumn and led to a comfortable victory for Bush. No one single thing would have accounted for the change, but the picture of Dukakis in a tank, looking like Snoopy with helmet and goggles, must have helped; it wasn't a cartoon, it was a photograph, but it could easily have been a cartoon, and it served to focus doubts about Dukakis as a potential commander in chief.

The British Embassy had good contacts with influential Democrats, to some extent inevitably, because Washington is full of them: members of Congress, think-tanks, neighbours in Georgetown, all the normal social routine. I don't know how well we knew Dukakis, because he had been a little out of the diplomatic area of concentration, but had he won and brought some of the usual suspects into the transition, the Embassy would have found a lot of people that we already knew and who already knew us.

I was involved in a nice bit of NATO business, because Lord Carrington had completed his four-year term as Secretary-General and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. President Reagan's speech at the formal awards ceremony was generous and well-crafted, and he was on excellent form also at a much less formal small lunch, to which I was invited as a retired member of the NATO team. Carrington had Marc Grossman with him in support, and Marc had told me that there was one piece of business that Carrington wanted to raise, but the stream of entertaining Reagan anecdotes was not going to be easy to interrupt. The clock was ticking, and I could sense a little bit of anxiety on the NATO side. Then Cap Weinberger, Secretary of Defense, broke in to say 'Excuse me, Mr President, ...' We thought, 'Good old Cap, he's going to give the Secretary General an opening for a bit of business,' but what he said was, 'I don't think you've told them the one about ...' So business had to be squashed in right at the end.

In November, there were the elections, and there was Margaret Thatcher in Washington to say a ceremonial farewell to Reagan. There was a great State Banquet in the evening, and a lunch hosted by Secretary of State Shultz, where he overcame his initial hesitations and presented his guest with a handbag ...

I can't remember any overwhelming policy issues, though my contact with John Hume at Harvard provided a helpful base for helping to handle the Irish questions which would come up from time to time. And the regular diet of politico-military issues marked an obvious building on my jobs at NATO and as AUS (Defence). The new flavour there was to recognise the extent to which Embassy involvement benefitted from sometimes more than occasional policy disagreements between State and Defense: the ability to call on each in turn, and to get pretty frank accounts of their current thinking, added spice to the information-gathering routine. And how much blander was the fare when Colin Powell, at the National Security Council, got everybody on the American side singing off the same hymn sheet.

We were only in Washington for about eighteen months; it was short, but a wonderful experience to have had. We didn't have time for a huge amount of travel in the United States, but Delmar and I discovered that if we were prepared to give a weekend to going down or coming back, we could go by car and see a bit of the country south of Washington on the way to speaking engagements in Richmond, Atlanta or even Birmingham.

We spent two thirds of 1989 in Washington. The transition from the Reagan to the Bush administration produced the occasional surprise for anyone who may have thought that

moving from one Republican administration to another would be all smiles and friendly feelings, but from the point of view of the British Embassy I'm not aware of anything except business ticking away as it normally did. I used to chair the morning meeting four days a week. That was Chancery plus, and Antony would chair a full staff meeting once a week. So there was always a daily agenda to be handled, a number of telegrams to check before they went. It was busy without being overwhelming. I didn't get the impression that we were being pushed too hard or required to get in too early or stay too late. It was perhaps a slightly old-fashioned way of doing one's work. Antony used to take advantage of the time difference which meant that telegrams of some importance would just stay there, waiting for him to come back from dinner and have a quick look before they went. It was an easy way to have an oversight without getting into redrafting, unless there was a real problem.

### **High Commissioner, Canada, 1989-92**

CM: In the autumn you moved to Ottawa.

BF: We travelled there in the bright red Jeep, which we had as our private car in Washington, having checked with Land Rover that they would see no problem in the British High Commissioner being seen to support the competition in this way. (My official car, both in Washington and Ottawa, was impeccably British). We spent a night on the way in Syracuse, and arrived in Ottawa the next day shortly after our heavy luggage.

The house, Earnscliffe, is a substantial mid-19th century structure, the equivalent of which might have served as the Manse in a rich Scottish parish. It was built for his family by the Scottish engineer who had played a major part in the building of the Rideau Canal, some say with the help of a deliberate over-ordering of stone when the canal project was nearing completion at the Ottawa end. A decade or two later the house was expanded on the ground floor by Sir John Macdonald, the first Prime Minister of Canada, to provide a large, formal dining room. The one major problem was the bridge: one end of the very busy arterial bridge between Quebec and Ontario was planted by some anti-British fiend almost in the Embassy garden, and the noise and the soot made it essential to keep the windows of the house shut. But it's an ill wind, and the noise and soot was the winning argument in our bid for air conditioning.

There was also a political problem. Ottawa-based members of the Conservative Party, enjoying one of its rare periods of government at the time under Prime Minister Mulroney,

felt it unfair that high school students visiting their national capital would be shown the Laurier House and the Mackenzie King House, with no suggestion that there had ever been a Conservative premier in Ottawa. The answer, so the disgruntled thought, was to press for Earnscliffe to be “given back” to the Government of Canada, to serve as a focus for the Tory-inclined young. So there was a nice High Commissioner/Conservative Party in Ottawa argument about that, in which my opening line was to explain that there was no question of giving Earnscliffe back, because the Government of Canada had never had it: it was the private residence of a man called Macdonald who happened later to become Prime Minister, and whose family duly inherited and then sold it on the open market. The argument, and the pressure from parts of the media, went on and on, and was in danger of becoming unpleasant. So I took the Queen Bee of the agitation out to lunch and said that I didn’t want to have to appear on television and say that the Conservatives were trying to get the British High Commissioner off the river, so that only the French Ambassador should be left with a riverside house alongside the Prime Minister of Canada. Drawing attention to that aspect of the question may have been helpful, and things calmed down from then on. And the British High Commissioner is still in Earnscliffe ...

The first major event after we had settled in was 9/11, with the European style of listing days and months: the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 1989, and the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. If you are told that a provincial Canadian paper had a front page headline saying: *Wall Collapses in Berlin: No Canadians Dead*, please put that firmly into your fake news basket. Of course the event was taken seriously, and well written-up by the serious papers, but one felt a long way away from it all. In Washington, there would have been constant work to be done, looking at a draft of this, or a draft of that, but not in Canada. And I think that thoughtful Canadians will have been reminded of some major decisions that Canada had taken at the end of the War. The Canadians could have decided to stay in the nuclear weapons business, building on their involvement in the Manhattan Project; they could have bid for a control zone in Germany, and there are no doubt other ways in which they could have tried to keep up their war-time level of importance and centrality. But this punching above one’s weight business is neither financially nor medically the right way to go over the long haul, and I would say that the immediately post-war Canadian decision-making served the country well. But when some game-changing event, like the Berlin Wall, came along, Canadians would be conscious of their absence from the inner group.

So it was a great plus that the Open Skies Conference, chaired by the foreign minister of Canada, opened in Ottawa in early 1990; and that, in the margins, the foreign ministers of the US, UK, France, Russia and the two Germanies had the 2+4 talks, which agreed to the formula for the forthcoming negotiations on German re-unification. So a really important piece of East-West post-9/11 business took place in Ottawa, and that was good for morale.

Less good was the constitutional crisis. In 1987 there had been an agreement at Meech Lake, signed up to by the eleven (the Prime Minister of Canada and the ten provincial premiers) but it needed ratifying by each of the provinces and that wasn't happening. A consultation was launched to try to put it back on track, but it didn't work. Newfoundland was agin it, and so were Manitoba and New Brunswick, for reasons which I forget: the bottom line was that, despite the promising start, the Meech Lake agreement failed to meet the June 1990 deadline for ratification by all. This attempt to get a constitutional deal which Quebec as well as the rest of Canada could agree to, had been a major initiative of Prime Minister, who on the whole played it well, although he may have picked the wrong moment to talk about 'rolling the dice'. The underlying problem was that he was seen as politically too dependent on Quebec to convince the rest of Canada. So it was a case of Meech is dead, long live continuing efforts to find a way forward.

And then, from August '90, international affairs intervened again, in the form of the first Gulf War. The government of Canada were wholly supportive of their allies, and took their responsibilities for diplomatic protection very seriously, deciding that the Americans, the Brits and the French needed close protection. So we had the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) around for the duration, which, thanks to my Private Office experience, didn't seem as strange as it might otherwise have done.

The High Commissioner's job is a travelling one, and I did my best to visit each province at least once or twice a year, with Toronto, and to a slightly lesser extent Montreal or Quebec City, much more often than that. The constitutional crisis, leading up to the Meech deadline and then thinking about what to do when the deadline was missed, provided a continuing political theme. The dangers of misunderstanding about the British constitutional role were by now quite clearly yesterday's story, and the fact that the British High Commissioner was taking an active interest in the problems and the prospects was regarded as both normal and, I think, welcome. I was careful not to appear to be pushing any particular idea, but found on occasion that I was able to help with the propagation of the ideas of others in the course of

my travels. The constitutional dossier was important to each of the provinces, but if one were measuring the commitment of provincial government resources to the subject, Quebec would be a case apart, with a first class team of lawyers and diplomats on the job.

John Boyd paid a Chief Clerk's visit to Canada while I was there, bringing the news that nobody had written an annual report on me since my time in ESSD, back in 1980. So that was the secret ... John also said nice things about the political reporting from Ottawa, adding that there was almost too much of it on the internal political scene for North America Department to process. I took the point but added in my turn that the other end of the Mall was very interested in the constitutional affairs of Canada. Buckingham Palace was, of course, getting reports from the Governor General, and from one or two well-placed Canadian academics, but telegrams from the High Commission were a valued part of the picture. They continued to flow.

The Queen, quite clearly in her role as Queen of Canada, came to Ottawa as part of a Canadian tour while we were there. The British High Commission and our subordinate posts along the route, understood perfectly well that we had no official involvement in such a visit, and were also left wondering how many of our non-constitutionalist Canadian contacts would assume that we must have dropped some terrible brick not to be invited to any of the events.

The High Commissioner called on the Governor General at the beginning and the end of his tour, but not to present credentials. My credentials were a letter from Margaret Thatcher to Brian Mulroney. When you travelled to the provinces, you called on the Lieutenant Governor. Some of them were public figures of great ability. I remember the one in Vancouver in particular, a well-chosen Chinese-Canadian. I asked him on my introductory call about the reported difficulties over wealthy Chinese buying suburban property, then claiming that the feng shui was all wrong, knocking the house down and building something much larger right up to the property line. He agreed that there had been such problems with Hong Kong Chinese, who would come over to establish Canadian residence, but said that he had been talking to them and it was going to be all right. Two years later, I went to pay my farewell call on the same Lieutenant Governor and asked about the Hong Kong Chinese question we had been talking about. He said that Hong Kong Chinese were now no problem at all, but Taiwan Chinese ... So some things had changed, but not the feng shui approach to making oneself a bigger house.

The Chinese with money would come to Vancouver and do their settling in there. The Chinese wanting to make money would go to Toronto, where there was now a large Chinese community, hard at work to make their first million, while their compatriots in Vancouver were investing their first five. More generally, Toronto had become the big immigration city, partly because Montreal was getting difficult for language reasons, and partly because immigrants came by plane rather than by ship.

CM: And they didn't pay attention to the language rules in the same way in Vancouver as they did in Montreal?

BF: In Vancouver I can remember a right-wing politician, or it may have been someone on a radio talk-in, blaming Mr. Trudeau for the fact that they now had to put up with French on their corn-flake packets. The blame would have been better attributed to Mr Kellogg, who didn't want to worry about which end of Canada his packets would end up, so they all had French and they all had English.

Montreal, and more generally Quebec, remained keen to attract immigrants, and ideally francophone immigrants. They invented the rather sinister word '*francophonisable*' to explain the next category down. And then there were all the silly stories about making life impossible for mom and pop shops selling Mars Bars with unilingual English wrappings. It wasn't nice, but it wasn't silly, because there was a serious political aim: to get mom and pop to leave Montreal, so that they wouldn't be there to vote in the next referendum. It was a very hard-nosed, Parti Quebecois thing to be doing.

CM: What about the First Nations? Did you have any visits to the North?

BF: The Protocol Department arranged an annual trip for Heads of Mission. That would have been fine, if a bit coach-trippy, in our last year in Canada, but a much better option turned up: the Deputy Minister (PUS in our terms) in the Department that dealt with the far north, told me that he did an annual trip, that he'd got a plane and that I would be welcome to come with him. That sounded great, so I accepted, and ducked out of the group outing. But then there was a charity event which included square dancing. I thought someone had kicked me in the back of the leg, but my Achilles tendon had given way. So I missed out on the far north. I'm not sure of the moral to draw, but it's probably to go on with charity but to cut out the square dancing.

We could have done with a few more visitors to Ottawa, but we were lucky with the ones we got. Douglas Hurd came for the Open Skies Conference, and came again to spend a few days before that very busy Foreign Ministers' week at the General Assembly. There's a wonderful photograph of him standing in a pine wood on a mobile phone trying to help over a problem of obvious concern to No 10. We also had a return visit from Speaker Weatherill and his wife. They had obviously recovered from their rather modest accommodation in Washington, and came to stay with us in Earncliffe over a long holiday weekend. Ottawa is a lovely place, but there is a limit to how much variety there is to offer your weekend guests. Dinner for the Speaker of the Canadian Parliament was a success; Mrs Weatherill was able to play some tennis, and we ended up at a dog-racing track half way to Kingston, where the wife of the Private Secretary to the Speaker applied with enviable success the skills she had honed as a teacher of Maths at St Paul's Girls School.

The sensible thing for business visitors was to head for Toronto, Montreal or Calgary. There was a well-staffed Deputy High Commission in Toronto and in Montreal, and a much smaller one in Edmonton, the capital of Alberta. I decided that this Post no longer represented good value for money and should be closed: the office was getting three British business visitors a year, they were the same three, and the main commercial interest in Alberta was focussed on the oil and gas centre of Calgary. Much to my surprise, there were then two debates in the House of Lords, trying to get the decision overturned. One of my predecessors, Lord Moran, was the spearhead, and no doubt had his reasons; and the Agent General for Alberta in London no doubt had hers, as the Deputy Premier of Alberta was said to be wanting to succeed her in a London job unlikely to survive our closure of the Post in Edmonton.

To end on an up-beat, the closure of Edmonton added Alberta to the portfolio of the post in Vancouver, giving the Deputy High Commissioner there a splendid parish, including Calgary and Edmonton as well as Vancouver and Victoria, with Banff and Jasper in between to encourage travelling by car and spending a weekend on the way. For Delmar and me, who had happy memories of the journey, it was one of many things that we had enjoyed in Canada, where we had made many friends over our relatively short posting.

### **Ambassador, Moscow, 1992-95**

CM: You leave Ottawa in March 1992 and you arrive in Moscow in June. A lot has changed since the last time you were there. This time instead of the Soviet Union you are going to

Russia and you are also accredited to all the other former Soviet republics except for Ukraine and the Baltic States.

BF: Yes, the Baltic States for political reasons: we had not legally recognised their incorporation into the Soviet Union, and we had immediately put in embassies when independence was restored. In the case of Ukraine, we already had a Consul General in Kiev, and making David Gladstone the Ambassador was a no-brainer. That left me with a portfolio of one plus ten.

CM: When you came back for the third time to such a different place, were you struck by the changes, or were you struck by the continuities?

BF: The answer to that is both. You needed some variant of double entry booking; left-hand page for things that hadn't changed and right-hand page for things that had. That idea was reinforced on our first weekend when we walked out of the Embassy, across the bridge, and into Red Square. There, for the left-hand page, were soldiers goose-stepping mournfully in front of Lenin's mausoleum; and, for the right-hand page, there was a little band in fancy dress, standing in front of GUM and playing a selection from *My Fair Lady*. As things went on, you never quite knew whether you were going to get an old-style, inefficient, grumpy, unhelpful response or whether someone would be saying, 'Good, glad you came ...' You could predict up to a point, because there would be people who had a track record. Vice President Rutskoy was pretty awful, and so was Speaker Khasbulatov. You suspected that they would be trouble, but quite how much trouble emerged only later. And then you had things which would have been silly if there had been a better choice, like having as head of the Moscow Police someone in his twenties with no previous police experience. The calculation was no doubt that people with previous police experience were exactly what you didn't want around.

We gave a reception early on and invited a lot of people we didn't know, but who had been recommended to us. We also had Viktor Sukhodriev, now retired, and his wife, whom we'd known from before and enjoyed spending time with. They obviously appreciated being invited, but there were other guests who wondered what the new Ambassador was doing bringing people like that to share reception time with the *nouvelle vague*.

I would have found out more about what was happening in Russia if my travelling had been concentrated there, but the multiple accreditation imposed other priorities. If you went to

Uzbekistan, for example, without being able to call on the President first, there would not have been much productive work to be done in Uzbekistan, and the President would only see the Ambassador. So much of my travel was in the 'near abroad', and Francis Richards, an outstanding No 2, ended up doing most of the high level travel in Russia.

Planning for the new posting in London, I said that I was happy with the multiple accreditation, but it would be important for us to start opening embassies as soon as we could. Meanwhile, I would need to be able to hire planes, so as to avoid the endless backwards and forwards between Moscow and single destinations on the periphery: hub and spoke, with no commercial airline way of cutting across from one to the other. That was accepted, and worked well. By giving it a working week, and sacrificing most of the weekends before and after, we were able to cover three or four countries reasonably well. The travelling team, which might include people whom we had encouraged to come out from London to look at the possibilities from their point of view in the newly independent countries, would split into subject-specific mini-groups, and at the end of the day there would be an oral report back over a drink or two. Delmar would go with Hugh Carpenter, our Embassy doctor, but now the 'regional medical adviser', to bring the medical team up to two man scratch.

One of the points I had made before leaving London, and reinforced in my First Impressions despatch, was that if we were serious about Britain's position in world politics, we would have to open Embassies in each of these countries. I also said that the senior Brit who happened to be there should become the Ambassador, without worrying about which government department they came from. The opening of Embassies duly happened, but my point about other government departments evidently went against the grain

We had a splendid Chargé d'Affaires in Uzbekistan, Paul Bergne. I can remember a visit to Bokhara, where a variety of religions seemed to rub shoulders, and I'd asked to have a meeting to talk to some of the cast of characters. I was ushered into a room which had a table with lots of people sat around it in different costumes, and a rather second-rate Soviet-style minder who started off in lecturing mode. I said that wasn't quite how I wanted it, and that it would be better to go round the table and ask everybody to say a few words. He scowled, but that's how it happened. The people at the table would say their party piece in Russian, and then pass to their neighbour, while Paul Bergne would duck in after the person who had just

finished speaking and give them the choice of three or four different languages in which to continue, in a way that the Soviet minder was in no position to do anything about.

When the decision was taken to open an Embassy in Uzbekistan, I saw a list of the people who had been put up for consideration by the No. 2 Board for the job of ambassador, and Paul's name wasn't on it. I hit the roof. Happily David Logan, until recently Minister in Moscow and by that time back in London as the relevant AUS, was easily persuaded to hit the roof too: he got the Board re-organised, and Paul emerged, quite rightly, as Ambassador-designate. The next job was for me to submit a formal Note to the Uzbek authorities, seeking *agrément*. Remembering the story about Howard Smith's farewell call on Gromyko and the authority that he had sought from London first, I did something similar, getting authority to say to the President that what we had put in the Note seeking *agrément* was the truth, but it wasn't the whole truth. But I couldn't say that to the President, because he'd taken to receiving ambassadors in a room full of you never knew who. So I got hold of the Foreign Minister and said that the two of us were going to have to walk around the garden. I then told him what I wanted him to pass on to the President in strict confidence, and he looked as if nothing half-way as important had crossed his path before. The point, of course, is that if we had not been allowed to brief the President, the KGB would have been there the next day explaining to President Karimov what was wrong with the British Note.

President Niyazov of Turkmenistan still had on his desk the red telephone which he would have used in Soviet times to receive instructions from the Kremlin. He still used it, to find out what was going on, but he didn't seem sure that he was being given the right story, so he would spend most of the time when we were together wanting to talk about Moscow. He also clearly wanted to establish good relations with Britain, and the story of the horse which he presented to John Major is an epic. It has been well written up by Laura Brady, who did all the work at the Moscow end, and I would commend to the reader the BBC website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-19653492>. My own involvement at the Turkmenistan end was trying to establish according to local protocol whether paying for the upkeep of a gift horse was a matter for the donor or the future recipient. The foreign minister blushed, and made it clear that this was a question some way above his pay grade, so I decided that I would have to find a tactful way of raising the matter during my subsequent call on the President. I needn't have worried about fine-tuning, because he put his arm round my shoulder and said, 'By the way, Ambassador, next time you talk to that Prime Minister of yours, would you remind him that he owes me six weeks' feed for his horse.'

I don't know what the horse's final fate was, but my memory is that once it arrived, the Household Cavalry took it over, but kept sending cross messages to No. 10, saying this animal is completely unsuitable. We knew perfectly well in Moscow that the horse was not the right size or shape for ceremonial use, and had rather hoped that the colonel's lady might have used it for hacking. What I wanted was a thank you which Nyazov would appreciate, and I suggested that SIS might produce a nice fake photograph of the horse and the Prime Minister in front of No. 10 and that I would then be happy to contribute a silver frame. But that didn't strike the right chord in London ...

When I went to say goodbye to Nyazov, he was surrounded by most of his Cabinet, as we had all gone out to the airport to welcome him back from a trip abroad. He offered me honorary citizenship of Turkmenistan, and the right Russian phrases for declining without giving offence was something else that was not included in my language training. I did my best with worries about double taxation, to which he replied, 'Taxes? Subsidies!'

And then there was the South Caucasus: Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. We would do the three in one trip, by flying Armenia-Georgia, Georgia-Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan was the big commercial interest, with substantial oil reserves of considerable interest to major western oil companies, and not least to BP. President Elchibey was an old-fashioned academic nationalist, not at all a Soviet animal like Heidar Aliev who succeeded him. Lady Thatcher flew in from Hong Kong in support of BP, and Elchibey gave a State Dinner in her honour. That was perhaps predictable, but not the passage in his after-dinner speech when he said that during his time as a political prisoner he had kept his morale up by thinking of Arthur Koestler and Margaret Thatcher.

Then in Armenia, the president was Ter-Petrossian, a serious man trying to do a serious job. I think you were on that trip, Catherine, with Delmar, because we were going on to other places, knowing that we should not be expecting hospitality in an Armenia then at a very low ebb. President Ter-Petrossian, when I called on him, had a heavy jumper on inside the presidential office.

The Minsk Group was in charge of trying to get a solution to the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and I remember going to speak to one of Ter-Petrossian's senior advisers about whether the UK should become members of the Minsk Group. I think we settled for the fact that there were cultural reasons why this would be

inappropriate: the British were thought by the Armenians to have such a strong cultural interest in oil that they were unlikely to be neutral. In retrospect, it became clear that there was no point in being a rank and file member of the Minsk Group: the membership at large did nothing, except keep out of the way of the three co-chairs, who were the ones making the diplomatic efforts, reporting back to the membership perhaps a couple of times a year, and in no great detail. You could actually have more productive visits in Baku and Erevan being a non-member of the Minsk Group.

Georgia was fascinating as always, and Shevardnadze was very much in control. Gamsakhurdia had come and gone. I don't remember visiting Abkhazia, but the fighting had happened and it had become a stand-off. Shevardnadze paid an almost state visit to London at the time. I remember going, because I thought it was right that the British Ambassador to Georgia should be there in support. Robin Cook may not have thought that that was the right order of priorities, because he came out to Moscow as Shadow Foreign Secretary at precisely that time. I had been trying to get the Labour Party to show some interest in Moscow, nobody had come for ages, and then Tessa Blackstone came over on some non-political business and I was able to encourage her to spread the word back home. This she duly did, and Robin Cook's visit was the result.

CM: And what about politics in Moscow during this time?

BF: May you live in interesting times ... At the end of '92 Yeltsin's one year deal with the Fifth Congress expired and he found himself in trouble. In retrospect, with what was happening to the economy being of such crucial importance, having a deal that expired in the middle of winter was absolute madness. Yeltsin would probably have been able to get longer if he had thought it through beforehand. '93 was the year that pretty much everything went wrong. The forces of reaction came to the fore, they were pretty much getting their way in Parliament and Yeltsin wasn't able to keep control. He did get agreement to a referendum, which was very important to him and to Russia, but Parliament was able to tinker with the wording of the questions, to make it less likely that Yeltsin would win, and less useful to him if he did. He did win, quite comfortably, and everybody was surprised at what a strong vote there was approving of economic policy, because people were finding life very difficult. But Yeltsin didn't put in the sustained major effort that would then have been needed to capitalise on the referendum result and get things moving forward. Kosyrev told us that we should remember that Yeltsin was a Siberian, and that Siberians were like bears: they slept in winter.

If you woke them up, they'd be bad tempered, they'd get up and biff a few people around the head to get them to quieten down, and then they would go back to sleep. That was Yeltsin. Instead of going back to sleep, he should have taken advantage of the ground he had gained and started building on it. He did get a new constitution through and that was an important achievement, but he wasn't able to keep Gaidar as Prime Minister and he had lost the special powers that ran out after 1992.

One could have done a lot worse than Chernomyrdin as Prime Minister, but the votes were probably not there for anything better. The elections for Parliament, which happened at that time, resulted in a huge preponderance of Communists, Agrarians and the Zhirinovskiy bunch, with the reformers nowhere. They were not able to produce a Duma heading in the right direction. That would have had to have been done right at the beginning of the post-Soviet era, and by '93 it was probably already too late.

One of the questions that was asked then, and which continues to be asked, is how far the West was to blame for failing to do more to support the reformers. From the British point of view, we did well in demonstrating a commitment to the newly independent countries, while recognising that breaking away from the Soviet Union was not necessarily a sign of democratic intent. Our charter flights from Moscow had more impact than most of our partners and allies were able to manage, and we were also relatively quick to take the important further step of opening Embassies. (The Americans were a case apart: they had opened up everywhere, pretty much straight away.)

We also got right the need to find some way of bringing Russia into a prestigious international group which would allow them to show that they were regarded as serious partners at the top table. The UN Security Council P5 was no good from that point of view, because it wasn't much of a prize for the new Russia to be in a group which included China. Something institutionally new was needed, and we were strong proponents of the G7+1, a G8 on the political side. That had a very positive effect on Yeltsin, and on the sort of people we were trying to encourage. I can remember Chubais, who was organising the briefing for Yeltsin at his first G8 meeting, inviting some of us in to his office in the Kremlin to talk it over. I drove there with my Canadian colleague in his car, and he said 'Brian, you seem very excited. This all seems very normal to me.' I said, 'That's why I am excited.'

On economic support for reform, the Know How Fund was great. It got people from London and Embassy staff out into the country, and it made people in the country aware that there

was Western goodwill and a willingness to help. But the financial size of the programme was small and it was hugely labour intensive: if you simply gave out money, you'd never see where it went and you'd never get results. So you needed the money, but you also needed the Russian-speaking first secretary to visit regularly and establish a sense of team effort. The concept was right, but there was clearly a limit to how much we could do.

What Gaidar wanted during his period in charge of the economy was vastly bigger sums, both to demonstrate Western support for reform in Russia, and to give it the wherewithal to succeed. Billions were talked about, but little arrived. And what did arrive turned out to be primarily either export credits, which we and other western countries used to give to the Soviet Union, or debt rescheduling, which is what lenders offer to improvident borrowers if that is the only way they can see of ever getting their money back. So there was not much demonstrably special in any of that, no sense of western governments collectively realising that an unprecedented and very positive change in the way the world worked was there to be encouraged and given practical support. Academics who thought that way would remind us of how much the United States spent on defence every year, and suggest that half of that, spread over five years, would have a huge impact, especially if it was spent in ways that produced results that Russian voters could see for themselves. Putting the IMF in charge of the economic support for Russia wasn't going to deliver at anything like that level, and governments should have been prepared both to recognise an exceptional situation and to will the exceptional means needed to address it.

Another thing that we got right was the State Visit in 1994. The unadventurous argument (rather like the arguments being used on the economic side) would have been: these people are all over the place; let's wait till things have settled down and we've got a flourishing democracy to deal with. The better argument, which happily prevailed, was to say that we were going to do it now, when it could do most good, as a vote of confidence in the future. The G8 did that a bit, but only the policy wonks understood about the G8, and bringing the Queen to Moscow was something else. As indeed it turned out to be, with upbeat reactions from the Russian people in Moscow, and even more so in St Petersburg, and with favourable coverage in the local media.

The prospect of playing host to the Queen gave Yeltsin some thinking to do. His instinct told him that Soviet protocol wouldn't be quite right: for example, in Soviet times, the visitor would be given a dinner in the Kremlin, but nobody would go from the Kremlin to the

visitor's embassy for the internationally recognised feature of a return dinner. He also knew that tsarist protocol wasn't going to be the answer either, so he had to feel his way. Dinner jackets at the Kremlin dinner was no problem, they probably had them anyway, but it was the first time ever on parade. The really serious thing was the return dinner, and not only did we have a return dinner, but a return dinner in St Petersburg on board a yacht. Getting the Moscow rulers to go to Leningrad/St Petersburg was always going to be difficult, because there were good reasons why it was regarded as awkward territory. I got called in by Yeltsin to talk things over. He didn't come clean about any worry about St Petersburg, but he did say, 'Is it really all right for a Head of State to be going aboard a foreigner's yacht?' I said that it happened all the time, and that the King of Spain had been on board Britannia only about three weeks ago. That was true, but what I didn't say was that the King of Spain had apparently arrived two hours early in tennis kit, and asked whether he could come up for a shower and change before dinner. The return dinner on Britannia duly took place, and there was an impressive turnout of the Russian upper crust: in part, no doubt, to honour a welcome guest, but perhaps also because Yeltsin wanted to be in good Moscow company in so conspicuous a breach of Soviet orthodoxy.

I had always understood that the Queen never made a speech abroad unless somebody had drafted something for her first, so I was as surprised as anybody when towards the end of dinner she was passed a gavel and made a charming little speech about how much she and Prince Phillip had enjoyed their visit. By then the body language was clearly indicating that Yeltsin wanted his turn, and the Queen passed the gavel across to him. He responded in a 'real men don't need gavels' sort of way, and thumped an enormous fist down on the table once or twice. Delmar was sitting at one end of the table, with the acting Prime Minister, Soskovets, on one side and the Head of Protocol on the other. Soskovets was delighted at this demonstration of Russia resurgent. The Head of Protocol looked as if he was about to be sent off to Siberia.

Yeltsin made a nice speech and then we all got up and walked towards the gang plank, with Yeltsin quite clearly thinking that he was heading for dry land. Nobody on the Russian side had dared to tell him that he was expected to stay and help greet the guests for the after-dinner reception which was standard Britannia practice. So it was really the Queen saying 'proper place' as if to a Labrador, and Yeltsin did as he was told and helped receive the guests. At the end of the reception, the band of the Royal Marines beat retreat and I was

standing next to Yeltsin on deck watching a performance which he clearly found most impressive: that, he said, is how the Russian national anthem ought to be played.

There were no drinking problems with Yeltsin over the visit, and none that I can remember earlier on when he and his wife stayed with the Majors at Chequers. But there obviously were problems, like not getting off the plane at Shannon, when the Taoiseach was there to meet him, and the inappropriately jolly conducting of a band at what should have been a solemn moment in Germany. People still argue about this, and those willing to give Yeltsin the benefit of the doubt say that even small amounts of alcohol would react badly with the drugs he was taking for some medical condition. But that was increasingly a weakness of his, and affected the way that he was looked on by ordinary Russians.

The shelling of the Parliament building, the White House, in October '93 was another dramatic moment, and one in which he lost a lot of Western sympathy. That striking television picture of a blackened side to the parliament building seemed to say it all, but it didn't do much to explain the context: principally, that the people holed up in the Parliament building were the ones trying to prevent the tolerably free elections which Yeltsin was trying to bring about, to provide a democratic way out of an evident stalemate.

CM: We are starting again after a short break. We're still in Moscow and this time you're going to talk about the visitors to Moscow.

BF: Yes, and I think I need to say something about housekeeping first, because it was quite a change in the role of the Moscow Ambassador and his wife as innkeepers. In Soviet times, the fact that the Residence had only two guest bedrooms was not a major problem. This time around, Moscow had become quite a fashionable place to visit. We inherited from the Braithwaites an Embassy which was hugely well-regarded on the Moscow scene, where they had been very well plugged in politically and had made good friends. But there was no chef, there were still only the two guest bedrooms and the hotelier side of the job needed to be nudged into the new world.

After a couple of misfires, we got ourselves an enterprising young English chef who, once he'd finished in the kitchen, would change into a tail coat and come upstairs to check that all was well there too; and we got a Russian house-keeper who had learnt her trade in large hotels, and was able to help us put the domestic arrangements on to a professional footing. And then there was the attic: a potential answer to the bedroom problem, but you

couldn't get to it except by going through the kitchen and up the back stairs, past the empty bottles after a dinner party. We got permission to build an interior staircase, going up from the main reception floor to an attic which could then be made habitable. In the course of the work on the staircase, it emerged that the building which became the British Embassy had what must have been, in terms of architectural history, one of the earliest steel H-beams in European captivity. And, rather like the Diplomatic Gastronom with the lady with the abacus to check that the electronic calculator was producing the right answers, there was a very Russian tree trunk alongside the new-fangled H-beam. So the Embassy became more open to house guests, with a combination of good food and comfortable bedrooms, and that wonderful view across the river to the Kremlin.

The Prime Minister, John Major, came with his wife, and Delmar went with Norma Major to call on Mrs Yeltsin, who was one of the living proofs that life was getting better and more normal. Our social secretary, Georgina Wilson, who had excellent Russian, went along as the interpreter, a job for which she had no formal training but a natural talent. And, as a well-educated, professional middle class London girl, when the conversation between the adults flagged a bit, she would chip in a few ideas of her own. Naina Yeltsina thought this was charming. Later on, when we had another high level occasion, I got a phone call from the Kremlin saying, 'We think that your Foreign Office interpreters are wonderful ...' I thought, O my God, what's coming now? '... but Mrs Yeltsin wants Georgina.'

John Major was a popular visitor. So was Douglas Hurd, who came two or three times, having established very good relations with foreign minister Kosyrev. Malcolm Rifkind came as Secretary of State for Defence, and Virginia Bottomley as Secretary of State for Health. We also had observers for the Russian elections, with Kenneth Baker as the delegation leader and Anne Clywd as the ranking Labour member. She was by reputation very left wing, but got on like a house on fire with Delmar. We couldn't put everybody up, but the two heads of delegation, the two senior MPs, stayed with us, as in their time did the visiting Secretaries of State. When the Majors came, they and their immediate team stayed with us, and there was no need to think about villas on the Sparrow Hills. We also played host to Princess Anne and her husband, and, towards the end of our time in Moscow, to Princess Diana. What we couldn't do was accommodate the royal party during the State Visit, and the Queen and Prince Phillip and the travelling household stayed in the guest quarters in the Kremlin.

It had also become possible for senior visitors to go to St Petersburg without coming to Moscow. Prince Charles did that, and Delmar and I went up to join the party; and so too, at the political level, did Kenneth Clark as Chancellor of the Exchequer (there was an economics conference there at the time) and Selwyn Gummer as Secretary of State for the Environment. And it was possible too for top persons no longer in government to stay at the Embassy and establish or re-establish contacts with their Russian equivalents. Conversation over dinner between Lord Carrington and Gaidar was a case in point, but the Thatcher-Gorbachev lunch was even more so. Lady Thatcher had been invited to Moscow to receive an honorary degree from the Mendeleev Institute, but this was also the occasion for Hugh Scully to produce for BBC television the instalment of 'The Downing Street Years' dealing with the Thatcher-Gorbachev relationship. So Delmar and I had the fascinating experience of hosting a lunch in the Residence featuring the Gorbachev's, the Thatchers ... and a TV camera or two.

Change was very apparent also in the relationship between the political leadership and the Russian Orthodox Church. Individual politicians now found it helpful to demonstrate their respect for the Church, and politicians collectively supported the expensive architectural proof of the brave new world. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Cathedral of Christ the Saviour had been destroyed on the orders of Stalin, and the site had become that of a somewhat incongruous out-door, heated swimming pool. This now gave way to a new Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, making up in size for what it may be thought to have lacked in charm. The Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia was riding high; and the historic church of Bishop Niphon, the apocrisarial representative of the Patriarch of Antioch, benefitted too from a Moscow congregation which now included the evidently wealthy.

This new spirit did not seem to have much influence on church doctrine. When the Archbishop of Canterbury and Mrs Carey stayed with us, on their way to pay formal visits to the heads of the church in Armenia and in Georgia, it was made clear that no such formal relations could be envisaged in Moscow, in view of the Church of England's regrettable views on the ordination of women. It was, however, thought appropriate for the Moscow Patriarch to offer hospitality to a Christian traveller, and this was duly translated into a lunch marked by an attractive new style of Russian cooking and a less attractive old style of doctrinal speech-making. Shortly after the Carey visit, the Reverend Ian Paisley, who I hadn't realised was in Moscow, asked to come to see me. I was wondering what we might have done wrong most recently in Northern Ireland to provoke such a call, and I touched base

quickly with Roderic Lyne at No 10; but it turned out that Paisley was in Russia on religious business, and wanted to complain about the Russian Orthodox hierarchy, who were promoting discrimination against his Church. I could only urge Paisley to recognise that his church was in good company in that regard.

There was, however, one piece of good news to record about church-related politics in Moscow. One of the happy outcomes of the State Visit was that the building of the Anglican Church in Moscow was formally restored, if not to their ownership, then at least to their long term exclusive use.

CM: Brian, there is one thing I want to ask you. When you started your Russian career, almost thirty years earlier, the Soviets were the enemy; it was the Cold War, even if it wasn't its coldest period. Did you ever think that things would change so radically that you would be Ambassador in a country not Communist?

BF: Forever is a long time. It became gradually clearer over my thirty years that the Soviet economic model wasn't working, and that the Soviet way of running society wasn't doing much better. That, to me, was a message reinforced by seeing the CSCE process unfold. But a general feeling that something can't last forever, and that sooner or later something was going to happen, falls a long way short of identifying the late 1980s and early 1990s as the crucial period, and predicting what actually happened between the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991. And if you look in detail at what actually happened then, and at who did or failed to do what, you are left with more of a sense of muddle than of coherent pressure for radical change. Which is perhaps why, moving the clock forward a year or two, we find Yeltsin in 1993 without a parliamentary party committed to reform, but with a referendum result more inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt than the result of the parliamentary elections would suggest.

If it was a revolution, it was one with commendably little bloodshed. Previously, the enemies of the people were sent to the Gulag or shot; this time round, they were in the Duma, out-voting the President, and all too well-ensconced in the political and economic structures in the country at large. It was trying to make a revolution without breaking the eggs, so it was perhaps not a huge surprise that not enough omelette resulted. Gaidar and his team knew very well what needed to be done, but they didn't have the machinery to pass the necessary instructions down the line and to ensure that they were put into effect: those were the functions which the communist party had performed, and there was no alternative in

place. The vested interests didn't want change, and certainly not change that would disrupt their self-serving interpretation of communism; and there were not enough politically experienced non-communists in the country at large to win the next election and form a reformist government.

If there had been somebody with the charm and basic good instincts of Yeltsin, with very much better health and a real grip on how you ran a bureaucracy, things might have turned out differently. But it is easy to underestimate the weight of inertia facing any would-be reformer. So, for example, it was possible to do the easy bit of privatisation: getting the State out of the boardroom; but hugely more difficult to do the next bit: getting the privatised enterprises into the hands of managers who understood why things were working so much better in the outside world, and who had the resources and the determination to do something about it.

It goes back to what I said about the head of the Moscow police: a bright young man in his twenties, with no previous police experience; and about the lack of politically experienced non-communists to win the next election. New thinking would have needed time to become sufficiently widely established to make a lasting difference; it may yet happen, but what it needed in the early '90s, and didn't get, was a massive campaign of practical support from the outside world.

### **Special Representative of the British government to the South Caucasus, 2002-12**

CM: Your involvement with the former Soviet Union didn't end when you retired in 1995, because from 2002 to 2012 you were the Special Representative of the British government to the South Caucasus. What did that involve?

BF: This was a huge surprise to me. I think the only day that week that our phone in France was working, Peter Ricketts managed to get through from the Foreign Office to ask if I would be interested in the job and if so, we could talk when I got back. The job was first envisaged as covering only Georgia, with the aim of encouraging the negotiation which would be needed between Abkhazia and what the Canadians would call the Rest of Georgia about how to resolve the issues highlighted by the civil war. They'd stopped fighting, but there was a stand-off, and it wasn't clear whether a diplomatic solution would be possible. The UN was already engaged, with an observer mission (UNOMIG) in Sukhumi, and there was a group of Friends of the Secretary General (the Permanent Members of the Security Council, including

Russia but minus China, plus Germany) which would have meetings with the parties in Geneva, chaired by Jean-Marie Guehenno, an outstanding French diplomat serving as the UN Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping. Between meetings in Geneva, there were visits by the group or by individual members to both Tbilisi and Sukhumi, so this was quite a major international effort at conflict resolution, with the Russians apparently on board and with a number of NGOs playing a helpful supportive role.

I asked for my portfolio to be extended to include Armenia and Azerbaijan, not because I had any thoughts of being able to do a similar amount of negotiating there, but because I didn't think it helpful to give the impression of thinking in terms of a frontier across the South Caucasus, or of some conflicts being more important than others. It was good to be able to go to Armenia and to Azerbaijan as well as to Georgia, and I found that as a Special Representative I was able to get more out of the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, particularly the French and US ones, and more out of the Presidents, who in both Armenia and Azerbaijan would be open to discussion of the problems and the prospects. The entrée was one which I hope proved helpful to the smallish British Embassies on the spot, but I can't say that it did very much to resolve the issues where the sides were firmly entrenched.

The main job remained Georgia-Abkhazia, and at one stage I think we might have moved towards a settlement if Saakashvili had been inclined to work for one on anything less than his maximalist terms. He had a very good young Georgian diplomat, Alasania, who was respected by the Abkhaz in part because his father had been killed during the fighting, and he was making headway. The general view, certainly among the Abkhaz, was that he was then removed from the job, and sent off to New York as Ambassador to the UN, because he was pressing good ideas too hard. And then there was the Russian military intervention in Georgia, and Putin finally shooting the fox by recognising Abkhazia as an independent state. That was the end of the negotiating mandate, and I looked at the clock and realised I had been doing the job for ten years. Two good reasons to call it a day.

Looking back, it is hard to see how any of the three countries in the South Caucasus have gained from what they defined as the political necessities in their response to outside efforts at conflict resolution. Armenia has the nine tenths of the law on Nagorno Karabakh, and sits in addition on a sizeable territory captured from Azerbaijan when the hostilities were at their peak; but it has in return to keep on a war footing, to accept a great deal of Russian oversight, and to forego the business opportunities which their enterprising people would be well-placed

to develop in an accessible Baku. Azerbaijan should be seeing itself as a Singapore with oil and gas, a natural centre for a region lacking an alternative hub, and pressing forward accordingly. Instead, it has allowed to remain as the centre of national ambition the recovery of a piece of mountainous land historically of principal value to them as pasture for their sheep when the plains became too hot. Georgia, by insisting on a unitary, Tbilisi-centred state structure, has lost Abkhazia; and the Abkhaz, fighting for independence from Georgia, have found themselves in a relationship with Russia which may prove to be the fire after the frying pan.